

# The Portals of Love

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The Portals of Love

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# THE PORTALS OF LOVE

## CHAPTER I

MACLEOD of the Fastness held his head as high as any laird in the North of Scotland. If ancient lineage and the possession of an historic property, not purchased, but actually handed down for nine hundred years from Macleod to Macleod be an adequate reason for pride, no doubt the present owner was fully justified in believing himself to be not quite as other men. Yet he had made one great and not uncommon mistake in his life.

The Macleods traced back their genealogy to the earliest recorded ages of Scottish history, and had gloried in its annals of rapine, and boasted of its reckless bloodshed. To the east lay the North Sea, an implacable foe they could never conquer, and which oft-times ravished their lands with impunity, but their old traditional enemies to north, south and west were now their intimate friends, and in many instances the ancient adversaries had contracted alliances and buried the hatchet and claymore in favour of peace and orange blossoms. It looked as if the race of the Macleods was not in any danger of extinction, for the laird of the Fastness had married twice, and each wife had presented him with one son, both of whom were vigorously alive. In any case there were nephews and kinsmen in plenty, scattered throughout the world, who would prove in an



## The Portals of Love

emergency their willingness and capacity to rule over the Fastness in the absence of direct heirs of the body.

John Macleod's first wife had been Catherine Malcolm, the youngest daughter of Lord Kennethmont, who owned considerable property and little cash in the adjoining county farther south. His second wife, who still lived, had been Margaret Watson, the only child of an Edinburgh lawyer, and this lady was John Macleod's mistake.

However, he was not the type of man who knew how to acknowledge error, and the watchful eyes of peeping neighbours remained ungratified by any peculiarities of conduct or provincialisms which she might reasonably be supposed to make. Macleod knew how to manage his property in his own masterful fashion, and his wife found herself moving and conforming to his will with the same precision and automatism as did his chairs and tables.

Men marry for beauty, for riches, for connections, and for love; they marry but rarely for the permanent interest of their wives' society. The county was wearied of asking for what reason Macleod took to wife Margaret Watson. True, she had money, but only Macleod knew how much; yet as time went on no outward friction between husband and wife could be detected, simply because it did not exist. Macleod would as soon have thought of quarrelling with one of his cows as with his better half.

When a clever man suffers from an unsuitable marriage he has only himself to blame.

Of what use is mental superiority if in a matter so overwhelmingly important as the choice of a wife it fails to give warning when the choice is absurdly unsuitable. The county finally concurred in the belief that Mrs. Macleod must possess hidden virtues which were apparent only to her lord, and welcomed her in their midst, if not with enthusiasm at least with perfect civility.

## The Portals of Love

If a trifle wanting in individuality, she was "a lady to meet," and the strongest epithet that had as yet been applied to her was the word "narrow," an epithet she certainly deserved to its fullest extent. John Macleod had married for the same reason clever men so often marry silly women; to him all women seemed mentally on a par. His first marriage had been the result of an early formed and suitable choice. Miss Malcolm had been a silly woman, but his equal in birth. In his second marriage he had chosen a woman whose fortune he could not resist, an entirely ignorant and kind-hearted person from whom no interference was to be apprehended, and he entirely excluded her from his private range of thought.

His belief was that all women were incompetent to live in the region of masculine understanding, and he acted so consistently and systematically up to this belief that though he might divulge mental profundities to a man friend over whisky and water in his smoking-room at night, not all the whisky in Scotland would have made him frank and sincere in the presence of his wife.

His belief worked well in practice, and his reserve was so natural that Mrs. Macleod, with all the female subtlety she was capable of, never even suspected it. In every point, save one, the result suited him admirably, but that one point lacking was often a very sore thorn in his flesh; yet it was exactly the trait of all others he ought to have anticipated finding in her. It was a difficult failing to put into precise words, perhaps rather than a failing it ought to have been looked upon as a mode of thought which was always out of place in her new surroundings, and could only be defined by saying Mrs. Macleod had a middle-class way of looking at things. She had been married for eight years without being able to subdue an intense interest in the domestic arrangements of her neighbours. The futile and pallid trivialities she had been accustomed to in



## The Portals of Love

The laird of the Fastness never moved without a strong reason, and briefly stated his object in securing Miss Herne as an inmate of his household was to provide an antidote to his wife's one deficiency, and checkmate her extremely rigid tendencies. He desired to possess under his roof a woman, and relative for choice, who when occasion demanded could amalgamate herself with those who were of the world worldly, and a woman who was of, and had mixed freely with his own particular class of life. He wanted a woman domiciled, who knew what she was about when the autumn came with its shooting parties and its wide-awake wanderers from the South. He knew that Margaret Watson would be accepted by the county, but he also knew that her "bringing up" had precluded her from ever being one of them.

The coming of the Honourable Lilius Herne was the only hidden confession Macleod had ever made of his mistake, a confession known only to his Maker, and considered rectified from the day the girl took up her permanent abode in the Fastness.

Margaret Macleod bore with her because she could not do otherwise, but she found it impossible to like her. The first year had been one long earnest striving after reclamation. She looked upon Lilius as a perishing soul whose destiny was a very hot place; the second year she began to lose heart in the contest and abandoned her to her own destruction. Miss Herne was unapproachable because she only laughed and told her aunt not to trouble her head about what she didn't understand. It was impossible to make any impression on her imperturbable good nature, and Mrs. Macleod in consultation with the minister christened her "The Pagan".

For the first two or three years Miss Herne's life was somewhat erratic. She was a traveller, and seemed unwilling to take root in any one spot. She

## The Portals of Love

spent a considerable portion of the year and the entire shooting season at the Fastness, which suited her uncle well enough ; still he was anxious to look upon her as a permanency, and this he at last accomplished through the agency of his heir.

Macleod was quite in the dark regarding Miss Herne's motives for at last settling down. He was clever but no match for her, and she had taken his full measurement within two days of her arrival. The blinkers of his own self-importance were wonderfully efficacious. If he hated any one in the world he hated Malcolm, his son and heir, who reciprocated the emotion in no half-hearted fashion. If his nature was capable of love for any living creature, that sentiment was expended on Roderick, his seven-year-old son by his second marriage.

For numbers of men there are few more difficult tasks than to understand why others are not of their opinion. A man bows down before gold, and thinks those who are contented with poverty a pack of fools. Another worships the simple life, and believes those who prefer luxury to be misguided imbeciles. Another prefers to root himself to one spot, and looks upon the traveller as a harmless lunatic whose absence is a thing to be grateful for. One man hates another, and is either impervious to the fact that all do not share his sentiments, or is amazed and wounded to discover that there are those who differ from him. If he does not actually say so, he thinks, "I hate the man, and there must be something very much amiss with those who like him".

Macleod loathed the knowledge that Malcolm must succeed him in the entail. He despised his son, and could not forgive him for those inherited characteristics which were essentially his own, though he did not realise it. Self-analysis had never been one of Macleod's occupations. He had a quick and violent



## The Portals of Love

temper which he had never been taught to control. He had been his own master at an early age. Whilst at Oxford he had succeeded his father, and had at once taken up his responsibilities and married young. His temper he had bequeathed to his son, and rather fostered than otherwise, for his own amusement, whilst the boy was still at home. He had bequeathed to him also his own love of the country and intense activity and hatred of idleness, and he had put him into a Guards regiment in those years when officers were plentiful and work very slack.

In a few years' time Malcolm had quitted the regiment heavily in debt and bored to death with the life of town idleness and dissipation. In a Highland regiment he would have done well, and probably run straight, but in the Guards the odds were all against him. Want of supervision and a dislike to town life had combined to cause his utter failure in the distasteful existence he was forced to lead, and at the age of twenty-five he was back at the Fastness, in deep disgrace and with no very brilliant outlook stretching before him. In looks as well as temperament he closely resembled his father. A great, strongly built man, with fine straight features and dark eyes. The father carried his forty-nine years lightly, though he was turning grey and wore the old-fashioned whiskers, his decisive lips exposed to view; but Malcolm wore a dark moustache which concealed the rather weak mouth which he had inherited from his mother. Macleod's rough, rude barbarism, inherited from a long line of fighting, foraging ancestors, though covered by the thin veneer of present-day civilisation, was infinitely less marked in the son, who had acquired, by intercourse with the world, the charm of manner his father lacked.

In one essential they were widely dissevered. The laird of the Fastness knew how to hold and to spend.

## The Portals of Love

His property was unencumbered and he kept it in splendid order. His house was run on a lavish scale, and maintained according to ancient usage and his position in the land, but there was no waste and he saved yearly.

Malcolm had no knowledge of the value of money, had always been in debt, and was prone, when begged from, to part with his last sixpence. His father had given him a reasonable allowance, but it was utterly insufficient in the life he had led. He had plunged into extravagant dissipation, and that, combined with his naturally free-handed generosity, had made ducks and drakes of his income, and the tiny fortune of three thousand pounds which he had inherited from his mother.

Macleod's despal of women went hand in hand with his despal and hatred of his son's extravagances. He could find no excuse for them. To squander money upon women was, to him, the most contemptible of all vices. His cold, overbearing nature had never unbent to the follies of youth. He paid his son's debts, those he acknowledged to, a matter of some five thousand pounds. For the sake of his own honour he permitted Malcolm to return to the Fastness until something could be found for him to do, but he never forgave him, and though outwardly friendly to him his hatred increased a hundred-fold.

Malcolm returned in the month of May, and, as formerly when on leave, met his cousin, Liliás Herne. Macleod had kept his own counsel regarding his son's career—it saved his pride to do so—but Miss Herne discerned that something was amiss, and Malcolm was not long in confessing to her his misdeeds. The house in Eaton Square was let that season, and the family spent the spring and summer in the North, and through the long days the two young people were naturally thrown much together, with the result that



## The Portals of Love

a mutual liking, which had always existed, speedily developed into a deep affection. The girl's protective self-reliance found an object to expend itself upon ; the man's weaker nature turned naturally to so charming a staff on which to lean, and before he had been at home a month they were affianced, though secretly, the girl insisting that Malcolm must find some occupation before the engagement was made public.

The Fastness had at one period in its history served as a monastery ; its vicissitudes had been many and varied, and the preservation in which all its appurtenances of ancient feudal gloom, grandeur and means of defence had been kept gave it a unique character as one of the most interesting show-places in Scotland. The more modern part dated from about 1600, but three of the towers were of many centuries' earlier date. On driving up to the principal entrance the first glimpse was somewhat disappointing, and no conception of its size was gained ; but striking eastward at right angles to the frontage ran enormous irregular wings, one containing the principal living rooms which overhung a densely wooded precipice, the other containing offices of various sorts, penetrating far into the thick shrubberies. It had something of the air of a French château, with its steep slated roofs and many conical-topped turrets, but in all other respects it was a genuine old Highland fortress, grey and grim, of enormous proportions and intricate geography. Perched on the lip of a high cliff overhanging a brawling torrent of clear brown water, gathered from the peat mosses of the great moorland hills behind, and surrounded on all sides by forest trees which concealed the extent of its park, it was protected by dense foliage from the sea winds which swept the eastern confines and stunted the outer ring of wood as with a keen-edged razor.

The North Sea was but a mile distant at its nearest approach, and on rough nights its thundering breakers

## The Portals of Love

could be heard crashing against the precipitous cliffs, ragged rocks and torn boulders that bordered the coast-line. To north-east lay a wide bay of yellow sand, enclosed by the outstretched jaws of lofty promontories. The coast-line was bold, bleak and rocky for many miles, the cliffs intersected with caves, where, like great guns, the waves bellowed and roared at high tide, the north-east wind driving them ashore in foaming mountains before its hurricane fury, born of the Polar lands of endless snows and ice-fields.

The little harbour which protected the numerous fishing fleet nestled snugly under the beetling brows of the land, and between the shore and the Fastness lay the fishing village and town of Seaview. A huddled-together, irregular mass of low-browed cottages of brown stone, with thatched and grey-slatted roofs. One wide street, with numerous narrow lanes intersecting, it possessed a few shops, and the ancient Macleod Arms, where post-horses were still to be hired despite the prevalence of the ubiquitous motor-car.

The owner of the Fastness was proud of his home and his wide inheritance. Proud of the hoary traditions which clung to his name and the place of his birth. Though the days were past when the Beltane fires gleamed on the hills, when the fiery cross went round and his forebears could summon several hundred of the clan and march out to battle at their head, yet still he felt something of a king as he rode over his miles of mountain and moor, or stood upon the terrace as the sun set over his wide domains and lit up with its dying radiance the vast irregular pile of such a dwelling as few monarchs could boast of possessing.



## CHAPTER II

SUNDAY was observed in the spirit of a Scotch Sabbath, and therefore rendered as much as possible a day of penance at the Fastness. The old-fashioned rigours of the days of Begg and Chalmers were still adhered to in all their gloomy austerity.

In this one particular Macleod seconded his wife. He possessed no religious beliefs of any sort, but he considered it discreet to infer that he was pious, and assuming a rigid orthodoxy he was minded to sacrifice himself once a week to public opinion.

In bad or in good weather he never omitted to show himself in the kirk of which he was an elder, and he ordained that his household should do likewise. He was not the sort of man who could tamely suffer alone. When it could possibly be exacted he required an equal sacrifice on the part of others. By witnessing the discomfort of his own and the strangers within his gate he seemed to gain a salve for his own boredom.

Family prayers and the nine o'clock breakfast were over, and the master of the Fastness and his eldest son were smoking their pipes as they paced the irregular stone terrace which followed the jagged out line of the house, and overhung the steep cliff which descended to the stream at its base.

The sky was filled with the song of larks, and a thin blue mist rose like the first smoke from the altars of morning, from the still green cornfields and leafy woods, from the wild heathery hills and the close windings of the heavily over-shadowed glen. In the

## The Portals of Love

filmy, grey-blue distance rose the fantastic outline of crag and precipitous cliff with their tortuous caves, but the sea, like a Titan at rest, but gently lapped the shores and sang a lullaby in amongst the rocks and crevices as it slowly rose with the tide.

Macleod's face was dark and angry, in sore contrast to the peaceful aspect of nature, an expression he habitually wore when brought into contact with his heir. The bitter enmity at heart expressed itself outwardly in harsh voice and scornful angry rejoinder.

"This sort of thing can't go on," he was saying. "I won't have you loafing on here much longer, kicking up your heels doing nothing. It's all devilish fine for you, my boy, but it doesn't suit me. You've proved yourself a rank failure at soldiering, and I don't expect now you'll do any better in any other walk in life; but I abominate idleness, and something must be found for you to turn your hand to. You needn't trouble your head to wait for dead men's shoes. I'm sound as a bell and good for many a long year to come. No use counting on my death."

He ceased speaking with a short, dry laugh, and knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"Roderick will be worth twenty of you when he's your age," he observed cynically.

For a moment Malcolm held his peace—he was becoming hardened to his father's brutality—but his hot blood was boiling ominously.

"I've a great mind to clear off to the Colonies, South Africa or Australia or some other God-forsaken spot, and never let you set eyes on me again. No one hates me as you do," he burst out stormily.

"Waste is always popular with those who don't have to pay the bill," remarked Macleod drily.

"I daresay I've been a fool in many ways," went on Malcolm, "but not a whit worse than lots of other chaps have been before me. I'm grateful to you for



## The Portals of Love

having squared my debts, but after all a father ought to do something for his son. You're not the only man who has had to pay up. If you had let me take my own way and go into a Highland regiment, I'd have been right as a trivet. It was just that loafing you so hate that played the mischief with me. What can a chap who only cares for sport do in London?"

Macleod did not reply. The first fierce onslaught of his anger had long since expended itself. Now he only had recourse to pin-pricks. He drew out his watch and glanced at it.

"Church time, see that you're not late," he remarked briefly, and turned to the house, entering by the library window which opened on to the terrace.

His son followed his example but took a less direct route, strolling round the great north wing of the castle and on to the wide gravel sweep which spread before the principal entrance. An open carriage drawn by a pair of stout horses stood at the door, and a groom and footman were conversing on the step as they waited for their mistress to descend. Mrs. Macleod always drove to church, a distance of one mile, though there was a short cut making a ten minutes' walk through the woods.

Macolm met her in the hall, a woman of medium height, with a pleasant though inane face and a tendency to stoutness. She was elaborately dressed in a light silk gown and a very smart hat, and her son in his tartan kilt and doublet was by her side. He was struggling with a pair of new gloves, and ran up to his half-brother to whom he was devoted.

"I do wish I could walk to church with you, Malcolm," he cried. "May I not, just for once, mother? It is such a lovely day with no mud to wet my shoes."

He threw an appealing glance back at Mrs. Macleod who frowned impatiently.

## The Portals of Love

"Certainly not. Get into the carriage at once, Roderick," she ordered, as she swept to the door.

The child's face fell. He was a good-looking boy, fair as Malcolm was dark, and his blue eyes were clouded with tears.

"I wish I was a tutor to do as I pleased," he exclaimed with a backward glance, as he followed his mother.

The carriage drove off, and Malcolm turned to a tall youth who was busily engaged in brushing a hat.

"Damned shame, isn't it?" he exclaimed scornfully.

Keith Tytler shrugged his broad shoulders and looked thoroughly sympathetic. He threw down the hat-brush with a certain show of irritation and looked round.

"I wish you'd remember I'm only the boy's tutor," he remarked shortly.

Malcolm smiled cynically and leaned against a great oak press as he lit a cigarette. "Ghastly day a Scotch Sabbath," he said again, taking up his bonnet and selecting a stick from out the varied collection reposing in a corner.

The tutor laughed a trifle sadly.

"The boy will be right enough when he goes to school. Youth soon forgets its early miseries," he said.

At that moment Macleod himself strode into the hall with Lilius Herne by his side, the latter clad in a short tweed skirt and brown country boots. Sunday clothes were Miss Herne's abominations. It appeared as if the more Mrs. Macleod loaded herself with finery the plainer and simpler became the attire of Lilius. She gave Malcolm a charming smile and a swift glance, but she said nothing and passed out with her uncle, in whose company she always walked to and from church.

The two men followed in their wake through broad, well-kept paths intersecting the fir woods, where the stone pines rocked softly in the gentle breeze and the



## The Portals of Love

larks made melody in the cloudless blue heavens which stretched over land and shadowless sea.

The west wind wafted to them sweet thymy perfumes of growing fields and flowers, a different atmosphere to the pungent salt scents of broken angry waters and sea-weed borne inland when the wind came out of the cold north-east.

"I'm half-inclined to echo Roddie's words and wish I were a tutor to do as I liked," remarked Malcolm, after they had paced a short distance in silence. "I wish to God I could get something to do and clear out of this. I feel like a slave tied to the galleys."

Tytler glanced aside at the dark handsome face with its troubled eyes. He himself was hardly less handsome of feature and form, and that mind and intellect which his companion lacked gleamed brilliantly from out his red-brown eyes and individualised his finely cut mouth. There was also something of the fighter in the way the nose sprang from the brow between the wide-set eyes.

He knew the heir's bed was a thorny one ; he guessed at the troubles between father and son, and his sympathies were all with the latter.

"I know it's a hard thing for you to find any suitable work," he said. "I guess your former occupation makes it a trifle harder than for other men."

Malcolm threw up his head with a fierce ejaculation.

"I've half a mind to ask the governor to give me a hundred or two and cut the whole concern for the Colonies. I'm in a beastly position here. I'm not wanted, and I'm dying to get out. I can't hit it off with my father. I don't mind telling you he's had to pay up for me. A regular surgical operation to get the cash out of him ; but I've learned my lesson, and that's done with, I hope. I love the old place, and thank God, if I live it must be mine, but that may not

## The Portals of Love

be for many years to come. Meanwhile, I must find occupation, and I believe the Colonies would suit me down to the ground. Lots of riding and out in the open all day. I'm strong as a horse, and manual labour is necessary to me if I'm to keep fit."

"I don't doubt for a moment you'd do all right—say ranching, or sheep farming," Tytler replied, "but for anything of that sort you'd need capital. I should have thought your father's influence would have brought you some more secure work nearer home. Say, the factorship of your own lands. There's been a rumour that Grant wants to give up. That would give you lots to do, and seems to me the work peculiarly appropriate for the heir to the property."

Malcolm hit the head off a tall burdock and laughed bitterly.

"Catch him allow me to meddle with the Fastness or have any knowledge of its revenues. It would remind him too often of the fact that all men must die, and that when his time comes I must step into his shoes. The fact is, Keith, I'm torn in two. I've the strongest reason for staying on here and the strongest reason for cutting the whole damned business. Scotland is too small to hold my father and me. Yet Scotland has bound me to her with the strongest of all ties. I'm in a fix. I want to go, I want to stay."

Keith Tytler looked round at the speaker slowly and rather timidly; the colour had risen in his cheeks.

"Macleod," he said, speaking quietly and deliberately, "you've chosen to make a friend of me during the last year or two, and I hope what I'm going to say won't offend you. It's the natural thing that would occur to any one who has eyes to see. There's a woman in the case. Now, isn't there?"

Malcolm laughed shortly.

"You've guessed rightly," he said. "I don't mind your knowing. I like you. Bar one, you're the only



## The Portals of Love

soul fit to speak to in the Castle, you understand something of life. My father once did, seemingly he's forgotten. My stepmother's intellect has remained where it was as a child. Some minds don't grow but remain stationary. Hers has been a fixture from birth."

"I believe there's something else besides the woman, Malcolm."

Tytler stopped to light a cigarette as he spoke. His dark eyes were bent on the flame he guarded in the hollow of his hand. For a moment Malcolm did not speak.

"Well! What then?" he asked briefly.

"Can't you make a clean breast of it?" asked the tutor quietly.

Malcolm laughed drily.

"No, I can't. I've confessed enough as it is. It's the last straw that breaks the camel's back. It's just the last and smallest of my debts that's going to break me. I'm in the deuce of a hole and see no way out."

For a few yards they both paced on in silence, then Tytler spoke again.

"If I loved a woman and that woman loved me, I'm hanged if I'd have any secrets that I kept from her," he observed.

Macleod's face darkened and flushed ominously. "Mine happens to be just the sort of secret which must be kept from her," he retorted sharply.

"There are women and women," answered Tytler. "There is no secret the man who loves Miss Herne need fear to confide to her."

Macleod gave utterance to a curse under his breath.

"Would you allow a woman to pay your debts?" he questioned cuttingly.

The tutor turned sharply round and met the angry eyes full. There was a quick glint of passion on the faces of both men.

## The Portals of Love

"If I were in your place I should allow that particular woman to pay my debt and repay her as fast as my ten fingers could accomplish the task. We treat women too often as if they were of totally different calibre to ourselves. A man helps a man, why may a woman not help a man? Why deny to the girl who loves you the supreme joy of helping you through a crisis? Accept her practical as well as her theoretical assistance."

Macleod shook his head contemptuously.

"Bah! I simply couldn't do it. I couldn't get the words out. Why, man, it would be reversing all the canons of decency and self-respect that we Britishers have been reared in. Take money from a woman! It would be a damned cowardly thing to do. Never! I'd sooner rot in gaol than ask her for a penny."

"Men take from women things that are of more value than money, and take them without a thought or care of what they rob them of," remarked Tytler imperturbably. "What you call the canons of decency and self-respect would not appear so binding had men a trifle less exalted an opinion of themselves. Women score over us in that particular, Macleod. They are great enough occasionally to humiliate themselves before those they love. We are too prone to call moral courage, which we don't understand, woman's weakness."

Malcolm made no reply. He strode on by Tytler's side scarce taking into consideration the words just spoken, but ruminating more on his own seemingly hopeless difficulties. He had spoken truly when he said he was torn asunder. His love for Lilius Herne, which was genuine and deep, held him with powerful insistence. The profound sense of humiliation he suffered under his father's roof, the lash of those galling reproaches he was continuously subjected to, spurred him forward in his desire to leave home and



## The Portals of Love

parent for ever. His empty pockets and uncertain outlook threw over him a sense of impotence which darkened his life and youth and made living almost a burden to him.

The two men passed out of the East Lodge and entered the confines of the village where a few neat houses of the villa order had straggled up the hill towards the Castle. They were mainly occupied by the higher employees on the estate and had been built by a former Macleod. To the right, behind a high old wall and on one side flanked by the Fastness woods, lay "The Auld House" in its several acres of venerable garden. A substantial, rambling edifice of uncertain date, which for several generations had been the abode of the head factor, and was now occupied by one Torquil Grant who officiated in that capacity.

They were drawing near to the church, an old cruciform building, and the burial-place of generations of Macleods and others of noble blood. Groups and couples of fisher folk were standing about amongst the graves reading the well-known inscriptions and pausing by the nameless mounds of those content to be forgotten by all but love.

Malcolm had a friendly word and smile for every one he met. There was not a man or woman about the Fastness who didn't like him or who failed to speak well of the handsome young heir. His brisk activity and buoyant humour appealed to them; his love of sport and proficiency in all its branches was a constant pride to them.

Macleod and Miss Herne had already passed within, and the last notes of the cracked old bell were fading into silence as the two men walked up the narrow grass-bound path and entered by the private door leading to the family pew.

The dust of generations had raised the inside as well as the outside and the walls were consequently

## The Portals of Love

low. Wide galleries ran down either side supported by squat pillars, and some hideous stained glass shut out the brilliance of the summer day. The place was bare and uninviting, haunted by gloom and shadowy recesses.

From a small window in the great square pew one could catch glimpses of the sea and shimmering horizon, and with his back to this window, so that his attention might not be distracted by the beauties of God's work, sat the child, Roderick, by his mother's side. Mrs. Macleod had said her prayer and had composed herself to five minutes' inspection of the congregation, its individual members, their clothing and behaviour. She could always tell afterwards exactly who had and who had not been present. She was quite as particular about counting the Ulvadale domestics as her own. It was the trivial in life which interested her. The only God she could visualise was a superior type of man, her angels were all provided with feather wings, linen tunics and musical instruments.

To Macleod the Sunday observances were an unspeakable weariness to both body and spirit, which betrayed itself on the seventh day in a sterner aspect and infinitely shorter temper. The whole establishment realised without asking why that on the Lord's Day the master was unapproachable.

To Malcolm, dreary though the observances were, he did not find them at all so on the present occasion, his mind was too full of distractions, doubts and fears. Tytler's words kept recurring to him only to be irritably thrown aside. In one particular the tutor was right, his pride forbade his confessing his difficulties to the girl he loved. He could not so lower himself in her eyes and risk her scorn and pity. Some other less humiliating way must be found, and speedily if he was to be saved. He saw nothing but the face of the



## The Portals of Love

girl who sat opposite to him, to all appearances unaware of a single person being present save herself. She felt no glimmer of interest in the proceedings nor did she assume any. She did not rise during prayers or song but sat motionless, her firm, beautifully moulded lips closed, her face expressionless as any statue. Her neatly gloved hands folded in her lap, the dark-fringed lids hiding the deep grey eyes.

Occasionally he let his own eyes stray from her face to glance out of the window to the lark-filled sky, and to where rivulets of sunshine streamed between the graves and gilded the long grass and weeds, and sparkled like jewels on the tranquil bosom of stretching ocean beyond, and when he looked back the church seemed like a dark cave filled with sepulchral gloom. A gloom which yet encased a jewel of rare beauty—the woman he loved.

The minister was a man of about fifty, rough and uncouth of speech, yet owning a certain rugged grandeur of feature and gait. He was wholly uneducated, came of the humblest origin, and had been reared to the Church in order that he might earn bread. His beliefs were of the narrowest, his views of the crudest.

In Joshua Tytler was exemplified one of those most curious inconsistencies to be found in human dealings with the pursuit of truth. We recognise the vital importance of scientific problems. We admit that for their elucidation the highest intellects in the world must be summoned to the field of investigation. None but the most intellectually and educationally evolved may apply, yet, as a rule, we commit the charge of religious instruction—the most complex structure known, the most momentous force for weal or woe, the most important subject in the universe—to the hands of men whose hearts and intentions may be good, but whose environment has taught them nothing. Men who are wholly uneducated and who are ignorant alike of men

## The Portals of Love

and the world they live in, and whose only trust and resource is common usage and tradition.

Joshua Tytler's prayers and sermons were to the thinking and educated nothing short of blasphemy. For his trenchant, sombre, precipitous philosophy there was no middle course; he preached a lost world in which walked, capriciously distributed, a few elect and chosen souls. The earth was on the morrow of a great natural catastrophe, resultant from the apple of Eden and the fall of man with its consequences in full working order. Vanity and nothingness were his catch-words, and Divine wrath, essentially implacable, stalked through a world of abysmal dilemmas.

To his son, Keith, his dissertations were hideous and revolting, his addresses to his Creator were profanely familiar and arrogantly presumptuous. The sufferings of his life (for Joshua Tytler had suffered long and bitterly) had made him as unsparing to his God as to man. He played with hell fire as if revelling in its warmth, and toyed with eternal damnation as with a *pièce de résistance*. His interpretation of the character and disposition of God was that of a fiend incarnate, glorying in annihilation and destruction—a relentless and bloodthirsty God, who outstripped in every particular the Jewish deity. Speaking in his Maker's name his endeavour was to terrorise his congregation into subserviency and dread of the consuming Divine wrath, and as far as possible to reduce them to cringing, crawling worms, who were utterly beneath, not only their own contempt but the notice and contempt of their Maker. No doubt those who listened to him from out those simple souls went away profoundly impressed with their own vileness and infamy, and the hopelessness of their ever being otherwise. On this particular Sunday he took for his text the thirty-second and following verses of the fifteenth chapter of Numbers: "And while the children of Israel were in



## The Portals of Love

the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the Sabbath day. . . . And the Lord said unto Moses, The man shall be surely put to death; all the congregation shall stone him. And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones and he died; as the Lord commanded Moses."

For the best part of an hour Joshua Tytler enlarged upon and poured eulogy on one of the blackest crimes committed by the so-called God of Israel. He took no note of the former part of the chapter which is concerned with "sins done in ignorance which shall be forgiven, for it was an error," nor of the fact that in the teeth of this wise ordinance the man who picked up sticks is ordered by the same Divine taskmaster to be most brutally murdered. Like the mockery of some Satanic fiend the flagrant contradiction between precept and practice displayed itself upon the pages of the many open Bibles lying under the eyes of the congregation, but Tytler took no heed of this anomaly. He gloried with lurid rhetoric in the sanguinary lust and ferocity of "Yahveh," the God of Israel, and held up His punishment of Sabbath breakers as a terrible warning to his congregation.

As he listened Keith Tytler blushed with pure shame for his father. That such infamies should be treated as the inspired word of God caused the gorge to rise in his throat; his whole soul rose up in the turbulent rebellion of enthusiastic defence against such blasphemy attached to the sacred, most holy name of the Father.

To Macleod his weekly penance mattered little. He sat in an attitude of profound absorption, but it was absorption in his own temporal affairs. He heard nothing of the sermon. During those two hours' service (though who they were expected to serve it would be hard to state) he practically made up his weekly book

## The Portals of Love

of debit and credit, and formed his plans for the ensuing days. He spent Sunday waiting impatiently for Monday.

His wife was mainly occupied in keeping her son quiet and attentive, and observing her neighbours. She never paid much attention to the sermon, but could always remember what the text had been.

The only other box pew the church contained was that consecrated to the sacred persons of Lord and Lady Ulvadale, mother and son, whose residence, Ulvadale Castle, marched with the Fastness. The mother only was present on this particular Sabbath. A tiny blot of black seated in the centre of the large vacant space. She was a curious old dame, one of those relics of the past which the present generation seem quite content to see fade into the oblivion of time. A staunch Presbyterian, and a worshipper of the memory of John Knox and Calvin, she was bigotedly averse to all other forms of worship, believing they were all foredoomed. Her husband had died leaving her in ignorance of his many lapses from virtue. He had left her an only child, the present Peer, and to him, on coming of age, he had bequeathed a large fortune. Lady Ulvadale was possessed in her own right of considerable means, which she expended on her one great hobby—missions. She possessed a thorough knowledge of the atlas, and had procured a globe made specially to order where all Protestant countries were coloured white and all so-called infidel countries were painted a deep scarlet. This she studied religiously, and was horrified to discover how enormously scarlet predominated over the world. At first she thought there must be some mistake; she had to put on her spectacles to discover the white. After the first shock she sent for statistics, and on discovering that the Protestants numbered about one-third only of the whole human



## The Portals of Love

race, she set herself resignedly down at Ulvadale to wait for the imminent end of the world. There was no denouncement of Tytler's too thunderous, no menace too inexorable, no condemnation too relentless to please her. She gloried in his fierce, vindictive piety, thoroughly approving of his God who was a consuming fire.

A sprinkling of the shopkeepers of the village and the retainers on Ulvadale and the Fastness stood out conspicuously from the fisher folk, who brought with them an odour of bait and brine, which impregnated the atmosphere, and in winter when all ventilation was closed, made the air well-nigh unbearable to all who had retained a sense of smell. They were all clad in their livery of dark blue, with here and there a scarlet handkerchief or scarf. The town people were like a bright bevy of flowers set amidst the sombre blue and the more sombre black of the Ulvadale and Fastness domestics.

Both Lady Ulvadale and Mrs. Macleod considered the garb of woe the correct hue in which their servants ought to approach their Maker in public. Joy and gladness were tabooed on the Sabbath, and both ladies rather resented than otherwise the unalterable fact that they were unable to effect a change in the colour of the sky and the face of Nature. Had it been humanly possible they would have draped the heavens in crape, and tied up the trees and flowers with mourning weepers—always, however, reserving the right to wear colours themselves.

In the front of the gallery, and right in the centre of the bottom of the church, sat Torquil Grant, the factor, a childless widower, of some forty summers. He was a typical Scotchman, grey as is the habit of his native skies; a tall, strong man, not by any means unpleasant to look upon, with shrewd grey eyes, set deep in a grey face and with neatly trimmed grey whiskers.

## The Portals of Love

The clean-shaven mouth and chin had ability and determination written in every line, the features straight and pronounced. He was an invaluable servant, and had succeeded his father in the management of the Fastness property. No man knew Macleod so well, yet master and servant had never been on terms of intimacy.

Malcolm gave vent to a sigh of relief as he once more stepped out into the sunshine. The larks had certainly the best of the God praising that had been going on for the last two hours. His stepmother always waited till church had emptied before she emerged. She liked to flash out in her fine clothes and pass through the groups of poor folk, who lingered amongst the graves to see the quality drive off.

Miss Herne and Macleod had speedily vanished, and after putting his stepmother and Roderick into the carriage he turned once more to Keith Tytler, and the two men began their homeward stroll by the short cut through the fir woods.

They talked in a desultory fashion, neither caring to return to their former topic of conversation, and the distance to the house was covered almost in silence, Malcolm at once going to his own room in the Eastern Tower, and Tytler to resume charge of his pupil whom he had to make proficient in several verses of the Bible before family prayers at night.

Mrs. Macleod had taken off her hat and sat in the drawing-room awaiting the announcement of dinner, which on Sunday was always served at two o'clock.

She had strictly preserved the middle-class treatment of a drawing-room, as an apartment only to be used on Sundays, and in which to receive callers. The fact that she saw the drawing-rooms of her county neighbours used as living rooms, smoked in, worked in and used as the social centre of the house, made no impression upon her. On Sunday she occupied the room



## The Portals of Love

without fear of interruption, for it was understood in the county that the Fastness did not receive on the Sabbath. A cold supper was always laid at eight o'clock, which was delusively supposed to save trouble in the kitchen, though had Mrs. Macleod only known it, no such Spartan fare was served in the hall, where the rigours of the day were amply compensated for by an unusually elaborate and hearty meal. At half-past nine Macleod himself read evening prayers in the library. The drawing-room, a finely proportioned apartment commanding a lovely view over hill and dale, and filled with fine old furniture, had a cold unlivid-in and cheerless aspect by reason of the removal of all books, periodicals and work-baskets. Those unlawful accessories to the destruction of time Mrs. Macleod herself locked carefully away on Saturday night, replacing them by a scanty supply of Sunday literature, *The Leisure Hour*, *Sunday at Home*, *The Missionary* (in deference to Lady Ulvadale's hobby) and the family Bible. An old Edinburgh habit which had clung to her of lowering the blinds on Sunday, as if for a death, shut out the summer sunshine and lovely view, and cast deep shadows over the spacious old room.

She had no admiration for the beautiful old furniture the Castle contained ; she considered it dark and heavy, and would have liked to be given a free hand and a happy week in Maple's or Shoolbred's. She possessed no individuality to impart to her home, and would have given a modern upholsterer *carte blanche* to transform the Castle from feudalism to villadom. She had tried to lighten the room by throttling the giant palms with liberty scarves, and had draped the backs of the old oak and hand embroidered chairs with Oriental gauze, but Macleod in half a dozen strides and an ominous silence had cleared away the rubbish, and she had not dared even to save her labour from the flames.

## The Portals of Love

76  
Roderick had just entered, with neatly brushed hair, ready for dinner, and Tytler and Miss Herne followed him into the drawing-room. The child wandered about amongst the furniture in an inconsequent manner, and finally sat down upon the floor, whilst his mother and Miss Herne were exchanging a few words. He began to play with two old swords which stood in a corner, placing them crosswise, as if in readiness for the sword dance. The clink of the steel attracted Mrs. Macleod's attention, and she turned angrily upon him.

"Put those swords back instantly, Roderick, and remember it is Sunday. Do you not remember what Mr. Tytler's text was to-day about the man who gathered sticks and was stoned to death because he did so. Run down at once and take your place at table."

The child coloured up to the roots of his hair and a look of fear sprang into his eyes. He obediently placed the weapons back in their corner.

Miss Herne and the tutor exchanged a swift glance and turned simultaneously to the window. The sheer brutality of Mrs. Macleod's ignorance was intensely trying to the temper. The blood rushed into Miss Herne's cheeks and her eyes flashed ominously; then suddenly, as if she could contain herself no longer, she turned upon the silly woman.

"Why don't you practise what you preach, Aunt Margaret?" she asked indignantly. "You are always storming at Roddie for breaking the Sabbath, yet you yourself break the fourth commandment every Sunday by driving to church. I think you are perfectly right to drive if you like it, but what's the use of asking God to help you keep a commandment you know you mean regularly to break? The commandments are either to be kept as inspired words or ignored as old Jewish history. I understand you accept the Old Testament as the inspired word of God, therefore you are as



## The Portals of Love

wrong in making your coachman, groom and horses work as Roddie is for playing with his toys. You really ought to be more logical."

Macleod had entered the room at the beginning of the stormy little scene. He stood by the door and heard his niece deliver herself to the end, then he quietly approached the group.

"Come, come, now," he said soothingly, "you two women are always sparring. Much better each keep your own opinions and agree to differ. There goes the dinner gong. Come along, Margaret."

Mrs. Macleod rose in a trembling state of agitation and anger. The anger mainly arose from her utter inability to answer those periodical onslaughts delivered by Lillias. Far from convincing her of her narrow-minded and cruel bigotries, they but more securely determined her in her right to continue in them, for it is impossible to argue with a mind too feeble to see the other side of a question, too timid even to glance to right or left, too fearful to investigate the simplest question. She glanced at the silent and dismayed tutor as she moved slowly from the room. She was glad to see how troubled he looked. Intensely troubled indeed he felt, but it arose from the indisputable and humiliating fact that Joshua Tytler was his father. She took his downcast mien as a sign that he disapproved of Miss Herne's attack. She liked him because she liked his father, and she had no conception that his religious views had swerved from those of his parent.

He kept his views to himself, looking upon them as private property, and faithfully carried out the religious instruction she had ordained for her son, seeing nothing in his post but obedience to his employer, and comforting himself with the knowledge that all would be changed when the boy went to school and later on passed out into the world.

## The Portals of Love

Like the majority of her particular class who hail from out the Scottish Capital, she knew how to conduct a bazaar, she had church matters at her finger ends, and she knew how to rear children on the Edinburgh plan, an excellent plan provided they remained there, but how to rear a child to become a useful citizen of the world she had about as much idea as a limpet fixed to its own particular rock on the sea-shore.

The boy was accustomed to having his toys locked away from him on Sunday, and fully believed that an innocent game of ball or soldiers would seriously offend the Almighty. Like many children he was exceedingly thoughtful, but only with rare impulses did he give utterance to his thoughts, so constantly was he misunderstood. He privately made up his mind that when a man and his own master he would act very differently. With the curious analysis of childhood he sometimes wondered how a being great enough to create a world and all the stars could be small enough to bother about such trifles. He seemed to be a God who was wonderfully strict with little children and extraordinarily lenient with grown-ups. He had peeped into the pantry one Sunday afternoon and had seen MacNab, the butler, with two of his footmen and the house carpenter playing cards. He had understood he must not mention the fact. MacNab was a great friend of his, and he had said nothing, he had only remembered. He had seen his mother's maid sewing a very smart blouse for herself, and when he had timidly questioned her action she had pertly replied, "When your ma gives me time on a week day to sew for myself, then I'll not need to sew on Sundays". In his childish mind Sunday was associated inextricably with deceit, his father's ill temper, his mother's irritability and Malcolm's yawning. His tutor and Miss Herne were the only two who apparently did not seem to mind much. Sometimes he



## The Portals of Love

heard her singing songs in her own room in the Western Tower, and when his mother took her after-dinner nap he slipped away and joined her for a few moments while she painted, or sewed, or read, but she never did those things on Sunday in public. He had asked her why, and she had replied, "Because it would not be good taste on my part to offend the sensibilities of your mother". Only half-understanding he had wondered why people were all condemned to make themselves wretched on the Lord's Day. He was glad the Lord only had one day in the week, and it cannot be said that his private opinion of the Creator was raised by what he weekly witnessed and endured. In one of his Sunday books he had a highly coloured picture of the Christ calling little children to Him. His arm was about the shoulders of one of them, a group stood about Him. He marvelled why those children showed no fear, he felt he would have been very reluctant to join the group. Surely the Son must be as terrible as the Father, who had a man murdered for gathering sticks on Sunday. A jealous God visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children.

On the seventh day Macleod always ate a very heavy meal at two o'clock. He explained that church made him hungry. Afterwards he retired to his business room to sleep off the effects. On week days he ate the most slender lunch, knowing a heavy one would incapacitate him for the afternoon's amusement of shooting, fishing or riding about his property. At four o'clock he always took Roderick for a walk, and that period of the day was the child's happiest and brightest. Macleod seemed to throw off his Sabbath gloom, and talked in a most companionable way to his little son. Sometimes he even whistled blithely when he was sure no one was in hearing.

The dinner was not a very sociable meal. Mrs. Macleod showed her outraged dignity by a persistent

## The Portals of Love

silence, her husband sat frowningly at the head of his table, occasionally abusing the cook and calling the footmen to order. Miss Herne and Malcolm kept up a semblance of conversation in low tones, and the tutor sat beside his charge in depressed silence.

The heavy dinner was nearly over, the huge joint of roast beef and the pair of chickens (the fixed menu for Sunday) had been removed, and the apple tart and sago pudding had gone the rounds, when Roderick spoke for the first time during the meal—it was one of his rare impulses. As with most thoughtful children, long after authority has given its word, the subject in question is remorselessly and searchingly tested and tried in the child's mind. By an irresistible impulse it asks why? The arbitrament of its reason insists that it shall test the authority, and none knew this better than the Christ when He admonished men to cultivate the child attitude.

"Mother," he asked in his high treble, "when God said 'Thou shalt not kill,' why did He order the people to murder the poor man who gathered sticks?"

For a full moment there was silence, then Malcolm burst into an irrepressible peal of laughter, even Miss Herne smiled. Macleod looked down frowningly and poured himself out a second glass of port. The child glanced at his half-brother in timid surprise. What was there to laugh at in his question? he wondered; then he looked again at his mother and noticed her face had grown scarlet; she looked extremely angry.

"How dare you ask such irreverent questions?" she burst out severely; "you shan't have any dessert to-day. As you have finished your pudding, you had better go now and finish learning your verses."

Mrs. Macleod always dismissed her son when he asked her questions that she was powerless to answer. Roderick rose, looking very much ashamed of himself, and the tutor rose also.



## The Portals of Love

"Don't go, Tytler, stop and have a glass of wine and a cigarette," said Macleod, raising his eyes for the first time.

"Thank you, sir. I have some work to do, if you will kindly excuse me," he replied hurriedly, as he moved to the door.

It was one of those moments he found so desperately hard to endure, his heart was fairly bursting with indignation. Outside the door he took the boy's hand, and they walked together in absolute silence to the schoolroom.

When the door was shut Roderick turned and looked at him, and there was a storm of passionate anger in his eyes, and the flame of indignation on his cheeks.

"I hate and detest Sunday, and I simply hate and detest God and all that He does and says," he cried wildly; then he burst into a tempest of tears and threw himself face downwards on the floor.

Tytler knew that his own eyes had filled. He knew that he had to undo the mother's work without injuring her in her son's sight; it was an oft-repeated and difficult task. He stood for a second or two looking down on the child who was heaving with sobs, then he crossed over to a chair and sat down.

"Roderick, come here," he said.

Something in his tones arrested the boy's attention. He raised a stained, scarlet face and glanced across with streaming eyes at the speaker.

"Come here, my boy."

The child rose at once, the obedience Keith could always command asserting itself. He came and stood by Tytler's knee, and the man bent forward and kissed the child's cheek, then the slender little arms were round his neck in a second, and he was drawn close by his tutor's arms to a very sympathetic breast.

## The Portals of Love

"You know you've been talking nonsense, my boy, and we can't have any more of that," he said gently. "It's nonsense for either you or I to talk of hating God, because we can't understand His motives. You see, Roddie, you and I are, in comparison to God, no greater than the insects that crawl are to us. How can we comprehend the working of a Creator who gave birth to this beautiful earth, and all those great swinging stars you see above you at night. You would think those flies on the window very silly and wrong if they hated me and all I did. You would think, what can they possibly know about it? When you grow up you will look at things more as I do. You will believe that God is, must be, all love, and that we, His created, are slowly working on to greater perfection, though still so far away from all we ought to be. Don't bother your head about such questions as you asked at dinner. You'll understand right enough later on. Think rather of the glories of this lovely earth that God has made, of the singing birds, the rustling trees, and the flowers and sunshine. Now see that you have perfected your verses; the harder you put your mind to it, the sooner it's completed. Come on now, buck up! Be a man!"

The child was smiling again; he scuttled across the room to where his open Bible stood on a table, and bent his head over the task. Tytler took up another Bible and carefully read over the fifteenth chapter of Numbers, then he took down from a high shelf a volume called *The Pulpit Commentary*, revised edition. When his doubts had once begun, a fellow-student of Aberdeen University had advised him to buy the book. It contained explanations of the Old Testament, proffered by orthodoxy itself, vouched for and approved by authoritative names such as Dean Farrar, Principal Tulloch, Bishop Cotterill and Canon Rawlinson. Up to now it had given him no help,



## The Portals of Love

the apologists were childishy feeble. How could they be otherwise under the circumstances? He found the page that dealt with the text his father had that day preached upon. He wished to see what possible excuse those great and learned exponents of theology could find for their God. As he read the contempt within him deepened and widened. Why had such men not the moral courage to state openly their refusal to accept the Old Testament God as the God of love and power whose work was manifest to all. Why did they cling to the Divine inspiration of such a volume of crime? What blasphemy to credit the Creator with a vileness, even below the level of peccable humanity. What sin to place such a record of debauchery, murder and rapine in the hands of an innocent little child. Aye, that was the worst sin, to give such a book to the questioning, opening mind of little children. It was like pouring sewer water into the heart of an open lily. The apologist had tried to be equal to the occasion, his mental athletics were pitiable to read. He discovered that the stick gatherer's sin was "presumptuous," and went on to remark "this was clearly presumptuous because the prohibition to do any work oneself on the Sabbath had been made so clear that ignorance would not possibly be pleaded here". But Moses and Aaron and the whole congregation who knew nothing of such hair splittings, and had never heard of presumptuous sins, had nevertheless to plead ignorance, not knowing what to do with the unfortunate stick gatherer until they had consulted God. *Faute de mieux*, that was the gist of the apology for so brutal a murder.

Tytler's father had destined him for the Church, he was ready to be ordained; he knew now that he would never enter the ministry. His reason revolted from the belief in inspiration. He could not preach what

## The Portals of Love

he believed to be a lie. What would his father say when he heard that his only son had turned infidel, for that was how Joshua would class any man or woman who refused to accept every word of the Bible as the inspired word of God. It was a case of all or nothing with the minister of Seaview. Either absolute blind faith or eternal damnation. No middle course was possible.

That he would turn him from his doors was a certainty, erase his very existence from off his mind and life as he had erased the name of Elizabeth Tytler, his only daughter. Like a clean-washed slate the writings on her parent's heart which she had drawn there in early girlhood were wholly obliterated. As one dead had she been for the last two years. Her letters burnt unopened, her name forbidden in the household. To Keith Tytler the want of knowledge as to her whereabouts was an intolerable suffering. No day passed but he thought of her in anguished longing and always he thought of her as pure and without sin. He rose up at last as if his thoughts were unendurable, and threw *The Pulpit Commentary* from him. It was the last time he ever opened its pages.



### CHAPTER III

THE lovely day was drawing to a close. The twilight merging into such night as the summer in the North knows, a pale, sweet reminiscence of the past day, as of a work which had been finished by Heaven. The fathomless blue of that great vault without arch or keystone had deepened, and was darkening out into the wide horizon, and the still darker sea lapped on the long yellow sands, filling the ear with uttermost peace and harmony.

The sun had sunk behind the heather hills, painting them as he went with amber and amethyst, and the western skies bereft of the greater glory were a tumbled ruin of temples not made by hands, of rose, and gold, and prismatic green.

Lights from humble casements were beginning to sprinkle the distant dusk with stars, and from out one or two of the Castle windows streamed a pale radiance reflecting on motionless trees and silent shrubberies.

Malcolm and Liliast stood together on the terrace drinking in the solemn beauty of the scene. Supper was just over, and there was still three-quarters of an hour before prayers, and Malcolm smoked his pipe whilst they stood together leaning their arms on the stone parapet and gazing over the shadowy park and the wooded cliffs which fell away in wild rocky luxuriance from where they stood to the stream below.

Behind them lay the great dark pile of the Castle, vast in outline, sombre, impressive, almost oppressive in its huge proportions and irregular formation. The numer-

## The Portals of Love

ous turrets, towers and spires with their quaint vanes still touched to burnished gold by the after glow of sunset.

Now the lovers spoke but little, there was so much to be thought upon. In the afternoon they had walked together, and Lilius Herne had renewed her promise to be Malcolm's wife and go with him to the Colonies.

It did not appear to her in the light of an exile; she was fond of travelling and had that cosmopolitan strain in her blood which made all countries in the world homelike to her. She had always thought of the world as home rather than one particular country. With the man she loved she was ready to face a new life in any clime and under any sun. If they lived there would be the coming home at last to life at the Fastness.

It had been decided between them that on the morrow they should inform Macleod of their engagement, and Malcolm should ask his father for a certain sum of money with which to start a new enterprise. What that enterprise was to be neither had the vaguest notion. They would go out together and then look about them. The five hundred a year which was Lilius Herne's fortune would keep the wolf from the door if work was long in presenting itself.

For the time being Malcolm had lived in a paradise, his troubles forgotten in the love of the woman by his side, all else obliterated but the rapture of her kiss, the touch of her arms about his neck. Once during that afternoon had come the fleeting remembrance of Keith Tytler's words, "Can't you make a clean breast of it?" but in the bliss of the golden afternoon, in the dream of love-making, confession had appeared more impossible than ever.

Now as the night crept on it seemed as if it brought with it that shroud of gloom and fear which of late had so darkened his life. He remembered his one



## The Portals of Love

great difficulty, and how to face it, how to escape it, came to him in torturing waves. Always did he hope for inspiration on the morrow.

An owl swept by with shrill scream, and was answered in the distance by its mate. Away down in the depths of the glen all was impenetrable darkness, dark by day, in twilight it became ebon.

His eyes, as he gazed down in gloomy reverie followed instinctively the twinkling of a little light which advanced at times and then disappeared for a period, only to reappear still farther up the cliff. Some one carrying a lantern was approaching by the narrow, tortuous path which led up the face of the precipice. A simple enough way by daylight, and used commonly by all the household who wished to take a short cut through the glen to and from the village, but dangerous in twilight or darkness.

"Some one is coming up the cliff. I wonder who it is?" observed Lilius dreamily. She felt at perfect peace with all the world, in that dream state which succeeds a great crisis in a life. Malcolm roused himself.

"One of the servants, I suppose. You're not cold, are you, dearest? Shall I fetch you a cape?"

"No, no, Malcolm, why it is perfectly warm; don't let us go in yet. Prayers aren't for ever so long," she answered.

Suddenly the light appeared immediately below them, and in another minute the tall, straight figure of the factor, Torquil Grant, had stepped on to the terrace beside them. He took off his hat to Miss Herne, and blew out his lamp, placing it on the stone coping, but not before he had caught a glimpse of Malcolm's face which had gone deathly pale.

"You are enjoying the beauty of the night, Miss Herne. Did you see the sunset? the grandest we have had this year, and a promise of fine weather," he said pleasantly.

## The Portals of Love

"Yes, I saw it ; perfectly beautiful, was it not ? May I inquire what brings you all the way up to the Castle on Sunday night ?" she replied, with a smile. She liked the factor, recognising the true gentleman under the somewhat rough exterior.

Grant sent a swift glance towards Malcolm, who had not once spoken. He stood rather aside, as if unwilling to join in the conversation.

"Well, the fact is, I have to run up to-morrow to London for a couple of days, and I wanted a few words with the captain. I thought I'd just catch him before prayers. It hasn't gone nine yet. If I'm not troubling you too much, captain ?"

He now looked straight at Malcolm who was forced to meet his eyes. For a second he hesitated and his face was still strangely white.

"Why ! Certainly," he replied, in a matter-of-fact voice. "Shall we go into the library for a minute, my father won't have come down yet from the business room. You'll excuse me, Lilies ?"

The girl nodded a pleasant assent and moved away along the terrace, the two men entering the library by the window. It was a long irregular room, or rather a chain of three rooms leading out of one another, but the doors of communication had been removed, and the walls which had closed in to meet them now made pleasant angles clothed in books from floor to ceiling. The Fastness Library was noted for the richness of its treasures, a room where a student could very happily have lived and died. A short distance from the window stood a great oaken desk which was rarely used save when shooting parties were assembled. Macleod himself always used the business room as his private sanctum. Lounge chairs in gay chintzes struck a note of colour in the natural seriousness of the room.

Malcolm shot a hasty glance round as he entered ;



## The Portals of Love

the apartment was empty as he thought it would be, and he turned without preamble to Torquil Grant.

"Well?" he said, and there was a world of meaning in the interrogation.

Grant leaned against the desk and stared straight at him; the firm mouth was very resolute; he folded his arms in front of his breast.

"You know what I have come for, Captain Macleod. I must have a thousand pounds, and at once. I've waited too long as it is. Your father will begin to suspect. He's trusted me absolutely in money matters, but the whereabouts of such a large sum must be explained. At present, as you are aware, he believes I have held back the money for the building operations on the West Mount; he can't understand why I don't hurry them on. The money must be forthcoming now, captain—at once."

"And supposing I tell you that I can't produce it?" Malcolm spoke with a mocking sneer, but his face was ghastly, and the hands clasped on his sporran shook as he sat confronting his tormentor.

A flash of anger sprang into Grant's grey face. He threw up his head and his eyes blazed.

"Then I must go straight to your father, tell him of my misguided kindness and refund him the money; but in doing so, remember, captain, you are a ruined man. Not only your father but every living soul I come across shall be told what you are. I lent you this money, which was not mine to lend, on your faithful promise to refund it within four weeks. I have waited three months and I will wait no longer. Out of my own pocket I can repay the sum at once, else you should never have had it. I took your word to be that of a gentleman, now prove it to be so."

Macleod had risen, and the two men stood facing one another. Eyes blazed into eyes as in the dimly-lit room they stood, the one determined and resolute in

## The Portals of Love

every line, the other with that ashy face and defiant sneer distorting his fine features.

"You would never dare go with such a story to my father," he hissed out passionately. "It would cost you your place. My position would be bad, but yours would be infinitely worse. I have always the Fastness at my back; what would you have left without even a character behind you?"

The brutal words struck Grant like a blow. He had trusted Malcolm utterly, having known him since childhood and liked him always. The young soldier had begged most urgently for the loan of a thousand pounds for four weeks, giving every earnest and solemn assurance that it should be repaid. He had mentioned a debt of honour demanding instant settlement which for the next few days he could not meet until he had realised certain securities that had belonged to his mother. Grant knew of the existence of this little fortune of three thousand pounds, and had no idea that the whole sum had long since vanished. He trusted the man he had known since boyhood and believed in his integrity.

Suddenly Malcolm's very nature seemed to have changed. The frank, boyish humour had merged into biting sarcasm, the honest open gaze was cunning and full of subterfuge. In truth, his troubles brought upon himself had for the time being altered Malcolm's whole character.

"Am I to think of you as an out and out blackguard? What have you done with the money, captain?"

The powerful concentration of restrained passion was in Grant's voice as he stepped closer to his antagonist and looked him keenly in the eyes, as if to drag an answer from him by sheer force of will.

"What the devil is that to you?" demanded Malcolm furiously.

"You ask what it is to me? I begin to believe what



## The Portals of Love

I have heard hinted, that you were the man who for a time financed Elizabeth Tytler. Is that true?"

Suddenly Macleod lost all control; the onrush of his overwhelming wrath, the wild frenzied passion of a beast at bay and fighting for its very existence, the rage and fiery hot-headedness of his robber ancestors which ran like a subterranean flood latent in his veins awoke, and bubbling up to boiling-point ran over.

With one swift, well-aimed blow he struck out and felled Torquil Grant like a stricken ox to the ground.

For a moment he was as one gone mad, and a myriad demons took possession of him and swayed him as they pleased. The blood hissed and seethed in his brain and floated in crimson waves before his eyes. The man had accused him wrongfully, had brought a false imputation against him and deserved punishment. The savage gloating over glutted revenge was all he felt—but Torquil Grant lay still where he had fallen.

As if from a raving dream he started violently as a hand was laid heavily upon his arm. His eyes, filled with the hellishness of blood and revenge, turned and met the terrible eyes of his father. For a brief second they held his in a fascination of hideous, awe-inspiring wonder, then like a crash of thunder the word "murderer" struck on his ear, and sent a thousand terrifying vibrations flashing through his brain as he staggered back from Macleod's grip upon him.

"Murderer!" The word was hissed out once more through the silence of the summer twilight. It held in it all the concentrated essence of a lifetime of hatred. A loathing of years condensed and reduced to the compass of one hideous word.

A sort of sob broke in his throat, his lips moved in voiceless articulation, his pale mouth was drawn back against his teeth and was too rigid for speech.

Macleod was down on his knees now beside the

## The Portals of Love

prostrate form, and his son stood above him reduced to an appalling impotence of sullen despair.

Only a few moments passed, but to Malcolm they seemed long years. As his father rose once more to his feet he stared at him in a vacant stupor.

"He's stone dead. When you felled him he struck the back of his head, just behind the ear, on the edge of the desk. There's the mark—a triangular wound which hasn't even bled."

The inflexible verdict was delivered with a chill, unrelenting calm. Then Macleod looked round the room with a sudden, fierce alertness as if some leaping thought had galvanised his whole being into another life. As he ceased speaking his wild, dark eyes seemed to search every nook and cranny. Some sudden, swift determination seemed to have seized him, the ponderous gloom of his former pitiless bearing changed instantaneously to an alert, cunning virility. Abruptly, as if it had been another man who spoke, his voice rose in a stern, merciless command.

"Help me quickly, there's no time to be lost. Man, pull yourself together, unless you want to swing for your crime," he ordered, and darted to the right side of the room and threw open a tiny turret door through which could be seen a narrow spiral staircase.

It was one of those corkscrew stairs which abounded in the Castle, leading only to a turret which formed one small, unused chamber.

He knew instantly what his father intended to do, and with a frenzied strength and energy he aided the work. The significance of his awful act began to shriek in his ears and warn him to hide away his work of destruction.

The corpse of Torquil Grant, father and son dragging it by the armpits, was pulled across the floor to the gaping door of the turret staircase. The steps sprang up from the immediate entrance and the dead man



## The Portals of Love

was raised and laid back upon them, his stony grey face, with the glazing, staring eyeballs gazing out into the still room, until that last awful second when the door was closed, firmly locked and the key dropped by Macleod into his doublet pocket. Then for one long fateful moment the two men faced one another in pregnant silence.

Suddenly the great clock in the Western Tower gave tongue, chiming the half-hour after nine to the drowsy summer night. Its booming strokes as it reverberated out over hill and dale and sleeping glens fell on the dull ears of the fisher folk in their huts, and they glanced up at their old timepieces, for the village time from time immemorial had been set by the Castle clock.

For a moment Macleod sank down into his chair and wiped his clammy brow. The whiteness of his own face had equalled that of his son, but the colour was returning to his cheeks. The indomitable force and determination of the man triumphed; centuries of traditional violence had culminated in him and concentrated into an absorbing passion for power. A second more and he was speaking in a hard, impersonal voice.

"You will remain here whilst I read prayers. I command you by all you hold dear to pull yourself together and act your part as you will see me act mine. Otherwise——" he paused for a second and drew his forefinger with malignant significance round his throat, an evil gleam shooting crooked across his face. "I will speak with you to some purpose after ten o'clock. We have a dark night's work before us."

Malcolm stood staring at him. Still half-dazed he gave voice to the thought slowly struggling through his clouded brain.

"Are you absolutely sure he's dead? Ought we not to try to revive him?" he whispered, panic-stricken.

Macleod gave utterance to a low curse.

## The Portals of Love

"Torquil Grant's eyes will never more open on the light of day," he answered fiercely. "You've done your work too well. Good God! don't stand staring at me like that. Be master of yourself or I can't save you. In a moment the whole household will be in this room; call up your courage. For once in your life be a man, or my eternal curse be upon you."

He stood up, glancing once more swiftly round the room, set a chair straight, and crossing over to the fireplace deliberately pulled the bell.

Malcolm Macleod stared about him with scared, dazed eyes. The creeping terror of detection was alive within him; he glanced at the small closed door behind which lay a corpse, the warm corpse of the man his hand had just murdered, sent without shrive or shrift to the unknown realms called death. A terrible shuddering seized him, his teeth chattered in his mouth; he tottered rather than walked towards the fearful spot, and drawing forward a chair sank down and turned his back upon his crime.

Macleod lit two candles which he placed at his elbows and seated himself at the desk. He opened at random the big Bible which lay upon it, and his eyes wandering over the open page read the words, "I am the resurrection and the dead, though a man die yet shall he live again". Hurriedly he turned over the yellow leaves; his mind was in a state of fierce chaos, yet he held it in leash with a grip of iron.

The door opened and Mrs. Macleod entered, followed by Keith Tytler. Roderick had been put to bed at least an hour before. The housekeeper and butler, followed by about twenty domestics of varying degrees, came behind. The men stood, the women found chairs where they could and straggled into the farther rooms. Mrs. Macleod took her accustomed place by her husband's side. When all were seated Macleod looked sharply round, his keen eyes darting into the



## The Portals of Love

inner rooms. One chair was left vacant, the one usually occupied by Miss Herne. His heart beat just a trifle faster as he noted her absence. What did it mean? His mind was agonised and full of voiceless fears.

"Is Liliás not coming?" he asked in a low voice, turning to his wife.

Mrs. Macleod shrugged her shoulders slightly. "I'm sure I don't know. I haven't seen her since supper time," she answered indifferently.

At that instant the girl's step was heard on the terrace. She came through the open window, and with a murmured word of apology slid silently into her seat.

Macleod cleared his throat and began to speak.

"We will read the fifth chapter of 2nd Corinthians," he said, looking out over his audience.

At the entrance of the women Malcolm had risen but stood still before his chair. His face looked wan and strange enough, but the dimly-lit room, half in shadow, half in darkness, drew a merciful veil over his anguish. He suddenly began to wonder again if Grant was really dead, and sat scarce breathing with straining ear to catch the smallest sound from the other side of the door he guarded. Not yet had he realised the full force of his crime, only a haunting knowledge that his life was over possessed him. He seemed to realise that. Yet there was a strange veil of unreality cast over the whole tragedy. All had happened so swiftly, it seemed impossible that with one blow a man could be cast headlong into eternity. Surely it must take longer, take more force, more premeditation to slay a brother man.

He had often in his life dealt such blows and no great harm had been done. At school, in the ante-room one night when he first joined, and the ragging had been severe, in a street brawl going to his hotel one early morning from a Monte Carlo supper. He had prided himself upon the power of his natural

## The Portals of Love

weapon of defence, and boasted he need never carry firearms. He knew the man was dead, yet he could not believe it. It seemed incredible that a corpse should be huddled just behind that little door and that all the household should not know it. He looked stealthily round from under his lowered lids. No one seemed to be looking at him though people were seated all about him, not one glance was directed towards the door. How quiet and composed every one was; there was no sound but his father's sonorous reading. How cold-blooded, impeccable, correct and impersonal he looked, how steady his voice was!

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."

A silent shudder shook his frame as with ague. Suddenly his father's attitude terrorised him. There was something Satanic, diabolical, hellish in the man's sardonic calm, in the even, powerful vibrations of his voice as he read those words. What could he be made of, blood and iron? A halo of light cast by the candles fell upon his face and showed it calm, powerful and sanctimonious. It wore that hypocritical devoutness, that air of canting pietism which the master of the Fastness thought it proper to assume in church and at prayer time. Knowing his father's indifferent apostasy it had formerly rather amused him than otherwise, now it seemed infernally malevolent and vile.

He glanced stealthily at his stepmother sitting in the purple veil of the summer night, as it filtered through the open window. Her eyes were shut, and her hands, coarse unkept hands, covered with rings, reposed on the lap of her white tea-gown. She was a woman whose gowns were never bought to match her face.

Then his tortured eyes turned to Liliás Herne, and



## The Portals of Love

in one wild throb of anguish her eyes met his across the room. He had not dared glance at her before, for fear she should detect that awful something he knew was branded on his face. Now she sat huddled up in her chair, her chin was dropped upon her breast, and her raised eyes were on him, fixed, immovable merciless eyes, which seemed to read right down into his very soul. With a snake-like fascination she held him in a quivering suspense; her face was the colour of clay, even he could see that, with gaze half-blinded to all else but his own dread. He saw it, and as he tore his eyes away from hers, there was given to him the absolute conviction that she knew.

A dream-like stupor supervened. He seemed to know nothing more till the rustle of his stepmother's gown as she passed out recalled him to life again. After a few moments he looked up, still half-dazed; the room was empty of all save his father. Still with the halo of gold cast by the two candles illuminating his face, Macleod sat with eyes fixed upon him, sardonically, quietly and patiently, like a tiger awaiting the wakening of the prey he knows cannot escape him.

Malcolm rose and advanced to the desk, and steadied himself with his hands upon it.

"What do you intend to do with me?" he asked.

The sound of his own voice was strange to him, it seemed so indifferent, so dreary. Macleod answered nothing. He rose and stepped out for a moment upon the terrace. One great planet swung in the eastern horizon, more distant worlds were stealing out to people space and calling upon the Heavens to declare the glory of God, and the firmament to show His handiwork. The only sounds which broke the absolute stillness were the tinkle of the stream stealing up from far below, and the wild, weird, shrieking at intervals of the owls. The enormous shadow of the Castle suggested a ponderous massive depth of silence,

## The Portals of Love

like some mighty gravestone reared over a fallen Titan. A bat attracted by the light flew in at the window, made a circuit of the room and disappeared again into the night. Macleod watched its flight, then he drew a deep breath and turned into the room again, carefully closing the window behind him and lighting two more candles.

He walked the length of the three rooms, stopping at intervals to illumine the darkness of first one corner then another, trying the door of exit which he firmly closed. The room contained no other door but the small one admitting to the turret stair. After thoroughly satisfying himself that they were really alone, he returned to his chair and glanced at his son.

"I don't want to be guilty of the mistake you made—I make sure there is no eavesdropping when I have dirty work to do. I may tell you I heard every word that passed between you and your victim. I was putting back a book in the angle of the second room," he remarked quietly. "You had better sit down as I have a certain amount to say—no, not over there, draw a chair close to mine."

The two men faced each other within the little circle of light. A large moth fluttered close to one of the candles, and Macleod caught it and remorselessly crushed it between finger and thumb, dropping the remains carefully into the waste-paper basket. The action was typical of the relentlessness of the man, even so he intended to drop the victim of his son's passion into oblivion. Few people had ever cumbered his path, he had so easily removed them. Even out of murder he would find an escape and a compensation.

"Now to business!" he said judicially. "I take it only you and I know of your crime. I presuppose no one else was a witness."

He paused for a second, but Malcolm preserved his



## The Portals of Love

your lesson. Leave me now. I want to be alone, and remember in three and a half hours you return to this room. I think you will tread softly for your own sake."

Father and son parted without further words, and mechanically, as one in a dream, Malcolm went to his own wing of the Castle.

Already it seemed as if the household was hushed in sleep. The lamps had been extinguished by the servants, who had all retired to their own quarters. They found the Sabbath a tiring day. Outside the drawing-room door stood two lighted candles, and he knew by this that only he and his father were still about—all the others had retired for the night. He had to pass by Miss Herne's rooms as he moved on to his own quarters; his stepmother's apartments lay away in another tower of the Castle, and involuntarily he stepped lighter as he approached her door.

Just as he was about to pass it opened very softly and Liliás appeared. Her cheeks were ghastly; a pinched, anguished look made her face appear smaller, and her startled, affrighted eyes preternaturally large. She was still dressed in the frock she had worn at supper. The two stood facing one another, he had nothing to say to her. She gave one swift glance to right and left then crept close up to him and whispered in his ear:—

"Malcolm, I have hidden the lantern; he left it on the parapet."

He started violently and looked down at her. His lips parted but were incapable of forming speech.

"Oh! Malcolm, God help you! Where have you and uncle hidden him?"

The hoarse whisper seemed to echo loudly down the dark corridors and he looked wildly round. His eye caught the fixed, immovable stare of a portrait on a level with his own face, the portrait of "bloody Macleod" who had well earned the epithet in "the '15".

## The Portals of Love

Illumined by the candle he held, the face seemed to smile with devilish, sardonic approval. It seemed to say "Well done! You are following in my footsteps. I was executed at Tower Hill, you will be hanged by the neck in Calton Gaol."

He turned and looked down into the tortured face of the woman he loved. She was no more like the same creature, his crime had stamped itself upon her wan, haggard features. She looked murder, her whole shrinking, terror-stricken attitude suggested murder.

"Wait until to-morrow, Lillas. Try to bear the burden of my crime in silence till then."

His hollow voice reached her as if from far away. The hand that was clutched upon his arm relaxed, and she shrank back into her room without another word, and the door softly closed upon her.

She had no need to ask what they had done with Torquil Grant. Common-sense pointed to there being only one place where he could be hidden—the stairway in front of which Malcolm had sat.

He stumbled up the stone corkscrew stairs to his own apartments and shut himself in. The clear translucent light of the summer night shone through the window. All through the nights of June and July in that northern latitude one could read through all the hours without artificial aid, yet he lit every candle the room contained and a large oil lamp till it blazed in light. He felt he could not bear external darkness, his internal darkness was so impenetrable, so black.

Occasionally a mouse scratched in the wall, and the sleepless owls hooted round the tower and shrieked from the shrubberies over their prey, but no other sound broke the stillness.



## CHAPTER IV

THE great clock in the Western Tower had chimed its hours and half-hours to unheeding ears. All the world lay wrapped in slumber save father and son and one silent watcher in her room below.

As the chimes of the second hour of daybreak rang forth in two solemn notes of warning, Malcolm extinguished his lights and stole forth. He had exchanged his brogues for a pair of soft slippers, and as he crept downstairs and passed through the long, silent, carpeted corridor he once more trod as softly as possible in passing the room where Liliast slept. Through the semi-gloom a ray of light shone out from under the door, and he knew that she still watched, that she also shunned the darkness.

He had no need of a candle; already the birth of another day was struggling to free itself from the womb of night. Through a window at the end of the corridor a silvery shaft crept in and laid a broad white finger on the opposite wall. The distant stars had begun to pale, but Venus at her brightest hung like a gorgeous gem upon the purple breast of Heaven.

He passed on down the winding main staircase. It was of uncarpeted stone, the walls were hung with rude weapons, coats of arms were emblazoned on the massive pillar which supported the mighty spiral as it sprang upwards in two flights. Half-way down he turned along the short passage which led to the library and opening the door softly he entered. At the far end, by the window, sat Macleod as if he had not moved since

## The Portals of Love

last they met, but the blinds were now closely drawn, and as he rose Malcolm observed by the stealth of his tread that he stood in his stocking soles. On the floor by the side of his chair stood a lighted lamp; this he now raised to the desk. A heavy sporting flask lay beside it, and into its cup Macleod poured a generous supply of spirit and held it out to his son.

"Drink," he commanded.

Malcolm put it to his lips and shuddered.

"Finish it. Do as I bid you. Later on you will see that you had need of it."

He took back the empty cup with a searching look in his son's face.

"You have always boasted of your strength—now you are about to prove it," he said grimly. "You are to carry the dead man down to the dungeons on your shoulders. You are to tread as softly as possible and closely follow me. Do you understand? Have you the courage and strength for the business, or must I take it off your hands? You look as ghastly as any white-livered girl."

"I have the strength. I am ready," answered his son.

Macleod turned aside.

"Right! Now let us get the hideous job over. We go by the passage of the cells—on past the old weaving-room, there we turn to the left, and through a door we descend by a very awkward stair to the dungeons. You have never been in them?"

"Never," answered Malcolm.

"I hope then it's for the first and last time," said Macleod, and wiped his forehead. He opened a drawer and took from its depths three large keys which he slipped into his pocket, then he advanced to the little door behind which lay the dead man.

The corpse lay as it had been placed, the grim, grey face staring outwards. Macleod tried to close the



## The Portals of Love

staring eyes, but it was too late, rigor mortis had set in. The wound had not bled. Grant had died instantaneously. Even Macleod's great brawny frame felt the awful strain, as with his son's aid the body was hoisted on to the stooping shoulders. Grant had been a tall and broad man, but had not an ounce of superfluous flesh upon him. As a collar of death he wound round Malcolm's shoulders, his head hanging over on to his right breast, his legs clasped by his carrier's left arm.

Macleod took up his lantern without a word, and followed by his son crept softly out of the room. The lower flight of the great stairway passed, they struck off to the right down a long narrow passage. At one side stood a close row of cells, now used as store-rooms. Opposite each was a window cut in the depths of the outer wall and forming an embrasure of some eight feet. From end to end stole in the coming day. There was little fear of their hushed footsteps being heard. Not a soul slept in that portion of the house; no living thing stirred save now and again a rat or mouse scurried in terror before them. The weaving-room reached, Macleod paused by a low wide door and inserted a key in the lock, which was covered by a cobweb. This he first carefully removed and laid aside on a window-sill. The door opened stiffly and creaked loudly, and for a moment both men held their breath, sweat pouring from both faces. A narrow, steep and worn staircase was disclosed by the lantern, and Macleod led the way with slow cat-like tread.

As the distance increased it came to Malcolm that some superhuman aid assisted him in bearing his ghastly burden. He knew that under ordinary circumstances even his great strength would have given out. After what seemed an unending descent into the very bowels of the earth, they reached level

## The Portals of Love

ground—a small vaulted chamber which was very dimly lit by one tiny window. It was but a hole at best, and looked out on the face of the cliff below the terrace. Deep set in the rocky face of the precipice it afforded hardly any light. The bare walls were of brown stone, wet and slimy and full of holes where the mortar had yielded, and stones fallen out. The flooring of earth was slippery and slimy with damp. From this they passed through two other chambers, each damp, brown, vaulted and absolutely dark, till at last they entered the fourth and last of the dungeons, and here they walked on smoother earth. Macleod held up his hand for a halt, and threw his lantern searchingly over the floor. A few feet from where they stood yawned a black hole, round, and about five feet across.

"Lay down your burden," he ordered, and the two men lowered the corpse to the ground, where it rested in a hideous, huddled heap.

"You're about done, eh? Well, there's little more to do," he whispered grimly. "I'll help you to drag him to the lip of the well, and see you don't go in after him. Now then, steady!——"

Malcolm seemed to know nothing, to hear nothing, but after a long interval a dull turgid splash of waters, long still and stagnant and hungering, closing over their prey.

He knew nothing of his return journey. Like a somnambulist he preceded his father, who kept a hand always upon his shoulder. Like a statue he stood whilst Macleod securely locked the door leading to the stairway, and with his great fingers replaced the spider's web upon the keyhole with the delicacy of a woman's touch. He felt nothing till he was thrust down into a chair in the library and saw Macleod holding out the flask cup to him once more.

This time he drank willingly; the large amount of



## The Portals of Love

spirit he had taken before the descent seemed not to have affected him in the smallest degree. He felt now as if he must drink or die, so enervated, exhausted and done was he. Macleod drank a deep draught himself, and sat down, looking at his watch, which he had not forgotten to wind. It stood at a quarter to three.

"Now," he said, glancing across at his son, "I will explain the plans I have formed for your future."

"I have no future. I must ever live in this awful present," answered Malcolm.

Macleod smiled grimly.

"Time works wonders," he remarked briefly. "In other lands, removed from all your old associations, you will soon learn to feel less keenly. By this day week I expect you to be gone——"

"Where am I to go?" asked his son.

"Where you please, so long as it is the antipodes. I recommend Australia. I will give you one thousand pounds, that is the last sixpence you will ever get from me, or from the revenues of the Fastness. Do you clearly understand?"

"Yes, I understand."

"From the day you leave this house you are dead to me and to all your family. If you ever attempt to return, or to claim an acre of my land, you will be instantly given up to justice. When you have been gone about three months, I intend to announce your death to the world. You will have the amusement of reading your own obituary, but you will know that though walking above the ground you will be as dead to all your relatives, friends and former life as if you lay six feet below the daisies."

Malcolm sat staring at the relentless speaker; not yet had he fully taken in the significance of the words and their meaning. The idea of getting away anywhere to hide himself appealed to him urgently. In

## The Portals of Love

the first moments, as he listened he thought the sum of a thousand pounds a wonderfully generous gift—but his supposed death, what did that mean? He might live for years longer, his father might predecease him by a quarter of a century. What did he mean—what happened then? He could not always be dead.

"You quite understand that after what has happened you can never inherit the properties. No murderer shall stand in my shoes. I thank God I have another son to succeed me."

Mentally, Malcolm staggered under the terrific blow. He understood now. He sat silent drinking in the full significance of that awful relentless verdict. Verily he was to be as one dead, as dead as if lying in coffin of lead in the damp gloom of the family vault. Then a wild resentment against fate suddenly seized him. He was no longer the murderer but the murdered, and his father's hands were strangling the life out of him.

"I will never consent. No, not if I had murdered a hundred men. Rather than that I will give myself up to justice," he shouted, rising in his chair and glaring across at his inquisitor.

Macleod never moved; something in his face made his son drop back again into his chair, though his head was raised defiantly.

"So you prefer the hempen rope and the gallows," he sneered. "You prefer to bring uttermost ruin and disgrace upon all your family rather than escape with your life and make a new home in other lands. I have done what I can to save you, and am ready to state before a British jury the means I took. Much will be forgiven a stricken father, and a man in my position in life, but you have no such excuse to offer for your crime. As I presume the deed was unpremeditated, we will call it manslaughter if you like. If you escape the gallows you have the alternative of rotting in gaol. Well! Take your own way. Had I been in your



## The Portals of Love

shoes I should have chosen my liberty. Is that your final decision? Have you no spark of feeling left, no sense of shame for the appalling misery and ruin you propose to draw down on us? Is that so? Shall I rouse MacNab and send for the police and let the whole world know that my heir is a murderer?"

He rose as if to put into execution the intention, but his son was by his side before he had taken half a dozen strides.

"For God's sake wait. I must have time, let me think. Don't you see I am beside myself with misery and shame and agony?" he panted.

Macleod dropped back into his chair, he knew he had won his game. He could afford to be more gentle and patient now. He remembered the words of God who screened Cain, the murderer: "Whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord appointed a sign for Cain, lest any finding him should smite him."

"Of course you must see that disclosure is out of the question," he said impressively. "You ought to be most thankful to me for finding you a way out of so terrible a position. Few fathers would have gone through what I have done in the last few hours. I might cast you out penniless to take your chance, to sink or swim; instead of that I give you a large sum with which to begin a new career in a new land. Supposing I had at once given you up to justice? A man provokes you, and you instantly strike him dead—what extenuating circumstances could you put forward? That you did not mean to kill him? Perhaps you didn't, but that does not alter the fact that he is dead—was struck dead by your hand. The jury might be lenient, but you would get at the least ten years. What would you be like at the expiry of your time? A mere gaol wreck, broken in body and spirit. Even did you succeed me as master of the Fastness,

## The Portals of Love

you could never live here. You couldn't live down your crime on the very scene of its enactment. You could never have a legitimate child. What decent woman would wed you? I am talking brutally but the truth is often brutal, and this is no time to mince matters. Your plans must be clearly formulated before the household is astir. As I pull the blinds up to admit daylight, it dawns upon a new life for you. Your old one is finished—utterly and entirely finished.”

For a period there was dead silence between them; both men sat buried in their own thoughts. Four o'clock chimed out upon the sweet freshness of the morning, and Macleod rose and let in the first outpourings of its dewy breath. Bird life was now fully astir, the sparrows were chattering in the ivy, starlings flew swiftly like sunbeams from the chimneys to the lawns. A thrush on a thorn bush poured out its rapturous melody, and the larks were rising into the blue to hail the coming sun. Away at the opal horizon the east was red with dawn, and long streamers of silver shot up from sea to zenith and painted blood-red the swelling sails of some outward-bound fishing smacks. Macleod turned and stood in front of his son.

“Your resolve is taken?” he asked.

Malcolm stood up, his face was very pale and wan but utterly calm.

“Yes! I accept your conditions. I will go next Friday or Saturday. The sooner the better, and when I go, I go for ever.”

“You have chosen wisely. Let it be Friday, that will allow the first violence of the excitement to blow over. You are sure you have learned your lesson? Remember there must be no blunders. The smallest mistake might ruin everything. You must bear yourself bravely before the world. A glance at your present face would instantly breed suspicion. Now



## The Portals of Love

repeat to me before we part the story we have agreed upon."

In a quiet firm voice Malcolm recapitulated the concocted tale of Grant's departure at 9.15. The unpleasant interview between his father and the factor to which he had not paid much attention, but knew it had to do with money. After 9.15 he had never set eyes on Grant again. The dead man's name was not to be mentioned until the fact of his disappearance was brought to the Castle. Then Macleod would himself send for the police and inform them that the missing man had called there on the night of his disappearance. He would frankly state that Grant had in his possession one thousand pounds belonging to the estate, and that he was to have gone to London on business on the following day. Macleod intended that the search should be pursued in the English Capital, not in the Castle or village.

"Now go to your room and try to compose yourself for the task which lies before you," he said not unkindly. "See that your bed has been slept in and appear at the usual time in the morning. Let nothing you do cause the slightest suspicion. Remember how much depends upon you during the next four days. The honour of your house, the whole future lives and prosperity of all your kith and kin."

The two men parted with a few last words and Malcolm sought his room, and flinging off his clothes stumbled into his bed. In a little over two hours he knew that a footman would enter to awaken him; he knew that sleep was impossible. His brain was no longer in its former state of chaos. The tragic events of the past few hours pieced themselves together with perfect sequence. He could think coherently and clearly, and the shuddering, creeping terror he had felt whilst the body was being disposed of, which had made his blood curdle and run cold, which had filled

## The Portals of Love

him with loathing, abomination and abhorrence, had by the very might of its stupendous force worn itself out, and expended its energies into something akin to apathy. Dumbly he marvelled how a man could go on living and breathing after hearing that ghastly sound of closing turgid waters. It had been the one supreme moment of agony, of emotional torture in which he knew that though the brand of Cain might always mark his brow he had paid a hundred-fold for his crime. He could not raise the dead to life, but retribution had come swiftly. Already he felt as if he had paid to the uttermost farthing.

He knew that there still remained to him a tragic parting, the parting from the woman he loved. His hand had severed the love-link between them. In that one blow he had cut himself adrift for ever from the love of woman. He would live and die alone now, under alien skies and amongst strange faces. He feared nothing from her knowledge of his crime. He knew she must have heard and witnessed all from the terrace, and her instinct to save him had bid her secrete the lamp. Had that been found the suggestion that Grant had never left the castle would instantly have arisen, and a search within would have been instituted. They would not have found the body, but they would have found traces of recent entry into the dungeons, and suspicions of all sorts would have clamoured so loudly that at last the well itself would have been dragged.

This chain of reasoning made him determined to assert the full forces at his command, to summon up his energy and concentrate all his powers of self-control and resolution upon playing his part. Lilia would be dragged into the crime if he failed. Her name would be in all the papers, depicted as a mock heroine—the girl who had hidden the lamp. He must get it from her as soon as possible, and then he



# The Portals of Love

would drop it into the whirlpool by the "Spindle Rock," where the waters always boiled in a gigantic cauldron, and from out of which the fisher folk said no drowned man ever emerged, but whirled on until resolved into the elements.

When the footman entered soon after seven o'clock he turned round drowsily and inquired if it was a fine morning. He had begun to play his part.

## CHAPTER V

PRAYERS were over and breakfast was over, and somehow Malcolm Macleod got through the ordeal with tolerable success. Only his father and Liliass knew what an intense strain it was to him to play his rôle naturally; suffering intensely themselves, they realised how infinitely worse must his feelings be, but no one else observed anything unusual about him.

Mrs. Macleod was always oblivious to matters which did not interest her, and as very few things of any importance did, she gathered very little of what was happening in the world. Keith Tytler was fully alive to Malcolm's state of depression, varied by an unreal and spasmodic gaiety, but he put it down to the topic which yesterday had formed their conversation on walking to the kirk, and the instant the meal was over he hurried off with his pupil to the schoolroom.

Liliass showed her deep strength of character in her quiet ordinary bearing. Her face had resumed its natural colour, and when her maid had entered with her early cup of tea she saw no signs of the night having been a disturbed one. She determined that for her lover's sake the coming day should appear as all other days; but in truth she was feverishly anxious for the moment to come when she could get a few quiet words with him. She could not bring herself to think that all was now over between them, though there had been periods during the long dreadful night when she could discern no hope, nothing but life-long separation stretching before her. Her natural shrinking horror



## The Portals of Love

of the murder she had practically witnessed proved for the time being stronger than her mourning over the ruin of her love story. The tragedy of the last few hours had dimmed the ardour of her devotion to her cousin, though she knew that for long she must suffer in silence and alone. There would be time enough to think of her own grief when he was safely away and out of danger, for she had divined as she sat listening to her uncle reading prayers that he had securely disposed of the dead man, and meant to conceal if possible the crime from the knowledge of the world.

She had heard voices raised in anger, and had approached the window at the very second when Malcolm struck the blow and Macleod had stepped forward and confronted his son with the terrible epithet of "murderer". She could not calculate how long she had peered in with horror-stricken eyes upon that awful scene, long enough to note with a ghastly realisation the dead form of Torquil Grant lying on the carpet by the desk. In shivering agony of mind she had at last drawn back into one of the seats placed at intervals in the angles of the house, and had known no more until she was roused by the bell for prayers. She had then caught sight of the lantern and her swift instinct had been to hide it. She had run panting to her room and locked it securely away, and then in a half-fainting condition had entered the library after all the others were seated.

It was obvious to her that Malcolm must sooner or later leave the country. Hidden or revealed, she saw clearly that his crime was to be the absolute ruin of his life. She could see no way, looking at it from every point of view, in which he could be reinstated in his former position.

Directly she could naturally do so she rose from the table and passed out on the terrace, feeling sure that

## The Portals of Love

Malcolm would join her. In a moment he was by her side, and bending down to her he spoke in a low whisper.

"Come for a walk. I must see you alone. Can you smuggle the lamp somewhere about you? It must be got rid of instantly."

"I will come in ten minutes. I will join you at the front entrance," she replied quietly, and turning disappeared into the house.

"We will go to the 'Spindle,'" he said briefly, as she reappeared and joined him, and without further words they set off together at a brisk walk down the avenue to the South Lodge. Under her arm she calmly carried a brown-paper parcel. He shivered as he saw it and did not ask to relieve her of her burden. In silence they walked through the wide drive, bordered on either side by stunted elms. The full force of the east wind swept over that portion of the country; every tree seemed to bend its back to the ocean and stretch out weak imploring arms to the land. The poor-looking trunks were thickly coated with shaggy grey moss, and the grass beneath wore the pinched, pallid look of herbage drenched in salt-laden breezes.

They skirted the town without exchanging a word. The fishermen were all out at sea, the wives busy at home, and they encountered few beings of any class as they began to ascend a long, steep path leading to the top of the cliffs. For a short distance inland the turf was smooth and close, starred here and there by daisies and sea-pinks; about a quarter of a mile inland on the right, fields under cultivation met the turf, and to the left the cliffs in their jagged indentures fell sheer down to the yellow sands.

A few children waded at the edge of the calm blue sea, or played about a cobble drawn up high and dry on the shore, their shouts of enjoyment echoing faintly up to the heights. But half a mile farther on the



## The Portals of Love

water gradually encroached on the beach until it lapped against the rocks, and at all times cut off foot passage by shore. Towering out of the blue rose the "Spindle Rock," a solitary outpost of what had once been dry land, but now the waters had reclaimed what they pleased, and the herring gull and cormorant made their undisturbed home upon its precipitous and wave-worn ledges.

Here a deep fissure ran right into the heart of the cliffs, as if some Titan had cut away a huge hunch of Mother Earth, and in this fissure a whirlpool of water fed from two sides, from the intrushing sea and the outpourings of a turbulent stream, seethed always in angry boiling and hissing. So sheer was the cliff that the sure-headed could look straight down into its roaring, foamy depths, and occasionally the intrepid traveller was lowered by ladders of ropes to roam the profundities of a huge cave which ran far into the bowels of the earth, and formed the mouth through which was vomited the subterranean stream.

Set like a rugged crown on the brow of the cliff was a ruined tower of Pictish origin, a round circle of huge stones, the topmost half of which lay scattered in disorder about its base. On reaching this point Malcolm looked carefully about him. The eye could penetrate for half a mile on all sides, and not a soul was in sight. His face, as he stopped short and looked at the girl by his side, was full of a strained agony.

"Give me the lamp," he said.

She sat down on the close turf and carefully undid her parcel. A pair of brown shoes and the lamp were within. She handed it to him without a word, and began tying up the shoes again in the brown paper.

"We must face the village after; if need be Tim in the bootshop must be able to swear as to what I was carrying to-day."

He gave her a swift glance of silent gratitude, and

## The Portals of Love

producing some string from his pocket he securely fastened a large stone to the lamp handle, then approaching the lip of the precipice with one more cautious glance round, he dropped it down, straight into the depths of the seething cauldron.

After a moment or two he turned and approached her again.

"Will you come and sit by the tower ; we must have a talk, our last intimate talk, Liliás."

She followed him without a word, and they seated themselves on a broad sun-baked stone under the shade of the wall, and again he turned to her.

"You realise this is good-bye, Liliás?"

She gave him a swift glance before two great heavy tears brimmed over. His face looked sunk, miserable, and with that foreshadowing of the lines of age which sudden agony is apt to call out on the youngest and smoothest faces.

"Oh! the infinite tragedy and sorrow of life," she moaned.

"You have been good to save me, Liliás. In my father's saving there is mixed up much relief and future gain. In yours there has been nothing but love."

"No, there has been nothing but love, Malcolm, the love of a heart-broken woman who would give her life to save you. I can shield you with all my power from detection. I can do nothing to aid you for the future except give you my undying devotion. We will try to begin a new life together, Malcolm."

He gave vent to a startled exclamation. "You would go with me?" he questioned incredulously. "Go into hiding with a murderer?"

She put out her hand and drew his into her lap.

"Hush!" she said, "you are not that. I heard and saw all. It was an unpremeditated deed, the result of sudden passion. It was a crime—terrible enough—but not that—not what you call it, Malcolm. All last



## The Portals of Love

night I sat up thinking and praying to be directed. My honour pulled one way, but my love was stronger. I knew always that I would go with you in spite of everything. Now more than ever my place is by your side; few men need a woman's love as you do and will do in future, Malcolm."

He was sitting now with bent head, his eyes shaded by his hand, his elbow resting on his knee. As he listened to her a groan burst from his lips. How was he to tell her that he must go alone?—that woman's love was not for him, that henceforth he was to be as one coffined and buried, dead to all the world for evermore?

His anguished silence told her the sentence his lips refused to frame, and she leaned towards him, her face paling, her voice strung to a low pitch of intensity.

"Is it that you do not want me, Malcolm? Can your crime have crushed all love for me out of your heart?" she whispered.

With a strong effort he turned to her at last, and made clear to her the conditions his father had imposed upon him, and to which he had assented. They made it impossible that he could accept her sacrifice. Even if he were selfish enough to permit her to pass with him into life-long exile, her total disappearance would rouse suspicion and comment. In three months' time his death would be announced to the world. How could she account for her life-long absence and supposed widowhood to her many and powerful relatives? A thousand insurmountable difficulties would crop up. Such a sacrifice was impossible to make or to accept, parting was absolutely inevitable. He explained to her that his father was totally in ignorance of her terrible knowledge. After he was gone she must make her own choice of disclosing to him what she knew or keeping silence for ever. In the immediate future feigning ignorance would save her from certain

## The Portals of Love

interrogation. She could speak the truth in so far as to having seen Grant enter the library with Malcolm. She had gone round the Castle to the front entrance to fetch a cloak. After that falsehood must come. She must say she remained at that end of the terrace, and never saw Grant again. From the moment of leaving the eastern terrace she must know nothing more. He told her the whole story, of how the body had been disposed of, and pointed out to her that it was most unlikely it would ever be found. The dungeons were never opened—like many others existing in the great old castles of Scotland they had in former days been used for the incarceration of wretched prisoners of war, as hiding-places for hunted outlaws and occasionally for the persecuted priesthood—their very existence, lying deep buried beneath the inhabited parts of the Castle had come to be well-nigh forgotten. Macleod held the keys, none might enter without his connivance.

After listening to his broken words, and gathering the true state of his awful position, she began to realise clearly that her sacrifice was not to be. She heard him out with pale, horror-stricken face, and hope and light dying in her breast. She saw plainly enough that in order to save his life he must go out into the world alone, and battle with his future as best he could. She knew the temper of her uncle. Macleod would never relent, and indeed she began to see that under the dark circumstances, oblivion was all that remained to her cousin. When the day of succession came he could not come back and begin his reign at the Fastness with that awful secret always hanging over him, making a nightmare of the brightest day. Were she married to him how could she support life living at the Fastness, knowing what lay rotting beneath it and by whose hand that awful something had been denied Christian burial—an upright and offenceless man who,



## The Portals of Love

in a sudden gust of wild anger had been struck out of earthly life, and whose unhonoured corpse had been flung like a dead dog into a stagnant, putrid well? Better far that Roderick should reign in his brother's stead, believing him to be dead, and in total ignorance of the ghastly tragedy which hung as the pall of death upon the noble old edifice.

He told her that he meant to leave on the coming Friday for London, and would take the first berth he could secure on a steamer bound for Australia. There he would endeavour to find work, and there he would live and die, and his secret would be buried with him. He would write to her *en route* and on landing, after that the silence of death must fall upon him.

She let her tears fall unchecked as she listened to him, and his eyes were wet and full of a deep anguish as he endeavoured to assuage her grief in the way he knew would do it best, by telling her that the less she grieved for him and the braver she was the more would her influence aid him to bear his life-long exile. If he could but think of her as resuming her old existence in which he had taken no part, in blotting from out her heart and mind the very fact of his being, then he could face with greater brightness and resolution the struggle which lay before him.

It was one o'clock when they stood up and took their last lover's farewell of each other. The two breaking hearts beat against each other for one long moment, as lips said silent good-bye to lips which nevermore would meet on earth. Then with the calm resolution of finality they stood apart; each knew that from now henceforth a bitter and difficult part had to be played. A part in which terror lurked to sharpen wits, to veil the eyes in subterfuge, and aid the faltering tongue of dissimulation.

Once more in silence they took their way towards home, each mind busy with the fact that any moment

## The Portals of Love

the hue and cry might burst upon them, and striving to make ready to face the days and hours to come with courage and determination. At the foot of the cliffs they turned sharply seawards, through a narrow lane of fisher cottages which led to the principal street of the town. Here there were buildings of more worth and substance; the banker's house which stood at the corner facing the tiny market square with its weather-beaten old cross, the houses of some of the better class of shopkeepers, the Macleod Arms with its old courtyard and solid grey stone frontage. It being the dinner hour there were few people about even in the High Street, and though they saluted several they spoke to none until the shoemaker was reached, and Lilius entered alone. As Malcolm waited for her without the local doctor drove up from the left, and on seeing Malcolm reined in his handsome mare and saluted with his whip.

"Morning, captain," he cried, in his ringing, cheery voice, "I've just seen your father, and he told me to tell you if we met that there's a story afloat that Grant hasn't been home since last night. I wonder what the old dog's been up to? Mary Brown, his old housekeeper, was up at the Castle inquiring for him about eleven o'clock."

Malcolm was busy lighting a cigarette. "I hadn't heard of it. I've been out since ten o'clock myself—but I thought Grant was going to London to-day. I'm sure I heard my father say so—he was up at our place last night."

"Morning, Dr. Bright. What's that you were saying?"

Miss Herne had come out of the shop and now stood by her cousin's side, looking up at the handsome, genial face bending down to them, a face every one welcomed in all the Fastness and for many miles around. "Our handsome doctor" was the boast of Seaview.



## The Portals of Love

"I was just telling the captain that Torquil Grant has not been home since yesterday. Funny thing! A man can't get far lost in Seaview," he answered, with one of his jolly laughs.

"But we saw Mr. Grant only last night, doctor. As you say he can't be far off, unless he's gone to London," remarked Lilius, looking the doctor straight in the face.

"That's just what I say, Miss Herne," cried Bright, gathering up his reins and calling a "Woa, lass," to his impatient mare. "Your uncle told me that he had been up to the Castle about nine, and that he had seen him off the premises soon after. Well, good day to you, I must be off." He touched his cap and was whirled away down the High Street and out of sight in a few seconds.

"The hunt has begun, how will it end?" said Malcolm in a whisper, as they also pursued their way.

"Courage, Malcolm, courage; but three days more and you will be out of sight and hearing of it all," she replied firmly.

At lunch that day the disappearance of Torquil Grant was the one topic of conversation. In vain did Macleod try to revert with contemptuous good humour to other subjects, his wife just as surely whirled round to the news of the morning which seemed to interest her profoundly. He scoffed with well-simulated amusement at the idea of Grant's being lost, murdered, drowned or lying ill in some hole or corner, all of which were suppositions put forward by Mrs. Macleod. He even turned to wink in Tytler's direction as he assured her in a few hours that the lost man would be forthcoming, and would be naturally indignant at his private movements being commented upon. It was towards the close of a very uncomfortable meal for some and a very exciting one for others that the laird of the Fastness turned and remarked to his son:—

"If you're not doing anything particular this after-

## The Portals of Love

noon, Malcolm, we'll just stroll down to the Auld House and see what Mrs. Brown has to say. I didn't see her myself this morning, she merely asked MacNab if Grant was here, and of course he said nothing more than 'No,' not having opened the door to him last night."

Macleod had been intensely relieved when the butler, coming up to the business room with the intelligence imparted to him by Mrs. Brown, had expressed total unconsciousness of the fact that Grant had visited the Castle the previous night. Before coming to his master he had informed his footmen that Torquil Grant could not be found, and he at once told Macleod that, so far as he knew, no one had seen the missing man for the last week. His footmen knew no more than he did.

Malcolm signified his assent, and soon after lunch father and son strolled off together by way of the fir plantations and the South Lodge to the factor's house.

Mrs. Brown was sitting in the kitchen over the sorely needed refreshment of a cup of tea when Macleod pealed the front door-bell, and without waiting turned the handle and walked into the little square hall with its stuffed birds, its grandfather clock and collection of walking sticks.

"Well? Has he come home yet?" he inquired, in his loud hearty voice, as the old dame made her appearance at the end of the passage.

"No, sir, that he has not," she answered, and what with the sight of the laird, and her own anxiety and exhaustion, she burst straightway into tears.

Macleod went up to her and patted her on the shoulder. "Come, come! this won't do. Come into the business room and tell me all about it."

The old woman did as she was bid; there was little she had to tell. Grant had gone out without letting her know, as he often did. At what hour she had no notion. He did not return to half-past nine o'clock



## The Portals of Love

supper. She waited up for him until eleven and then concluded that he had gone to the Castle and remained there. Though somewhat uneasy at so unusual a procedure, she had locked up and gone to bed. By ten o'clock next morning she had grown very anxious, and by eleven she had made her way to the Fastness in search of her master.

"But have you not gone to the police?" asked Macleod at the end of her broken recital.

Mrs. Brown started with indignant horror.

"The police, sir!" she echoed. "And what would a gentleman like Mr. Grant be wanting with the police? I went to Mr. Ford, the banker, and to the Macleod Arms, and then I was that tired I could go no further."

In a few brief words Macleod told her that her master had been to the Fastness the night before on business, and that he himself had let him out by the library and seen him depart by way of the cliff at 9.15. With that he rose and shook hands in the frank, genial manner he could assume when it suited him.

"It will be all right. Cheer up, we'll find him, Mrs. Brown," he said kindly. "Leave the matter entirely in my hands. Don't worry or bother your head any more."

He walked to the door, then turned round again as if a sudden thought had struck him.

"By the way, Mr. Grant was to have gone to London to-day on business. Do you happen to know if he took anything away with him yesterday?" he asked.

"There's only one thing I miss, and that's his bull's-eye lamp, sir, the one he often used on dark nights. It always stood on the hall table, and it's not there now," the woman answered.

Macleod nodded, but said no more as he and his son

## The Portals of Love

passed out of the house and walked down the garden path. The instant they were out of hearing he turned abruptly to Malcolm.

"What's become of that lantern?" he demanded, and there was a ring of keen anxiety in his voice. Malcolm had been prepared for the question. Rather than drag Lillas into the horrible affair he was prepared to lie freely.

"I know nothing about it. I never saw it in his hand," he averred, with such coolness that his father accepted the statement.

"It may cause trouble yet, still, he did not bring it into the house, that I'll swear to," he muttered anxiously. "Now we must go to the Police Station. You'll have to speak up there, and see that you do it as naturally as possible."

The neat little stone building lay in a side street just off the main road. Gay flower-boxes, overrun with mignonette and geraniums filled the windows, and but for the announcement of "Police Station" above the door, no one would have suspected so pretty and attractive a dwelling to be connected with anything so dark, dry and dusty as the law.

Macleod strode in without ceremony, and found the chief inspector, Walters, sitting reading the daily paper and smoking a pipe. He rose respectfully and put those amusements aside as he saw who his visitors were.

"Good afternoon, Walters. What's this cock and bull story about my factor having disappeared?" asked Macleod, with a broad smile, and hint of amusement in his voice.

The inspector stared stupidly.

"Your factor, sir? Do you mean Mr. Grant?"

"Yes," said Macleod, still in a tone of amusement. "He was up at the Castle last night on business, and they tell me he hasn't been seen since. I'll sit down



## The Portals of Love

a moment, for the matter must be inquired into. Take a chair yourself, Walters."

The three men seated themselves, the puzzled inspector with his back to the empty grate, the Macleods with their backs to the window.

"It seems very funny, sir," observed Walters weakly.

"Of course I don't suppose for a moment that anything really serious has happened to the man," said Macleod, in a more reassuring tone and a laugh, "but I thought I'd just look in and inquire if you'd heard anything."

"Absolutely nothing, sir. You're the first soul that's mentioned the subject to me," the man said earnestly. "May I ask how you came to hear, sir?"

Macleod stated briefly the details of Mrs. Brown's visit to the Castle that morning, and his visit to her that afternoon; he then went on to speak of Grant's having been with him and his son the previous evening.

"So far as I can testify he left me as near as possible about a quarter past nine," he said. "Isn't that about what you make it?" he asked, turning to his son.

"I couldn't say to the moment, but I know it was just before prayers," replied Malcolm.

At that moment the village policeman entered; he had heard the story from a dozen tongues, the news was spreading fast. He saluted and stood by the door whilst his superior recapitulated the story the Macleods had to tell. He had nothing to add. He had gone to the Auld House and seen Mrs. Brown, he had stepped in to tell his chief before making his way to the Castle. At Macleod's suggestion the details, so far as they were known, were taken down in writing, and then Malcolm spoke voluntarily for the first time.

"I should suggest inquiries being made at the station," he said. "Wasn't Grant to have gone to London to-day?" he asked his father.

## The Portals of Love

"He was," replied Macleod. "He had important business to transact there for me. That may be the explanation of the mystery; yet one would think he would have told his housekeeper; there was no secret about it."

For some time longer the four men discussed the pros and cons of the matter, the Macleods insisting in their belief that Grant would reappear or write of his arrival in London. Of foul play or accident they would not hear, nor were such eventualities seriously put forward as probabilities. Grant had not an enemy, and knew every inch of land for miles, and the police in that view sincerely concurred.

"I need not say we will give you every possible help should he not turn up in a day or two," remarked Macleod, rising to go. "His loss might mean a very serious thing for me. Large sums sometimes pass through factors' hands, but as I've said I'm convinced he'll turn up right enough."

The thrown-out suggestion of Grant's having in his possession a large sum of money did not escape the notice of the police, though neither of them said anything there and then. They merely kept the matter in mind and echoed, "He'll turn up right enough, sir, don't you fear," as they stood and saluted respectfully. When at length the father and son took their departure both were more or less satisfied with the course events were taking. They felt that all pursuit, search and inquiry would now be instituted without the Castle walls, and so long as that was the case both felt they had little to fear.

There was one point which Macleod felt would be of immense value to him in the future in eluding detection. It was one of those simple, homely incidents that often are surer and more powerful blinds than the deepest laid and finely concocted scheme. That point was the assemblage on Sunday night of the



## The Portals of Love

entire household at 9.30 to hear him read family prayers. There was not a domestic out of the odd twenty who had been present who would not aver in discussing the matter that he or she had seen no trace in the Castle of the missing man, though as it afterwards turned out, five of the servants had seen Grant approaching the Fastness as they were strolling home. He felt that gathering of the household, but fifteen minutes after the fatal blow had been struck, and in the very presence as it were of the corpse, had been a master-stroke amounting almost to genius.

If ever the question was raised he possessed over a score of witnesses to prove that all was peace and quietude in that room, in all the Castle, little more than half an hour after Grant had been seen on his way there. Had he not pulled himself together and summoned the usual Sunday evening gathering, suspicion must have fallen upon him. The Castle rules were not broken save under some weighty pretext.

He had not feared detection there and then for himself, but he had feared for his son; but the gloaming had been his friend, mercifully veiling them in twilight. It had thrown its shadows over the old room, and drawn a curtain over the pallor of Malcolm's face, disguising its fear and blotting out its guilt.

## CHAPTER VI

TEN days had passed, and the wild excitement over Torquil Grant's strange disappearance had in some measure subsided. The police honestly confessed themselves thoroughly baffled. They had absolutely no clue of any sort or kind to go upon.

Quite a number of people strolling homewards on that lovely Sabbath night had seen Grant on his way up to the Castle, but from the moment he had passed from their sight all traces of him had been utterly obliterated. The matter was a complete mystery, and the townspeople discussed it over their work, and argued over it during their rest, and rumours of the most amazing improbability were set afloat only to be contradicted and fresh ones fabricated anew with constant reiteration. Macleod had passed through many interviews with the authorities, and had submitted with a pained and great reluctance that he could come to no other conclusion than that Grant, yielding to some temporary insanity or sudden temptation, had decamped with a thousand pounds belonging to his employer.

The estate books and papers belonging to the lost man Macleod had himself, in the presence of a detective, removed from the Auld House. No cheque book was found, but the local bank had come forward, and its manager stated to the police that four months previously Grant had banked one thousand pounds, remarking that he would very shortly draw upon it at intervals. In place of doing so a month afterwards he had withdrawn the entire amount. Undoubtedly this



## The Portals of Love

fact, coupled with Macleod's assertion that if Grant was not forthcoming the sum was lost to him for ever, coloured the thoughts and directed the activities of the police.

It was known that Grant had not left Seaview by rail, and a strict search was made amongst the fishing community for any man or boy who had seen or aided the factor to put out to sea, but without result. Macleod's outspoken theory was that after their stormy interview regarding the delay in the building operations, the man had secreted himself in the glen till the night was far advanced. He had then crept down to the shore and bribed an accomplice to set sail for Aberdeen, where in a few hours he would have landed safe from detection. From Aberdeen he could make his way unnoticed to any part of the globe.

This view of the case was universally adopted, but the hunt for the accomplice was absolutely unsuccessful. Out of the several hundred fishermen and boys not one could be found to swerve from a fierce or sullen denial of the conspiracy. There was no lack of bad characters amongst their number ; fishermen are proverbial poachers, and many were known to have given the keepers much trouble ; therefore it came about that on the principle of giving a dog a bad name the police felt convinced that the aider and abettor was to be found amongst their number, and directed their attention accordingly.

One curious fact had been elicited from an Aberdeen banking firm with whom Grant dealt. Several days before his disappearance he had realised securities of his own to the amount of two thousand pounds. Amongst all his personal effects no trace of this sum could be found, and the natural conjecture was that he had added it to Macleod's thousand and walked off with the lot. The master of the Fastness pondered long and deeply over this curious fact. He could only

## The Portals of Love

conclude that two thousand pounds lay at the bottom of the well in the dead man's breast pocket, but what he had wanted with so large a sum in cash he could form no conjecture.

There was also the fact that no one had found the lamp the man was known to be carrying as he walked up to the Castle, and the only consolation Macleod could offer himself was his certainty that it had never been brought into the library. Wherever it was it lay without not within, and if found might be accounted for as thrown aside when no longer wanted, ere its owner set sail. Malcolm had departed, and his going caused little or no comment in the excited community, they had other things to think about, and the few who mentioned the matter were told by Macleod that he guessed his son wouldn't stop long away from home. Keith Tytler had also mentioned to several inquirers that some time ago Malcolm had told him he meant to take a look round Australia, and he himself regarded the departure as a perfectly natural event, and concluded that Miss Herne would join him there later, should he find it a really desirable settling-place.

A widowed sister of the dead man had arrived in the village on receipt of a letter from Macleod, and was now living in the Auld House awaiting the result of police investigations. She had never been very good friends with her brother, but she stated herself to be his only relative, and in the event of his not being found alive she determined to lay claim to his estate. The laird showed her every civility, and offered her the use of the house till something definite could be discovered ; only he knew that Grant had been what is termed a " warm " man and had saved a considerable sum. Where that sum was invested he had no idea. Torquil had always been close and reserved, and Macleod lived in considerable anxiety lest this sum should come to light and dispel the present belief in the man's flight ; but as time passed



## The Portals of Love

on he took courage as no one came forward, and he knew that in this manner large sums are yearly lost to the relatives of missing men—and he who holds usually keeps.

Those were terrible times for Macleod, but he carried the weight of them with dogged determination and outwardly unruffled calm. He knew the length of the world's memory and how soon it forgets the most startling incidents. He knew how soon even the greatest and bravest are forgotten, alike with the abased and most degraded. The most brutal murders go undetected in the heart of great cities. He thought of the Merstham Tunnel mystery and smiled sardonically to himself. Every day men disappeared for ever and were no more seen or heard of. In London alone the average was a dozen total disappearances a week. He believed that in a month the hue and cry would have died down, and in a year's time the name of Torquil Grant would never be mentioned.

He believed the very boldness of the game he had played would secure its ultimate success. He was aware that in real life crimes are not discovered so long as the authors are sufficiently exalted in worldly position to be above suspicion, so long as they are clever enough to disguise them. The rich and well-born must indeed be stupid and clumsy if detected, for is not all the world occupied in telling them how superior they are to those of humble degree?

In Macleod's nature ran a broad streak of despotism. In the times of his ancestors no such desperate precautions had been necessary to hide away murder. The Macleods of the good old days had been far too powerful in themselves to permit of interference in their personal likes and dislikes. They had made their own laws, and had swept aside all who blocked their pathway. Even now he, John Macleod, as the reigning laird could remember, when a boy, hearing

## The Portals of Love

from the lips of a very old man a story of his father's prowess. The Fastness had been raided by a wandering band of cattle lifters, but the robbers did not get far away with their booty. By nightfall Macleod had pursued them, rescued the cattle and brought home six of the ringleaders. In half an hour six corpses were swaying in the wind as they hung from the trees that faced the Castle windows.

At heart Macleod resented the march of civilisation which now made such deeds impossible. He had all the determination of purpose, courage and contempt for life which had characterised his forebears. His nerves were of tempered steel, his physical strength was great. With no sensibilities of any kind to touch, he secretly exulted in the strategy which now enabled him to make his own laws, evade those of the State, and discarding the former weapons of brute force and immunity from punishment produce the same results by the cunning power of mind in place of matter. Amongst all those with whom he now came in contact he abandoned the supposition of Grant's return, and spoke of him gently and regretfully as the friend whom he could have sworn was to be trusted. When his own loss of money was sympathetically alluded to he waved the subject aside with a modest magnanimity.

"Oh! I'll get over that all right; but he, poor chap, I'm afraid it won't last him long," he would say sadly, and the local worthies told each other over their cups that the laird was taking his loss "Just wonderful!"

It never occurred to him for a moment to question the righteousness of what he had done. His actions had been dictated purely for the good of the estate and the honour of his race; his hand had not struck the blow, the blood of Grant was not upon his head, but upon his son's. He had done what he could to save Malcolm from the awful consequences of his crime,



## The Portals of Love

and he believed that Roderick would make a far worthier heir than his brother ever would have done. He had always hated Malcolm, but this undoubted fact never now crossed his mind ; he had lost sight of it in the credit he took to himself for seeing a way out of the terrible situation. That way had come to him in a flash, even as he knelt down examining the dead man, his brain busy with awful conjectures. In one vivid blaze of light his whole future course had been made clear to him, and he had acted instantly with the reckless courage which was typical of the man.

Lilias Herne had found the atmosphere of the Fastness insupportable after Malcolm's departure. Dread for his safety had hitherto been a powerful incentive to courage and in supporting her failing energies, but the instant he was over the border her moral and physical strength deserted her. In after years, thinking with shuddering memory of that awful week, she came to believe that the Almighty had temporarily endowed her with an almost superhuman fortitude.

Those four days which they had passed together under the same roof before he went for ever, seemed to both of them utterly unreal and strange. To Lilias it was a time of such bitter pain that she wished the days were ended, so terribly did she suffer as she looked on the face so soon to vanish for ever from her sight, the face that for months had made the sweetest sunshine of her life. He knew that it would be easier for both when he was gone, when the light of her presence and love would be totally extinguished, her voice silent and the long, lonely future left to roll on monotonously, unbroken by either hope or fear. Complete severance would be preferable it almost seemed to him than the constant anguish he now endured in her presence, with the knowledge always present in his heart that he should so soon cease to see or hear her any more. Inexorable time rolled steadily on and the day of

## The Portals of Love

departure came at last. For a few moments they stood close together in the hopeless agony of an eternal farewell, then they parted in silence. Such good-byes are too poignant to be prolonged. The fiat had gone forth, there was nothing more to be done but to submit to peremptory destiny.

She feared for herself a complete breakdown, and with her usual independence of action she announced her intention of running over to Paris for ten days to buy frocks; and taking only her maid, she put this plan into execution three days after Malcolm's departure. She had no thought of leaving the Fastness for good, rather did she feel with a morbid vividness that she must remain there always, that she must ever be on the spot in readiness in case of she knew not exactly what. At least ten days' absolute peace and separation from its hideous associations she felt would be required to enable her to rearrange her scattered forces. She wished to be absolutely alone in some place where she could let herself go, and be absolutely natural, where unobserved she could give way to her pent-up grief, and then gradually resume her old self and form her future plans of procedure.

In London she sent her maid home for ten days' holiday and went on her way alone to Paris, putting up at the Élysée Palace Hotel. She meant to spend her days in the country, and come home tired and early to a light supper and bed.

Macleod also about this time felt the need of change, which he laid on the score of business, and ran up to town for a week, a course he often took during the year and which provoked no comment. Thus the Fastness was left in a deep repose, the three turbulent elements having quitted it.

Mrs. Macleod was delighted to be left in peace and unrestricted conversation. She could not read through any book, all she was capable of was to skim the



## The Portals of Love

lightest novel, leaving out the controversial parts, and she would not allow any one else to read in her presence. This she did quite unconsciously and without malice. Directly she observed some one deep in a book she would take up a fashion paper, and studying the delectable advertisements would comment upon them interrogatively.

"Do you think Madame Mondaine's corsets or Evans' are the best?" she would ask pleasantly. Receiving some utterly vacant reply she would go on imperturbably.

"Just listen to this! How ridiculous people are! 'Before buying a new frock, I should like to know if voile or crepon is most worn.—Lucinda.'"

Sometimes on looking up with pure enjoyment in her eyes she would find the room empty, but as often as not her victim would be a lady guest, who was too polite to defend herself, or Keith Tytler, who looked upon Mrs. Macleod stoically, and as all included in the day's work. Since knowing Mrs. Macleod he had come to understand the meaning of those curious silly questions and answers in the columns of ladies' newspapers. They were written for the brains and delectation of the myriad Mrs. Macleods scattered all over the earth and whom he had never before realised.

Tytler had his afternoons pretty much to himself during that quiet period at the Fastness, for Roderick was carried off by his mother every day to make calls in the neighbourhood. After dinner, having worn out her maid, she devoted herself entirely to Keith and local gossip, and the subject of Torquil Grant's disappearance still elicited from her the wildest and most astounding surmises. Though the tutor was irresponsible he was at her mercy, and he told himself she always meant to be kind. That perhaps was the most trying trait to deal with in her character, this knowledge possessed by every one that she meant to be kind. It

## The Portals of Love

irritated because one could not in consequence entirely resent her silly mistakes. It was constantly getting others into difficulties in doing what she wished and they ought not—because she meant to be kind. It had killed two or three foolish persons who had swallowed her medicines, but all their sorrowing relatives could say was “she meant to be kind”. When Roderick resented her Sabbath restrictions and corrections, Keith caught himself telling the boy she meant to be kind, and when she took out her horses and coachman in a blinding storm to call at a house lying twenty miles off, or kept them champing and shivering before one door in London for three hours, all the called upon folk could say was “she meant to be kind”. After all it was something to be able to say of one of the many members of her sex who are born with the heart of a hen and the brain of a limpet. Humane persons sometimes lost patience with her incapacity to understand a horse ever being tired and her ignorance of what a bearing-rein meant.

Never had she tried her husband so sorely as during those days which intervened between Grant's disappearance and his own departure for town. As a rule he never listened to a word she said, but at every meal her prattle was of the dead man, and he could not but hear, for her words chimed in with his own thoughts and echoed them repeatedly. At other times of the day he contrived not to see her, and when he came to bed at night, he silenced her by saying he was too tired to talk, and rose before her eyes and mouth were opened in the morning.

At this period Joshua Tytler, the minister, was assiduous in his attention to her, concluding she needed spiritual support, and found himself as usual received with pleasure. On one occasion Lady Ulvadale had also called in to hear the latest rumours, and the three had discussed the matter with much animation over



## The Portals of Love

tea. Afterwards, Joshua produced his worn Bible from somewhere about his coat-tails, and read a particularly violent and malicious psalm, after which he expounded at considerable length. Finally the two ladies rose, whilst he, standing with uplifted right hand, prayed for all possible combinations of Christian men, for all possible cases of spiritual need, and lastly, selecting the individuals present and known to him put up a very personal supplication for each according to his notion of their wants and deserts. He ended with a stern admonition to the Almighty not to spare the punishment in store for the absconded factor. Not one of the three doubted for a moment that the missing man had departed for some wicked reason only known to himself, and carrying with him a thousand pounds belonging to the Fastness.

Joshua Tytler had brought all the thunders of Deuteronomy to bare upon the case, and had so depleted himself of invective that he had almost forgotten the usual prayer before departing, until Mrs. Macleod reminded him, and Lady Ulvadale on rising to go graciously remarked that she had enjoyed herself very much, and hoped he would repeat the same words next Sabbath as a warning to others who might be tempted to do likewise.

Lady Ulvadale had the same craving for highly spiced prayers as other people possess for theatrical entertainments.

## CHAPTER VII

JOSHUA TYTLER'S manse lay back off the high road, and was within a stone's-throw of the kirk, a boon the old man thoroughly appreciated in bad weather. It was approached by a narrow lane, always very muddy in winter, but pleasant in summer-time with its bordering of hawthorns, and the green pastures which spread away from it on either side.

The house stood in about two acres of garden surrounded by a high wall, and the flowers, fruit and vegetables were cultivated by Sandy Black and his wife, Martha, who "did" for Dr. and Mrs. Tytler, and looked after the kirk also.

Old-fashioned flowers bloomed profusely in that sheltered spot, lilies, sweet-williams, pinks and roses gave colour to the cold grey stone, and a fine old apple-tree covered one side of the rugged walls, and mingled with a Gloire de Dijon which festooned the porch, showering its golden petals on the gravel below.

A belt of lauristines, some fine hollies and three old oaks gave shelter to the lawn in summer-time, and in one corner of the garden an old thatched arbour offered a pleasant retreat in which to read or dream in.

Joshua Tytler and his wife had the manse to themselves and were therefore not pressed for room. Out of a family of six but two remained ; four little graves side by side in the kirkyard marked the spot where husband and wife had laid their little ones whom death had claimed, and no one knew what had become of Elizabeth, the one remaining daughter.



## The Portals of Love

She had gone out to be a nursery governess, and had never more returned, and her name was forbidden in the household. She had written to tell her father what she had done, that she had run away from her situation, and that she was engaged to sing and dance at a music hall, and the intelligence had at first roused him to a frenzy of anger which gradually hardened into something resembling hate.

To him play actresses and all women who exposed themselves on a public stage to the gaze of men were harlots. He had never been in a theatre in his life, considering them dens of iniquity. There are many Scotch folk and their ministers who still think the same, and look upon the stage as a profession for the lost and abandoned.

Keith Tytler was the only child remaining to them. The mother adored him as her one hope and joy on earth, but secretly she grieved unendingly for her lost girl. In his stern, unbending way his father was proud of him, but he did not permit himself to harbour love for his son. He had been proud of Elizabeth's beauty and had loved her very dearly, but he believed that for this God had chastened him heavily. Joshua's God was a jealous God, and did not permit of the human affections wandering away from Himself. In the deep but narrow sincerity of his belief the minister bowed his head under the heavy blow. He did not take it meekly, for meekness was not in him; he took it fiercely and strongly, scourging himself with self-reproaches, and displaying an added severity towards his congregation and himself. He profoundly and with proud contrition acknowledged his sin, and steeled his heart ever more and more against all human love and affection. The anguished battle in his own breast turned him more and more towards Jehovah, the cruel and malignant. As he fought with himself he fought side by side with the

# The Portals of Love

God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob; the lusts and bloody cruelties of the Old Testament pages appealed to him in his struggle with self, and seemed to bind up his wounds and salve the torture gnawing at his breast.

He had been trained in the primitive idea that the world was near its end, the morning and noon were past, and humanity was well on its way towards night. The end might come any moment, the trumpet sound any second. In Joshua Tytler's opinion there was no time to be lost.

In Seaview he was not loved but he was deeply respected. He left his flock but once a year, when he went down to Edinburgh for the week of the General Assembly. His wife had not been out of Seaview for years. Joshua always told her they could not both go away, and she believed his presence to be an absolute necessity during the "black week" in the Capital.

Joshua laboured untiringly amongst the poor and needy; of the little money he had he gave unstintingly, and his judgment and discrimination though severe was absolutely above reproach.

The rough seafaring folk, who passed their lives in battling with the waves, and striving to overcome the elements which seemed to be constantly warring against them, liked the thunderous sermons and fiery denunciations he poured out upon their humbly bent heads. The exquisite and gentle admonitions of the Sermon on the Mount seemed to them very remote, but the hardening of the heart of Pharaoh, and the beguiling of Ahab, both to their own destruction by the lying spirit sent for the purpose by Jehovah appealed to them strongly. There was some human interest in listening to the story of the hapless Ahab, who fell in battle against the heathen King of Syria on the bloody field of Ramoth-Gilead.

In their servitude to poverty and the elements it



## The Portals of Love

consoled them to hear of others in worse luck. The twenty-first chapter of Exodus was a universal favourite; it was satisfactory to read of God with His own lips instructing Moses on the subject of slavery, sanctioning it, and ordering the wife and children of the bondsman to be thrown as so many chattels to the slave-master. It stirred the blood to read on and find the hapless slave nailed by his ear to the doorpost, because he objected to be torn from his wife and family. The Almighty in those days showed some force of character they thought, and the Jews of Joshua, Judges and Kings were lucky in having a God who not only instigated but assisted in the atrocities perpetrated by them in their wars with the surrounding population.

Mrs. Tytler had been a pretty girl in the long ago, but sorrow and the rigours of her life had obliterated all traces of beauty. She was a good housekeeper and an obedient wife, which was all her husband required of her. She had never possessed a will of her own, so Joshua had no trouble over breaking what did not exist. A husband's duties to a wife were summed up in his mind by a judicious blending of St. Paul and Job, with perhaps a dash of David, and they got on very well together because her words, though not always her secret beliefs, were the meek echo of his own.

It was washing day at the Manse, and tea being over Mrs. Tytler donned an apron and set to work to wash the dishes, by way of giving Martha Black "a hand". The living room looked to the back, and was a large and comfortable apartment facing south, with a good pair of serviceable curtains draping the windows, and a worn though still respectable carpet under foot. A pair of horsehair-covered arm-chairs stood at each side of the fireplace, and a commodious table occupied the centre of the room. On the mantelshelf ticked an old Dutch clock, flanked by a pair of brass

## The Portals of Love

candlesticks and a pair of framed samplers, worked by the childish fingers of the vanished Elizabeth. Those were Janet Tytler's greatest treasures, as being all that was left to her of her girl; they were her greatest dread, as she lived in a perpetual state of terror lest Joshua would remember and order their destruction. The walls were lined with books, as was Joshua's small study adjoining. His father had been a minister before him and had bequeathed to him a large library, not, perhaps, the kind of literature that would now fetch anything at auction, or into which a cultured student would long care to burrow, but the ponderous volumes clothed the walls with the most comfortable lining a room can boast, and added a cosiness to the apartment it otherwise would have lacked.

Mrs. Tytler shook the tablecloth out of the window to give the birds the benefit of the crumbs, and sat herself down by it with a half-finished stocking in process of knitting in her hand. The soft summer air crept pleasantly in on her tired, hot face, bringing with it all the perfumes of Araby as it wandered over the bed of herbs which flourished without, and the large pots of musk on the sill rippling over with golden blossoms. She felt sleepy and inclined for a nap, but that was a luxury she never permitted herself to indulge in, though Joshua regularly composed himself for an hour after tea. He had just sat himself down in his big chair and closed his eyes, his handkerchief in his hand ready to throw over his face, and the big tortoise-shell cat "Moses" curled up on his knees, when the front door was heard to open, and light steps tapped softly along the oilcloth of the passage.

Joshua opened his eyes again; only strangers used the front entrance, which was flanked on one side by an unused dining-room and on the other by the drawing-room, where visitors of quality were received. Yet he had heard no bell ring.



## The Portals of Love

"Who's that?" he said sharply to his wife, as he strained his ears to listen.

Mrs. Tytler looked over her spectacles towards the closed door at the end of the room; her heart had begun to beat violently, she half rose and stood in an attitude of expectancy, her strained ears following those light steps which paused and then came on again.

"Go and see who it is," ordered Joshua irritably.

Mrs. Tytler never stirred; a deadly pallor was stealing over her worn cheeks, her eyes stared out in a terror-stricken apprehension.

The steps were at the door now, and in another second it was flung wide and a woman stood in the aperture. The darkness of the passage behind her threw her exquisite form into full relief; she stood there like a lovely portrait framed in oak, and looked at them, a smile upon her lips, a half-joyous, half-uncertain light in her eyes.

A faint, low cry broke from the mother's ashen lips, and reeling back she steadied herself by one hand on the back of her chair. Joshua had half-raised himself, the blinding flash of fury that had darted into his eyes obliterating for the moment the fairness of the vision. The blood mounted to his forehead in surging clouds, the veins in his forehead swelling ominously.

"How dare you set foot in this house?" he burst out, his utterance half-strangled by overwhelming passion.

Elizabeth Tytler took no notice of his fury. She closed the door but did not advance, standing straight and tall with her back to it. A lovely woman was the only epithet which could rightly describe her. Masses of glorious red hair framed the exquisitely chiselled face as in an aureole of gold; the dark red-brown eyes were large, intensely expressive, and shaded by dark lashes and arched over by dark delicate brows. Her form, graceful and lithe as a willow wand, was clothed in some soft, pale green texture; round her slender

## The Portals of Love

throat hung a long chain of green iridescent shells that glinted like the eyes of snakes with every movement. A pale green motoring cap sat on her ruddy curls, from which floated a long green veil. The whole outfit might only have cost a few shillings, yet she suggested some exquisite Undine just risen from the depths of a shining pool, and clothed in the shimmer of pale sea-waves. A creature half of earth, half of water. To Joshua Tytler and his wife she signified a creature belonging to an earth, a world of which they knew nothing.

She placed her hand upon the handle as if to bar ingress from without, and leaned back against the dark oak door, her eyes on her father.

"I will tell you presently why I have come," she said, in a sweet low voice which trembled ever so slightly. "I have come, not because I hoped for any mercy and forgiveness from you. I expect none. Yet, why should I talk of forgiveness. I have done nothing that needs your pardon. I have done nothing that I am not proud of."

"You shameless Jezebel! Get out of my house," roared Tytler, his fury breaking forth without restraint. He rose and stood on the hearth-rug, but he did not attempt to approach her or touch her—to him she was unclean beyond reclaim, her mere touch would be pollution.

She did not shrink at his words, her eyes never left his face.

"So you are just the same as ever," she said quietly. "Just as harsh, cruel, bitter and uncharitable as before. Your soul is rank with all unkindness. Well! May God forgive you! I do forgive you, and from the very depths of my soul I pity you!"

Her words roused in him an even greater intensity of anger. He brought his great fist down on the table with crashing emphasis.



## The Portals of Love

"You dare to take the name of the Almighty in vain! 'Thou that hast played the harlot with many lovers.' Take your vile presence out of my house and never let me see your false face again."

"Mother, have you not one word to say to me?"

The gentle tremulous voice pierced the wretched woman's heart, as she cowered against the window in an agony of love and longing for her child and abject fear of her husband. Involuntarily she made a step forward, then started back, panic-stricken by the terrible force of Joshua's voice.

"Sit down, Janet!" he thundered.

She wrung her hands together in an agonised impotence, tears streaming down her withered cheeks, and trickling over the coarse texture of her wincey gown.

Elizabeth looked across at her, and the piteous longing of that mother's heart caressed her like a beam of sunshine.

"Never mind, mother dear. Do not cry for me," she said gently. "Do not let a thought of me distress you any more. I shall not approach either of you. See, here I am by the door, quite far away, but I entreat you to answer me only one question. After that I will go and never come back. Father, what have they done with Torquil Grant?"

He stared out on her in a blank amazement. So unexpected was the question that for the moment he forgot his outraged respectability, his furious anger. What had she to do with Torquil Grant? Then the thousand devils of suspicion that always hastened to his call, and were never far absent, entered into him and asserted their mastery.

"What is Torquil Grant to you?" he cried out fiercely. "A liar and a thief who has robbed his master. 'Whoso loveth wisdom rejoiceth his father, but he that keepeth company with harlots offendeth

## The Portals of Love

his substance.' A fitting companion indeed for the girl who was once my daughter."

His voice broke into harsh, insulting derision, as with head thrown back he looked across at her with superlative scorn.

Her eyes flashed flame into his. Her whole nature seemed suddenly roused out of its sweet gentleness into tigerish passion.

"It is a lie. A hateful, hideous lie," she cried wildly. "Torquil Grant was no liar or thief. A more honourable gentleman never lived. Torquil Grant is no fugitive from justice, but a dead man. Murdered. Yes! I tell you, murdered—and I will never rest till I discover by whom!"

For a moment her words rang loud and ominously in the ears of her startled listeners. By their very earnestness and overwhelming conviction they carried with them a strong claim to attention; but their power was only momentary over Joshua Tytler, who believed as firmly in Grant's guilt as in his daughter's prostitution.

"I have nothing more to say. I know nothing of Grant. I leave him, as I leave you, to the justice of God. 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.' He will repay, and in His own good time bring you both to justice at the judgment day," he said sternly and unrelentingly.

"The world is full of judgment days," she muttered sadly, "and those who are not good enough for man are given back to God."

Once more he struck his fist upon the table. "Be gone out of my presence!" he thundered.

Elizabeth Tytler bowed her head, not in submission but in the despair, the futility of gleaning anything of what she had come to seek. She knew now that from her father she would learn nothing. She had good cause to know that when Joshua Tytler made up his mind neither reason or unreason would turn him from it. Violent, uncalculating prejudice was one of



## The Portals of Love

his worst faults. He looked at a case from his own jaundiced view, his own narrow, bigoted and warped standpoint, and no argument or ratiocination would cause him to swerve, or shake him out of his preconceived opinions.

She raised her head at last and looked round her, slowly, lingeringly, taking in all the homely details of the well-remembered old room, surroundings that had meant so much to her in her childhood, that she had at times chafed against, yet somehow always loved. The cat had crept up to her feet and now purred and rubbed itself against her dress in joyful recognition, and she bent for a moment to caress it; then her eyes rested long and tenderly on the meek, down-dropped grey head of her mother, in her rough wincey frock and alpaca apron. On the hands that grasped the back of the chair with their rough knuckles and traces of toil, with the wedding-ring worn slender in the course of years of labour. Her heart swelled with a wild yearning to take that beloved mother to her breast, to dry her tears, to comfort her and give her the peace of love; but it was not to be. To live in peace with Joshua Tytler meant to live in bitter enmity with the girl to whom she had given birth. Janet Tytler knew as well as did Elizabeth that henceforth they must live their lives apart whilst on earth, but both cherished a secret hope of a blessed eternity to come, where a God would be revealed to them—not the God of the Old Testament, a fiend of blood and hate, but a God of love and infinite justice, who understood and compassioned the frailties of His created. She did not glance again at her father, who stood with his back towards her waiting to hear her go. A little sigh escaped her lips and wafted over the strained, listening silence of the room. It fell upon the mother's ear like a parting benediction—a dying farewell. Then softly the door opened and closed. Again the light spring-

## The Portals of Love

ing step was heard passing the hall, the front door opened and closed again, and all was still.

To Janet Tytler the silence and blight of death seemed to have fallen down on the old roof-tree—the light of her eyes had gone out. With a moan of infinite despair, a sorrow too profound and deep to care what befel it from the hand of man, she slid down on her knees and buried her face in the chair, in a very transport of grief.

Elizabeth Tytler walked slowly away from the Manse door down the gravel pathway to the gate, her head bent, her brows knit together, a strangely radiant and bright vision in the closing hours of the long lingering day.

“Lizzie! At last!”

She raised her head, a swift flash of joy transforming all her gloom to radiance. Before her at the gate stood Keith, and in another moment the brother and sister were clasped in each other's arms, tears and laughter so intermingling that neither knew from which they proceeded. Neither gave an instant's thought to the Manse, their joy at meeting again was too overwhelming to admit of gloomy thoughts. He forgot for the moment that she was no longer acknowledged by her parents, the delight of seeing her again swept away the bitter recollection of the past; but when at last they had found breath to speak coherently Keith took her by the arm.

“Come to the summer-house,” he said, “they must not see you from the house; no one will see us in there, and we must have a good talk.”

She let him lead her through the little tree-shaded path to the arbour, and there they sat down, and he turned to her eagerly. “Now tell me why you have never written me one line to say where you were, and tell me where you have come from, and where you are going and all about it, Lizzie. You don't



## The Portals of Love

know how I have grieved for you all this long, silent time. It is three years come January since you left home. Just on three long, weary years."

She kissed him gently on the cheek and took his hand into hers. She was infinitely touched and comforted by his love and devotion. It meant a great deal to her.

"I did not write to you because I didn't want to get you into trouble, Keith. Father and mother had cast me off. I knew that you were all they had left, and I didn't want to make enmity between you. I have come from London where I act in a theatre. I took the train to Aberdeen, and there I left my luggage and secured a room for the night. Then I hired a motor and drove straight here, over fifty miles. The motor is at the Macleod Arms, and I am going back there to have some tea and start on my return journey."

"And didn't they all know you, and weren't they all glad to see you?" he asked boyishly, his whole face sparkling with happiness.

She shook her head and pulled the long green veil over her face, winding it round her neck. "They are so accustomed to motors now that they don't bother much about who is in them. No one knew me, Keith. I didn't want any one to remember me. Three years is a long time for the memory of man to stretch over; it is only love that remembers. Such love as yours for me, brother Keith."

He swallowed down the lump that rose in his throat. Now that his excitement was subsiding he began to examine her more closely. She had always been lovely, but she had grown lovelier still. She looked totally different. Her clothes bore the stamp of wealth, her hair was dressed with that careless negligence which is the surest sign of art. He remembered the forefinger of her left hand had always been marked with needle-pricks; it was so no longer, the nails tipping

## The Portals of Love

the long, slender white hands were like burnished pink shells.

He saw all this, yet no shadow of doubt crept into his mind. He had always believed in her wholly, absolutely.

"Will you tell me about your acting? What is it you act, Lizzie?" he asked shyly.

There was something about her which had begun rather to overawe him.

She laughed and put her arm through his, leaning her cheek against his shoulder. "You don't know any of the story, do you, Keith? But how should you? Who was there here to tell you?"

"There was no one," he answered simply. "I know nothing, Lizzie."

She hugged his arm to her breast and smiled softly.

"I will begin at the beginning," she said, "from the time when I left Mrs. Mason. I did that by stealth, Keith. I couldn't endure the life any longer. I knew I was made for better things. I had just enough money to pay my fare to London, and pay my way for a fortnight by great pinching and contriving. When I arrived I took the first room I saw marked up to let—a wretched den—and the next morning I consulted the landlady whom I had already paid for a week's lodging in advance. I told her I wanted to go on the music hall stage. She gave me the names of several, and off I went to find work. I went quite confidently, Keith, trusting absolutely in God. I said to myself—God has given you a beautiful face, and everything that God gives is good and to be made use of. My face, the gift of God, was my only stock-in-trade. To the first manager I contrived to see I sang my Scotch songs, and he offered me an engagement at once. It was in a little hall on the Surrey side of the water. I accepted it—a pound a week for one month. I refused to bind myself for longer. Well, to make a long story short,



## The Portals of Love

I sang every night for a month and got on very well, and, meanwhile, I had made much better terms for myself at a larger hall. Gradually I mounted up and up until I came last January to my first real success at the Alhambra—and there for the first time I was recognised.”

She stopped and met her brother's eyes, he was gazing at her in a transport of wonder.

“Who was it who recognised you, Lizzie?” he asked breathlessly.

“Two men from these very parts, Keith. Torquil Grant and Malcolm Macleod.”

He gave vent to an excited exclamation, but did not interrupt her as she continued:—

“Macleod was at the stage door one night when I left to go home. He told me he had recognised me instantly, and I swore him to secrecy. I told him father and mother had cast me off, and I had only myself to depend upon now. He promised to say nothing, and after that he came to see me often. It was several months after Torquil Grant had first recognised me that he took courage to come to the stage door and claim old acquaintance. He I also swore to silence. A very short time after I had first spoken again to Macleod I saw a great chance of becoming a real star. I explained this chance to him, and he offered to lend me the necessary money—five hundred pounds. I took the loan, and I went to the manager of the National Theatre. I said, ‘Here is five hundred down. Engage me as your leading lady at forty pounds a week to begin with.’ He laughed at me to begin with, but in an hour's time we had signed the contract. That is three months ago, Keith, and now I am simply at the top of the tree in my particular line of the profession. I have nothing to do but go forward. In a short time my salary will increase. I can't explain it all thoroughly now, but my getting into that particular theatre as principal meant just the making of me.”

# The Portals of Love

Her perseverance, pluck and determination struck him dumb with admiration. He thought her marvelous, superhumanly clever. She certainly was clever, with an excellent head on her shoulders, but her success had been entirely owing to her beauty. "My face is my fortune" was a truism none knew better than did she. The crowds she drew nightly came to gaze upon her unusual loveliness, not to hear her sing, and dance and act, though she could now do all three very fairly well by dint of hard study.

"And you would be awfully grieved to hear about Torquil Grant?" he said, after a period of silence.

He had so many questions to ask, he did not know where to begin.

Her face fell swiftly, and all the joyous light died out of it.

"Grieved? Yes, I was grieved, Keith. His death just means all the world to me."

"His death!" He stared at her in startled amazement.

She was looking straight before her with wide, unseeing eyes, in which great tears had suddenly gathered. Her exquisite lips trembled, she seemed to be suddenly drowned in misery.

"You believe he is dead?" he questioned again.

She turned and looked at him with a fixed intensity, heedless of the tears welling over her eyes, and stealing down her cheeks.

"He was murdered, Keith. Take my word for it. No one has better reason to know it than I have," she said, slowly and impressively.

Incredulity was in his face, though her words and manner had not been without effect upon him.

"What proof have you that he was murdered?" he questioned abruptly.

"My proof is that yesterday, the 31st of July, we were to have become man and wife," she said simply.



## The Portals of Love

For a moment he could only stare at her in blank bewilderment.

"You were engaged to be married to Torquil Grant? Why, it's past believing," he exclaimed. He was twenty years older than you are, Lizzie. You couldn't have loved him, dearie."

She bowed her head till her face was almost hidden, and her voice was low but full of profound feeling.

"I respected him deeply, Keith. Many a man has asked me to be his mistress. Torquil Grant was the only man who ever asked me to be his wife."

He sat silent, astounded by her words, and their deep-fetched significance. He was beginning to see, though as yet dimly, what depths she had been through to attain such ends. He did not know very much of the world and its callousness and wickedness. He had seen some of the rough side of life whilst a student in Aberdeen, but he practically knew nothing of that polished, gilded, sardonic wickedness, of licensed debauchery which is a matter of course in the great capitals of Europe. He had never mixed in that set, he was wholly ignorant of its infamy and cultured vice. Dimly he knew such things existed; he had never yet realised them, or thought about them. In mind and body Keith Tytler was as pure as a little child. The passions of manhood, which might have assailed him, had been diverted into other channels by his deep and secret adoration for Lillias Herne.

He glanced shyly round at his sister. She was sitting staring out again into vacancy; but a hard look had come on her face, her thoughts were far away from him, working at the problem which now filled her whole soul—the problem of who murdered Torquil Grant.

She was two years younger than her brother, but a girl of twenty-two, yet she was years older than he was in worldly knowledge and experience. He felt this to be so as he watched her intently, his eyes

## The Portals of Love

riveted on the exquisite purity of her profile. He loved her and revered her now as never before, as slowly it dawned on him that this slight, exquisite creature had been down amidst the very hells of life, in the swirl of its manifold temptations, and had yet preserved the pure flame of her soul from contamination with its devouring flames. He believed in her now without shadow of doubt or turning, as he always had, as he always would do. At last she spoke again and uttered her thoughts aloud.

"I had just been engaged to him for four months ; we had a serious difference at first because I would not tell him who had lent me the money to start with, and one of my profoundest regrets is that I never was sure that he believed in me ; but I gave Malcolm Macleod my solemn promise I never would tell. He said it would damage me in the eyes of the world if it was known, and I knew he was right. He's the best friend I have had. A real friend such as any woman might be proud of. He didn't know that Grant came to see me, nor did Grant know that I was friends with Malcolm. Seeing that they were factor and master at home, I thought it best they should never meet under my roof. I didn't want to marry Grant till I had paid my debt to Malcolm, but at last I agreed to his suggestion that he should pay the five hundred through me, and we should be married at once. After all, Torquil Grant was well off and could afford to pay for a wife. He was to have arrived in London on 20th July, a Tuesday morning. He was to have brought the money with him, and we were to spend the day in refurnishing the flat I live in, and which I now rent furnished. We were to keep it on, and I was to continue with my work for another year at least. I didn't want to come home to live in Seaview with father and mother so set against me ; what would have been the use ? I think Torquil saw this, so those were the



## The Portals of Love

terms I made, and he gladly accepted. Yesterday, the 30th, he was to have come back to London again, and we were to have been married quite quietly. My understudy was to take my place during our three days' honeymoon. He never appeared on the Tuesday, and then I read in the papers of his disappearance. On Sunday the 18th he was murdered, of that I am convinced. Torquil Grant would never run away from me, he cared for me too dearly. I was the light of his eyes, the joy of his soul, his whole life was wrapped up and absorbed in mine, as mine was absorbed in his ; and here I am, brother, spending the days that were to have been my honeymoon in tracking his murderer."

She spoke with a profound and bitter melancholy in which ran a chord of fixed determination. He listened to her with deep intentness. It struck him instantly that here was the clue to the meaning of the two thousand pounds—Grant had sold his securities to realise. Five hundred for his future wife's debts, the rest for furnishing, and possibly some present of jewellery. As to that thousand belonging to the laird of the Fastness, he had no clue to that as yet. What a mystery it all was!

"So you haven't yet paid back your debt to Malcolm Macleod?" he asked suddenly.

She shook her head.

"No, not yet. I asked for six months ; he said I might have a year, but six was all I wanted. Three months have gone, and I've got the half collected ; it will be easy enough so long as I keep my health."

She spoke in an even hopeless tone, and he saw that underlying her natural joy at seeing him again there was an abiding sorrow.

"Lizzie, was that why you came here to-day—to inquire into the mystery of Grant's disappearance?" he asked.

## The Portals of Love

She nodded her head.

"Yes, I shall never rest till I find out where he is lying. I have found out all I can at the Macleod Arms—every one believes he has run away. I can see that. They all say so."

"Did you know, Lizzie, that a thousand pounds belonging to the laird has gone with him, wherever he is?" he asked.

She looked startled for a moment.

"They told me something of that to-day. There is some mistake. Torquil was the very soul of honour, besides he had plenty of his own," she said positively. "He told me he was going to buy me a diamond brooch I admired one day in a window. Had he come to me that Tuesday he would have kept his promise, Keith. This was my engagement ring."

She held up her hand and showed him the diamonds glittering on her third finger. Torquil Grant had deemed nothing too good for the woman he adored. Careful, saving, cautious as he was, when his heart had been touched he had thought no expenditure too great to lavish on its idol.

She glanced at the little watch bracelet on her arm.

"I must be going now, dearie, but we will meet again. There is one thing you can do for me, Keith, if you will."

"I will do anything for you, Lizzie. It just breaks my heart to part from you again," he cried, with a catch in his clear young voice.

She bent and kissed him most tenderly again and again, her arms twined about his neck.

"You will take a holiday, Keith, and come to me, and let us spend it together. I am so dreadfully lonely."

"Lonely! You lonely, with your beauty and cleverness." He held her from him and looked at her in surprise. He was still so ignorant of life.



## The Portals of Love

She smiled sadly at his tones, she understood his state of mind.

"Yes, dear, very lonely. My life is the loneliest any woman can live, because every man and woman is my natural enemy. Some day when you know more you will understand, but I think, perhaps, I would rather you didn't yet awhile; time enough for that, brother."

"And what is it you wish me to do?" he asked. Instinctively he knew his own ignorance and felt it acutely. She started out of a dream she had fallen into, and was again all keen eagerness.

"You know old Kirsty Hislop, in Seaview?" she asked.

"Why, of course I do, but what of her?" he said, half-laughing at the bare thought.

"I want you to go to her and ask her who murdered Torquil. Will you do that, brother?"

He laughed outright.

"Why, you don't believe in that nonsense surely, Lizzie?"

"Do you remember when one of the Macraes was drowned down in the bay, she told his mother where to find his body. It was in a cave, it had been sucked up by the incoming tide and caught in the rocks," she asked seriously.

His face grew graver, he remembered the incident perfectly, and how strange it had been thought at the time. All the village talked of it, and his father had spoken of the old woman as a witch in league with the devil. He had heard Kirsty Hislop called a wise woman and a spae-wife. He did not know what that really meant.

"Yes, I remember perfectly, and I will go and ask her," he promised obediently.

She kissed him again and took his hand.

"I want you to be very kind to mother," she said, with a little quiver in her voice. "You are all she has got now, remember, dear."

## The Portals of Love

He suddenly remembered that she had been going from the Manse door when he met her.

"Surely you did not go in to see them?" he asked anxiously.

She smiled brightly and nodded her head.

"Oh! yes, I saw them, but it was no use. Father still hates and despises me, but I don't mind; it's only mother I mind for. Poor old mother, she has a hard time. Be very loving and good to her, Keith, for my sake, dearie."

She took a notebook out of her pocket, and wrote down her address which she handed to him.

"Write to me and tell me everything you can, and as often as you can, and get a holiday soon and come to me," she said.

He glanced at the paper and then up at her. "Miss Percival, who is she?" he asked.

She gave a little amused laugh.

"That is my stage name, Miss Percival, and that is where I live, number 200 Shaftsbury Avenue, quite near the theatre."

He put the paper in his pocket and turned to walk with her, but she stopped him.

"We must not be seen together, Keith. I don't want to be recognised." She arranged her veil carefully over her face. It wound round her neck and completely covered the lovely ruddy hair. He confessed that she was unlikely to be recognised alone.

"It is not only the veil," he said, with a comprehensive glance over her dainty person. "You are utterly altered, Lizzie."

"For the better?" she queried.

"You are much more beautiful than you used to be. You were always lovely, but never so lovely as now."

His flattery was very dear to her. Its innocent genuineness was sweet to her who knew the coarse admiration of hundreds. She kissed him once more,



## The Portals of Love

and with a last wave of her hand sped away from him, the tears blinding her eyes so that she could hardly pick her way down the dry, deeply rutted lane.

Keith had been on his way to see his parents; he felt he could not go in now, and destroy the impressions of the vision beautiful that had been with him for the last hour. Instead of entering he turned and walked rapidly away through the village, and up on to the cliffs, and standing on their heights looked out to sea and watched the glow of sunset deepen over the waves, and then fade off into the coming night.

The steamer from Aberdeen bound for the Orkneys loomed dark against the pink horizon as she ploughed her way north, and a great longing took hold of him to see something of the world lying outside Scotland. In imagination he conceived of himself as raised far up into the heavens from whence he could obtain a bird's-eye view of the world, and below him he saw the net-work of lines which conducted men all over the universe, the ships that crawled like flies over the blue enamel of the seas to India or the icy Labradors, to the far away Orient, to the burning South, to the Coral Isles, to the land of eternal snows! How marvellous it all was! Man had conquered the earth and annihilated distance, and he knew so little, had seen so little. His sister had shaken off her bondage and gone out bravely to work in the hive of men, whilst he was fixed down in the narrow confines of a little northern parish. Never until now had he realised his own utter ignorance. Elizabeth had roused in him a sleeping longing to be up and doing which he had formerly been unaware of. She had touched the sleeping chord of ambition which now began faintly to vibrate within him, and which was never more destined to sink down into silence and inertia. From that hour forth Keith Tytler made up his mind to carve out for himself some career which would give liberty of conscience and an insight into the living world of men.

## CHAPTER VIII

THE shores of England had faded out of sight in a pale lilac haze, and as far as the eye could reach there was no land visible, nothing but a grey tossing expanse of seemingly endless waters.

In a mood which was too bitter, too indifferent to externals to take much note of surroundings, Malcolm Macleod had boarded the *Britannia* and bidden adieu to the land of his birth. With blended feelings of intense relief and intense pain he had watched that pale haze gradually sink down into the bosom of the night, and then he had sought his cabin where for many hours he lay in the dumb stupor of unreasoning despair.

He had chosen a ship which took long over the voyage, calling at several places not directly *en route*, but he had purposely avoided the crowded liners, and the list of the *Britannia's* passengers, which he closely scanned, gave promise of his meeting with no acquaintances, and he booked his passage under the name of John Williamson.

Not yet had he begun to frame any plan of a future life; all his efforts were set on the bitter task of realising that he was an exile for ever, that in the space of a few weeks the news of his death would reach Scotland, and henceforth he would assume a new identity and bear another name. He saw how easily he could obliterate his own existence. A week after arrival in Melbourne he had but to stroll into any telegraph office and send his father a wire: "Deeply regret to inform you that your son died suddenly to-day of pneumonia. Letter follows. Williamson. Melbourne."



## The Portals of Love

That would suffice for the Fastness and the village post-office. Upon its receipt the flag on the old tower would fly at half-mast, a week's talk in Seaview, a pulpit reference or two, black clothes for the Castle inmates, a period of enforced seclusion, a few words of genuine regret, many letters of condolence, and then forgetfulness and Roderick recognised as the heir. The letter that was to follow might consist of a blank sheet of paper. Macleod would open it and only he would see it.

Even during a short voyage it is wonderful how intimate fellow-passengers become with one another. Marseilles to Port Said may furnish one with several life-long friendships. Little groups are formed rapidly, the young travellers foregather over games, the middle-aged over cards, the old over pipes, cigars and multitudinous experiences. However desirous a man may be to keep himself to himself it is impossible on board ship for him to do so completely. At meals, unless he wishes to be thought an ill-mannered brute, he must at least be civil to his neighbours on either side of him, not to speak of those who face him across the narrow board.

When Malcolm Macleod at length emerged from his seclusion he found himself flanked by a youth of twenty, who shared his cabin as far as Port Said, and a woman of uncertain age and nationality. She might have been thirty, she might as easily have been forty.

They were in the middle of the, for once, kindly disposed "Bay," and the ship arrangements had finally settled down when they first found themselves side by side and exchanging the bare civilities. She had begun the acquaintance by nodding at him with the air of an old friend as he slipped into the chair assigned to him. Her attitude of friendliness had at first alarmed him into a more unbending stiffness; he

## The Portals of Love

was too inexperienced to understand that her apparent exuberance was only the careless comradeship of a very much travelled woman who extended the same manner to her shipmates all the world over. The comparative quietness she maintained towards him throughout the meal disarmed him, however, and he could discover nothing offensive in the few platitudes she put—"How wonderfully tranquil the 'Bay' was. The first time she had passed through it without the 'fiddles'. Was he going the whole voyage? Had he ever been to Australia before?"

He answered her few questions quietly and reservedly, giving her no opportunity of following on in his civil, brief replies. He realised now that for eight weeks he would sit beside her at meals, and he was desirous of appearing natural, and beginning as he meant to go on throughout the long voyage. They had nearly reached Port Said before he really took her in or had thought of learning her name. Miss Celandine Shirley sounded odd and meant nothing to him. He never looked at her and they never spoke except at meals, but gradually he became alive to her actual existence, more because of what she said to others than to himself.

He gathered from her conversation with the chatty old colonel who faced her that she was an Australian and had travelled well-nigh all over the globe. A certain force, originality and breadth about her conversation commanded interest. Everything she said was worth listening to, and a wonderful memory made her extensive knowledge amusing as well as highly instructive. He began at first timidly to question her about the unknown land which in future was to be his home. It seemed ridiculous that having the chance of acquiring some valuable information he should not profit by the opportunity.

At Port Said, during coaling operations, they found



## The Portals of Love

themselves in the same boat pulling for shore, and on landing it seemed natural that they should stroll up together to the Savoy and lunch. The heat was fairly overpowering, and the Port Said mosquito, which is second to none in size and venom, were assiduous in their attentions, but Miss Shirley had an antidote. She seemed to be well known in the Port, the boatman had proved to be an old friend. Outside Cominos the little Jap and she had shaken hands warmly ; strolling through the Oriental wonders of Fairavanti's she had been bowed down before with considerable deference. Now as they seated themselves at lunch she discovered another friend in the proprietor who hovered protectively behind her chair.

"Just send me up a pound of raw liver as bloody as you have it," she ordered, to the astonishment and disgust of her companion. When the repulsive looking morsel appeared his disgust turned to gratitude. She set it in the middle of the table with the remark that travellers must not be too particular in a temperature of a hundred and ten in the shade, and a million mosquitoes as big as swallows hovering over, and assured him he would not long be troubled by the sight.

Sure enough in five minutes the flesh was black with their tormentors and they were suffered to eat in peace.

After the meal they drove about the noisy, dusty town, the only town which never sleeps, and bought cigarettes and other trifles, and about four o'clock found themselves sitting at a table outside the Eastern Exchange having tea in the welcome shade of the parched trees. From that day forth his shyness of her vanished and they became something of companions. His other fellow-passengers made no impression upon his deep self-absorption. They were so many shadows to whom he mechanically said "good-morning" and "good-night".

## The Portals of Love

His utter loneliness slowly and reluctantly responded to her frank, genial comradeship; his long hours of agonised remorse became shorter and fewer as she slowly won her way to his confidence. He realised that his life had now begun afresh and had turned abruptly into totally different channels. As a waif of the world he might as well pick up any crumbs of comfort dropped in his way. On his loss of Lilius Herne he would not permit himself to dwell. When her image presented itself he drove it away. Hope in that direction was so utterly and entirely dead. He had the belief that if he permitted himself to think much of her, it would, by love's affinity, draw her thoughts to him, and the best he could do for her was to wish her entire forgetfulness of his existence. As his father had grimly remarked, "time was a great healer"; she would forget him and marry some one else, she also must now realise to the full that Finis was written by Fate across their friendship and love.

The next day they began threading the long narrow channel of the Suez Canal, and at sunset were off Ismailia. All the marvellous effects of the afterglow in Egypt were presented with consummate beauty. In the west the glowing vermilion gradually faded into paler tints of orange and gold, of turquoise and amethyst. The eastern sky was silvered over by the pale light from the moon and the brilliant stars. Miss Shirley was watching the scene from the upper deck, and he found her there as he passed on his evening promenade. Something about her struck him as suggesting an equal loneliness to his own. The blue eyes had a wistful sadness in them, yet something of the sombre splendour above was reflected on her face and in the intensity of her expression. She was not a beauty, but she was altogether unusual looking and outside the ordinary classification. Belonging to no one type she seemed as if she might found a



## The Portals of Love

distinctive race of her own which partook of all nations.

He dropped into a deck chair by her side, and she spoke as if the same thought had sprung up in both minds. "It always makes me feel lonely, just this particular part of the voyage," she said. "It's the influence of the desert stretching away on either side of the Canal. The sterility sinks into my very being and appals me. When I'm out in the open sea I change again and take possession of myself once more. That's a thing you've got to learn, Mr. Williamson."

He looked at her hesitatingly and she met his gaze with her open frankness.

"As you are never going back to the mother-country you will have to gain complete self-dependence," she said. "You must learn to be self-sufficing like I am, or you will be miserable."

"How do you know I am never going back?" he asked, in a low, troubled voice.

She smiled and looked away from him towards the paling west.

"I know by many little signs and tokens not worth stringing together again. Suffice it that I do know. You're no stranger to me. I've met you many times before."

He stared at her in amazement.

"We have met before? Never! I should have remembered you," he asserted positively.

She gave a gesture of impatience at his density.

"We have not of course met individually, but you are one of a type one meets all over the world. The man who has done something, who never can return home."

A wave of crimson rushed over his face, anger for a moment seized him. Her remark was an outrage, an offence against civilisation. A swift retort rose to

## The Portals of Love

his lips and died away again as he looked at her with sombre eyes in which the glint of passion shone. She had unfurled her fan and waved it slowly, she lay back with a faint smile on her lips.

"Awful bore when one has to coal at Aden," she said placidly. "One has to lie outside the shallow harbour and often toss for many hours. I'm really looking forward to your first sight of Colombo, to the voyager coming in from the sea it's a city of lovely aspect. I love to hear fresh impressions, they add to my own rather jaded ones," she said; then she relapsed into dreamy meditative silence, wholly unaware of his deep annoyance, her thoughts fixed on other things.

He did not speak for some time, slowly swallowing his anger as he realised the uselessness of it. Her remark was impossible to refute; he saw now that it had been made in no spirit of malice or unkindness, but was the result of the casual light in which extensive travelling had made her view all humanity. As she had said she had often met his type before.

For a few days after that interview he rather avoided her, but the inevitable meeting at meals had to be faced, and once more his stiffness melted before her unchanging frankness and geniality. Whatever view she took of his type it was clearly not a bad one he perceived. They had reached Rangoon before any allusions of a personal nature recurred between them, and there they landed and went for a drive. The wonderful town interested him deeply with its gorgeous pagodas, like enormous gilded handbells ornamented with precious stones. They dismounted for a while and walked up an avenue guarded at its entrance by two gigantic statues of monsters, erected to propitiate evil spirits. The view from where they stood was marvellous in its oriental vividness; the great gilt dome as high as St. Paul's seemed to grow upon the vision with its pointed handle of solid gold. The vast bell



## The Portals of Love

reared itself into the hot, still blue sky surrounded by numerous smaller temples richly gilt, bell temples, rest houses and tombs. The constant tinkle of innumerable chimes of differing cadence, combined with the desertion and otherwise stillness of the place, produced a curious impression of unreality, harmonious in the extreme yet intensely melancholy.

The true meaning of exile rushed over Macleod at that moment as he stood amid the curious tinkling waves borne on the evening air. For the first time he knew the full meaning of solitude, he realised that for him existed neither home, kith or kin or friends. As one born again he must make all things anew, even friendships. As they drove back to Rangoon through the Dalhousie Gardens they were utterly silent, and that night sitting late on deck under the marvellous tent of stars, and the tinkling bells still stealing through the purple dusk, he told her something of his story.

Omitting all details he told her that he was a fugitive from justice, that in a sudden fit of anger he had felled a man, and had discovered that he had committed manslaughter, that his crime had parted him for ever from the woman he loved and meant to marry, and that all he possessed in the world was one thousand pounds.

She listened to the tragic story without much comment; she showed no morbid passion of pity but the steady fire of strong kindness. Again he found he represented to her one of a type; it was not the first time she had listened to the confessions of a fugitive from justice, and he found that his fate was not so solitary as he had believed. For the first time she showed him a deeper personal sympathy than her former mere friendliness had betrayed. She looked upon his act as one which might be wiped out by future conduct. Recognising that it had been abso-

## The Portals of Love

lutely unpremeditated, she spoke of the angry impulse as more the crime than its consequences; her deepest sympathy seemed to go out to the girl who loved him and suffered so intensely for no fault of her own.

Again with a sort of grateful wonder he marvelled to find that he was no less worthy in her sight than before. When he turned in at last it was with the first lightening of heart he had experienced since that fatal night. Confession had been good for his soul. With a great uplifting he gave profound gratitude and thanks to the God whose hand he dumbly saw above him for the friendship that had entered into his life in his darkest hour of need.

So the weeks passed on in sunshine and occasional storm, and by the time the *Britannia* passed between Kangaroo and Althorpe Islands, so resembling the white cliffs of Dover, on its way to Port Adelaide, Macleod felt as if he had known Celandine Shirley all his life.

During those long idle hours in that constant companionship he had fully unburdened his soul to her, and she in turn had told him all there was to know of her own life. She was an orphan with no near relatives in the world. As their voyage drew to a close a deep depression settled down upon him which he knew was the certain dread of losing her. In no sense was he in love with her, the memory of Lilius was still too vivid, the ache of her loss was still gnawing at his heart, but Celandine Shirley typified to him a saviour who had been sent to him in his darkest hours. She symbolised the dawn of his new life; her alert, strong self-reliance was what he had to learn to cultivate in himself. Hitherto he had been tied to one little spot on earth by a thousand traditions of the dead, by historical episodes in which the name of Macleod had been linked, by the certain belief that his life till death would be lived out in the old environment, amongst



## The Portals of Love

the same people. His life had from birth been predestined, carved out for him, like father, like son. The knowledge had atrophied energy to an extent he only now began to realise. It had killed out ambition, thwarted independent action, and made him the mere puppit of convention. Now, all that had been swiftly changed; as Miss Shirley had said, he must learn self-sufficiency or be miserable. He must think of himself now as she thought of herself, as an absolutely unfettered being with neither ties nor links with any one human being, with any one part of earth. No human being under heaven had either the right or the interest in him to say yea or nay. As an unnumbered unit on the face of the globe he might drift whither he pleased, the only dictator, the one imperial autocrat existing, his own eternal ego.

There were moments when despair seized him as he thought of their parting, and the awful solitude of the strange land they were nearing. As the hours drew on he could hardly bear her out of his sight, she was the only soul on earth to whom he could freely talk. Her strong common-sense had so often combated his hours of utter despondency, when she had forced him to lift up his head and face his life. Her gentle sympathy and insinuating hopefulness had warded off the encroachment of creeping recklessness, which oft-times stole down upon him and caused him to curse his fate with the bitter laughter of foolhardy indifference. Yes! she had made all the difference to him. Whilst in his left hand he had held death as a coming deliverer, she had put into his right hand life with its innumerable possibilities. He had taken a man's life; in place of taking his own in the madness of impotent despair, he must live it out in an offering of eager service to the Creator whom he had so rashly offended. Black as his future loomed it could never wear again so dark an aspect, for he had been shown

## The Portals of Love

the way of light by the woman whom he firmly believed symbolised Divine aid, and whom he felt as if he had relied upon all his life.

He told her this as they sat together in their favourite seats on the upper deck, and he saw a sadness pass over her face. She had told him of her beliefs which to him were strange, her belief in reincarnation, a chain of many lives lived on earth, a constant sequence of rebirths, the results of one life colouring largely the next, and she answered by stating what she had grown to believe, that they had met before in some previous life, and that their present friendship was but a renewal of an old one.

"I have been thinking very seriously for the last few days over a plan which I am going to lay before you," she said. "You have talked often of how much you will miss my companionship, you have told me what help I have given you. You have made me your confidant and friend. Now, Malcolm Macleod, to call you by your true name, our parting or not parting lies with you. If it would be any joy or help to you I am willing to marry you, but if you don't want to marry me, say so honestly. Don't be so small and narrow as to be affected by the rudimentary and conventional belief that it is awkward to refuse a woman, because it isn't or ought not to be. Remember this, if you don't want me for a wife, I most certainly don't want you for a husband, though I hope we will always maintain our present friendship. I'll have no uncertainty; the man who doesn't like and respect me I've no use for as a life partner, though I'd always give him a friend's help. I don't expect from you a lover's love, but I hope you give me the love of a friend. You haven't forgotten the girl you were engaged to, and I wouldn't think much of you if you had, but that is done with for ever. I want a husband as a friend and companion. I've had lots of offers, but I happen to be in a position to



## The Portals of Love

choose for myself and not rely on being chosen. You know now if you want me for a wife or for a friend. I give you the chance of either, so be a man and say honestly which it is to be."

She spoke with perfect composure, her seriousness breaking into smiles as she finished. She was perfectly right. Malcolm knew there and then which he wanted and said so.

"I can most honestly say my choice is made. I want you for a wife, but I should never have dared to say so," he exclaimed.

She gave him a rapid survey which seemed to satisfy her.

"I guessed as much," she said calmly. "That's why I proposed to you. Women have a better sort of courage than men. I always know what I want, but I know I can't always get it; still I'm not the woman to lose it for want of asking. Nothing venture, nothing have. I've seen lots of men lose the only woman they ever loved out of sheer timidity or fear of refusal. It hurts some people's *amour propre* to be refused, which shows how little they know what marriage means. Why! if a woman doesn't want a man or a man doesn't want a woman the kind thing is to say so, and not ruin two lives out of sheer idiotcy. Well! we've fixed up our engagement, and the sooner we put it in the past tense the better. We have no one but ourselves to consult."

"It can't be too soon for me, Celandine. I've no words to express my gratitude. I must leave it to time and my actions to bring home to you what this means to me," he said, in a voice which shook in spite of his efforts to steady it.

She smiled at him and gave the hand he held out to her a friendly squeeze.

"I'm about as desolate of kith or kin as you are, my dear. I know all about you, and you know pretty

## The Portals of Love

nearly all there is to know about me, so we start fair. We will make what life remains to us a success, Malcolm, or my name isn't Celandine Shirley!"

That evening as Malcolm smoked a last pipe with the captain he took that genial individual into his confidence and disclosed his good fortune.

"Well! Mr. Williamson, I congratulate you," exclaimed the little man, stopping short in his brisk walk. "I've made several voyages with Miss Shirley and know her fairly well, and besides being the richest woman in the Colony, she's a real good sort, as her father was before her, during all the years he amassed his pile when sheep's wool was worth something. She's the sort we've too few of in this world, and whatever your luck's been in the past you're in luck now, and likely to remain so in future so long as you've her by your side. You take the word of Captain Paton of the *Britannia* for that, and don't forget it."

"I'm never likely to forget it," responded Macleod, as he met the strong grip of the hearty hand-clasp.



## CHAPTER IX

EXCITEMENT and recollection were rapidly dying down in Seaview, now that close on a month had passed since Torquil Grant had been seen by any living person. The dead man's sister had returned to her own home, and the under-factor was now installed in his predecessor's house and had taken over his work and occupations.

Both Liliás Herne and Macleod had returned to the Fastness, where a large shooting party had assembled for the celebration of the twelfth. On the eleventh, in glorious weather, the afternoon train had set down at the little station of Seaview the seven guns with their wives and servants, and by tea-time all was stir and bustle within the Castle walls.

Liliás Herne had carried out her project and fought out her battle alone during that fortnight in Paris. She would gladly have escaped the twelfth that year but circumstances were against her. A Royal prince was to be numbered amongst the guests, and Macleod had written her urgent letters to return to the Fastness without fail to help in the entertainment of the party—it was one of those occasions when he knew she would be absolutely necessary to his household.

With her dread of arousing the least suspicion she made up her mind to comply, tragic and awful though the whole affair was in the light of all she knew, and weary though the ordeal would be to her in her hidden sorrow and grief. She marvelled at her uncle's cheerful countenance as she watched him talking first to one then another of his guests. To look at Macleod no one

## The Portals of Love

would have suspected him of having a care in the world, his attitude was one of absolute light-heartedness. It increased her difficulties enormously, indeed at that period she suffered almost more than at first. She saw that he recognised no responsibility for the crime, and she knew that he secretly exulted in the knowledge that Roderick was now his heir. He had always hated Malcolm and was intensely relieved to be rid of him for ever.

She had made up her mind to keep absolute silence towards him regarding her knowledge of the tragedy ; she saw how impossible it would make her position did Macleod know that she had witnessed the horrors of that night and was aware of all the terrible details. She would be forced to leave the Fastness, and this she did not immediately desire to do, though in the future, when Malcolm's rash deed was no longer in any danger of being discovered, she would go and find another home most gladly.

She had received one letter from him, a short guarded note in which he had stated that he was about to sail in the *Britannia* and would send her a line from Port Said. He stated that he was well, and busy collecting a few necessities for the voyage, but there was no word of love or comfort in the few brief sentences. With an anguish of heartbroken loss, she realised how utterly he was gone from her. Already he was dead to her as he soon would be to all the world.

Since her return she had been drawn to making a greater friend of Keith Tytler than formerly. She had always liked him and Malcolm had liked him, and now she turned to him naturally as the only being in the Castle who was on her own intellectual level. He occupied all his leisure hours in reading, and they began to exchange books and their different views upon the various subjects of their contents. During those days her mind was deeply tinged with the grey



## The Portals of Love

outlook of her cousin's future; she had cared deeply for him and the violence of their tragic parting had affected her whole nature, and in her anxiety and sorrow for his blighted life and hopeless future she forgot in a measure her own suffering and all he had caused her, and it was something of a relief to have Tytler, with his ready sympathy and cheerful nature to turn to in those hours of gloom and solitude. She looked round the softly lit drawing-room with its many occupants, and shuddered as her mind darted to the dungeons lying below and the horror they held. How little any one present knew of the ghastly tragedy that had been so lately enacted within those very walls. If there was any truth in ghosts surely the phantom of Torquil Grant would haunt the library and those long silent passages through which he had been carried, a corpse, upon the shoulders of his slayer.

"Are you cold, Lillas?" asked Kenneth Macleod, her cousin, who was seated beside her.

"No, only there is some one walking over my grave," she replied grimly, reverting to the old superstition.

He smiled at her tones.

"Early days to begin shivering because of that," he said. "By the way, I'm sorry to miss Malcolm this twelfth. Why on earth couldn't he have waited to go off globe-trotting till after the shoot? He used to be so keen."

"He got restless," she answered, her eyes on the cup she held in her hand. "He has always wished to travel—ever since he left the army."

"Thousand pities he ever did leave it," exclaimed Kenneth. "He'll always be wretched with nothing to do. How long is he to be out there? Mrs. Macleod didn't seem to know."

"I don't think he knows himself," she replied quietly. "It depends on how he likes it."

"Perhaps he'll pick up an Australian wife. Some

## The Portals of Love

Australian girls I've seen were extraordinarily pretty. Malcolm ought to marry now and settle down," he continued. "As a rule, I don't advocate early marriages, but when a chap's on the loose he'd much better come to anchorage. I think Uncle John would like it—don't you? After all there's only Roddie."

For a moment she did not answer, a new thought had suddenly struck her. After Roderick the man beside her was heir to the Fastness, as the only son of Macleod's younger and long since deceased brother. How little he knew that only the boy now stood between him and the inheritance, but in another two or three months he would know, for Malcolm would then be dead, in truth he was now dead to all the world for ever more.

"I never heard uncle mention it; I don't know," she answered, speaking as naturally as she could.

They drifted off into other topics, and as she talked she looked at him more closely than she had ever done before. He now possessed a greater significance for her. He was a decidedly handsome man, possessing a great family resemblance to Malcolm. The Macleods all resembled one another greatly. For several years he had been in the diplomatic service, and was doing well. He was one year younger than Malcolm and was at present on leave. His complete independence since the death of his parents in childhood had given him a self-possession and reliance which furnished the impression of his being older than his years. His father had been very poor, but had married a rich woman, and Kenneth Macleod had long been in a position to marry had he been so inclined. He came to the Fastness when he liked, and had always been on the best of terms with his nearest relations.

Tytler had been going round the room helping to wait on the many guests, and relieve them of their tea-cups, and he just then passed and the two men



## The Portals of Love

shook hands, having often met before. Miss Herne pointed to a chair by her side, and he sat down with his usual pleasure in being anywhere near her.

"Well! and how are things going in Seaview?" asked Kenneth pleasantly, by way of drawing him into the conversation, then suddenly he uttered an exclamation.

"I knew there was something I wanted to ask," he exclaimed, lowering his voice and leaning towards them. "Tell me what was all that excitement about the factor having bolted with Uncle John's money? I saw something about it in a local paper that some one sent me. Has he ever been found?"

For a second neither Lilius or Tytler spoke, each waited for the other. At last Miss Herne answered with one word—"Never!"

"Rum thing!" said Kenneth. "Of course I remember Grant perfectly. Not the sort of man I should have suspected of doing such a thing."

"No one would ever have suspected him," exclaimed Tytler. "Yet what was one to think? The man suddenly disappeared, and with him Mr. Macleod's thousand."

"Was there no other theory? Couldn't he have fallen over the cliffs, or even been murdered?" hazarded Macleod.

"Grant had not an enemy in Seaview," said Lilius firmly. "He knew every inch of ground, his absconding is the only possible solution for his disappearance."

"Yet there are people who firmly believe he was murdered."

It was Tytler who spoke half-dreamily—he was thinking of his sister's firm conviction. Suddenly he met Miss Herne's eyes, and the look in them startled him out of his reminiscences.

"Who dares say that?" she demanded brusquely, with an angry note in her voice.

## The Portals of Love

He looked at her in some surprise and saw the colour rise in her cheeks.

"Some of the village folks say it—no one of any importance," he answered evasively.

Just then Lord Ulvadale strolled up to the little group of three and Kenneth turned to him.

"We were just talking of that rum disappearance of Torquil Grant. What's your opinion, Ulvadale?" he asked.

Ulvadale drew forward a chair and sat down. He was an exceedingly neat and tall man, the beginning of baldness giving him a somewhat older appearance than his thirty years warranted. He had a plain, pleasant, honest face with no pretensions to good looks, unless good temper, which was stamped on his countenance, can be counted a mark of beauty.

He twisted his short brown moustache and looked grave.

"To tell you the truth, I don't know what to think. It's ridiculous to suppose that a man in receipt of a good salary and with a certain amount put by would take three thousand in his pocket and bolt for apparently no reason. On the other hand, who was there to murder him? One suspicious point is that in the Aberdeen bank they have the number of the two thousand worth of notes he received on realising his securities, and they have never been cashed. In our bank here they have the numbers of the thousand belonging to Macleod—they have not been cashed either. The question in my mind is—if Grant bolted, what the deuce is he living on now? Not that three thou."

Lilias felt herself turn cold and sick with horror. She sat silent fearing to speak, whilst the three men continued their arguments. How many little incidents there were which pointed to foul play: she saw them all so clearly. Only the social status of the Macleods saved them from suspicion.



## The Portals of Love

"Well, one thing I can vouch for is, that there wasn't a sign of him about the place at half-past nine, when we all assembled for prayers," she heard Tytler say decisively; "quite a number of the servants saw him walking up to the Castle just before nine o'clock. Mr. Macleod and Malcolm said good-bye to him on the terrace, and saw him go down the cliff path about twenty minutes past, and that was the last any one ever did see of him. Isn't that so, Miss Herne?"

She forced herself to look up and schooled her voice to calmness. She felt grateful to Keith and looked at him with an unusual glance of friendliness. It was one of those moments when Malcolm was in danger and must be screened at all costs. There had been so many of those agonising moments that falsehood had become very easy to summons. She had learned her lesson well by now.

"Yes, that is right. I was on the terrace when he arrived about nine, and spoke to him. He remarked on the beauty of the sunset. Uncle was in the library and Malcolm was with me just outside. Malcolm took him in by the window and I strolled away along the terrace to fetch a cape. He could only have stayed a short time, for when the bell rang for prayers and half-past nine chimed from the tower I returned to the library and he had gone. We were all present at prayers, and we heard nothing of his disappearance till noon next day."

"If he had been murdered surely his three thousand, which obviously must have been on him, would have been stolen," observed Kenneth. "It looks as if it was a mystery like the Merstham Tunnel crime, which will never be solved. When one comes to think of it, what an extraordinary number of murderers there must be at large."

"Like the Merstham case, it may not be murder at

## The Portals of Love

all," remarked Lord Ulvadale. "Who knows, Grant may yet turn up."

Lilias rose with some trifling excuse and moved across the room to join Mrs. Macleod, who sat in front of the tea-table doing her best to entertain the Prince. Macleod sat near her, and, to the horror of Lilias, they were all conversing on the same topic. Roderick was standing by his mother's chair drinking in each word with a child's eagerness for mystery. There seemed to be no escape from the ghastly subject.

"I've no desire to track him down. After all, if he were found it wouldn't do me any good to see him clapped into gaol," she heard her uncle say. The words turned her sick with horror; yet she knew that the father was but doing his best, as she strove to do, to save Malcolm from punishment and the house of Macleod from disgrace. It struck her poignantly that hers was a heavy burden to bear alone and unsupported. She drifted away to a quieter corner of the room and soon found that Ulvadale had followed her.

"You didn't show yourself once this season in town, Miss Herne," he said. "May I ask why you have deliberately buried yourself in the Fastness for the last year."

"I think taking one year's rest occasionally is rather a good thing," she answered smiling. "One returns to the old amusements refreshed and with a greater zest; the daily round and common task pall if pursued too systematically."

"Ah! You don't care for the society part of the show. No more do I, yet somehow I do it. We are such creatures of habit," he remarked. "I find motor-ing has given me a new interest in life. I've taken to that with a vengeance. I've brought two home with me."

"Will your mother drive in them?" she asked.

He made a wry face.



## The Portals of Love

"Rather not. Why she rarely can be persuaded to enter a train now—she's too old to change. I'll come for you one fine morning and take you for a spin."

"Do," she answered readily. "I love motoring. I daresay we shall have one here soon. Uncle often talks of it. Tell me, was there any great excitement in town this season? I seem to have seen no one and heard nothing."

"Well, I don't know that there was anything particularly thrilling," he answered. "Miss Styles, an American, was voted the beauty of the *beau monde*, and Miss Percival is undoubtedly the beauty of the stage. London seems to have gone mad about her."

"What is she like?" asked Miss Herne.

Ulvadale smiled rather dreamily.

"She's a perfect type of old Venetian beauty. She's got the glorious red hair and clear transparent skin and the matchless features one has read of but never before seen."

"Evidently you admire her very much," she remarked, smiling at his words. He sat up.

"Oh! well, no chap could help doing that," he said quietly. "I suppose a more lovely woman never lived."

"So often those lovely women are so tiresomely stupid," she remarked. "Beauty and brains very seldom go together."

"Well, she's got her head screwed on the right way, you take my word for that," he exclaimed. "A chap has to pull up his socks before approaching her. She's a woman, not merely a photograph like so many of the rest of them."

"You appear to know a great deal about her," she remarked, with a quiet smile of amusement at his earnestness.

"Perhaps I do, perhaps I don't," he replied vaguely. "Anyhow, she's on the square, there's no two opinions

## The Portals of Love

on that point. By the way, what a rattling good chap Tytler is," he ended abruptly.

She laughed outright at his quick transition from one subject to another.

"Do you refer to the father or the son?" she asked.

He began to laugh also, her merriment was infectious, and a wave of colour crept over his face.

"Oh lor'! no; of course I don't mean that wild old ranter. He's not the type of God's business men that I approve of. Of course I mean Keith. I hope he's not going in for the ministry, he's worth better things."

She raised her eyebrows and made an exclamation of protest. She absolutely agreed with him, but she wanted to draw him out before disclosing herself.

"Ah! You don't agree with me," he remarked, looking crestfallen. "But it does seem a pity that a chap like that with such excellent brains should do nothing else all his life but read and preach the blasphemies his father indulges in."

"So you think that's what his father does?" she asked.

He looked surprised.

"Why, of course! What else could you call his Sunday performances? I've come to the rather startling conclusion that the Old Testament is the curse of Scotland. Last week I had occasion to very seriously reprimand a couple of my men, and they told me they had only done what David had done, and as it was in the Bible it must be all right. That's the line a lot of that class take, and what is one to say so long as old Tytler tells them every word's inspired."

"I don't see what you can do," she admitted. "We have had much the same thing happen here."

Ulvadale looked very wrathful.

"It's awfully hard to combat ignorance," he exclaimed. "I'm not a very bright example perhaps, but I do approve of a chap living a decent clean life,



## The Portals of Love

and that's what I should like to see my chaps do on Ulvadale. Scotland's statistics upon immorality are perfectly awful in comparison to England, and I lay a lot of the blame on the Church. Look what we were treated to last Sunday; it struck me particularly not having been to the kirk for weeks. I went to please my mother, and was rewarded by the fifteenth chapter of Samuel!"

She could not refrain from smiling at his deep earnestness. It amused her to listen to this very spruce member of the Peerage criticising Joshua Tytler and his work, but Ulvadale—man about town though he was—had very strong opinions of his own and a realisation of his responsibilities.

"Oh! I remember what chapter it was right enough. I read it right through directly I got home," he went on, noting her amusement. "I read all those horrors about God sending Saul through the mouth of Samuel to kill Amalek, and all the poor women and little children and even the innocent cattle and sheep, and then when Saul spared King Agag and the animals, God becomes furious with him for his mercy and repented that he had made him king. Then comes in Samuel with more savagery and literally hacks the unfortunate Agag to pieces before the Lord. No wonder the wretched man walked delicately in the presence of such a pair of ruffians. It's all horribly profane and blasphemous, Miss Herne. It turns me sick to think that the people are taught to believe the Lord God Almighty capable of such brutality—what a lesson for them!"

"I absolutely agree with you," she answered gravely. "But luckily the more enlightened clergy now leave the Old Testament alone; they have the sense to see it is unfit for public reading, though it is interesting as a collection of old Jewish documents."

Ulvadale made a gesture of profound contempt.

## The Portals of Love

"Then why haven't they the moral courage to stand up and say publicly that what is unfit for public ears couldn't possibly have emanated from Almighty God?"

"The few enlightened would, I fear, have to fight the much larger army of the unenlightened," she replied. "I often think that story of the old woman and the Sabbath-breaker is so typical of the Scottish nation. She was rebuking a friend for having broken the Sabbath by having taken a walk, and he retorted in his own defence that Jesus Himself took a walk on Sunday, whereupon the old woman remarked, 'Weel, maybe He did; but mind you, I dinna think any the more of Him for that'; but to go back to the original subject, I don't think Keith means to follow his father's profession."

Ulvadale's face cleared.

"I'm thankful to hear it. I must speak to him quietly when I get the chance," he said.

"I hope you won't air your views before Mrs. Macleod," observed Lillas, "you would only shock her and do no good. I am half-ashamed to say I sometimes remonstrate, but it's no use; she still has a profound faith in the horrors you repudiate."

Ulvadale looked across at his hostess with sudden interest, much as he would have looked at some newly discovered animal.

"You don't say so," he exclaimed with animation. "I had no idea of that, one doesn't see any outward signs of it about her."

Lillas gave vent to an irrepressible burst of mirth.

"It would be interesting to know what outward signs you expected to see," she said.

"To be logical one ought to see in a believer in the Old Testament signs of deep immorality and depravity," he said; "but women never are logical, are they?"

"Very rarely," agreed Miss Herne. "Mrs. Macleod



## The Portals of Love

certainly isn't, and she gets extremely angry when any one points that out to her; but she is one of the kindest and best-meaning women in the world."

"Ah! they all are," agreed Ulvadale, "so were the inquisitors. I daresay Samuel really believed he was doing a kind action when he hacked Agag to pieces."

She got up suddenly, perceiving a distrait look on her uncle's face as he began wandering about the room.

"I must attend to my duties. Come and help me to get up some Bridge," she said. "We've still an hour before dressing time."

In ten minutes comparative silence had fallen on the room, even the voice of Mrs. Macleod had ceased to trouble as she sat with the Prince as her partner absorbed in her cards.

The next day was a free one for Keith Tytler, and he determined to try for the third time to find Kirsty Hislop, the spae-wife.

Twice before he had been to her cottage only to find it locked up and the owner absent, he had not cared to inquire where.

He was shy of being seen approaching her door for two reasons—he did not wish the neighbours to attribute superstition to him which might reach the Macleod's ears, and he did not want the rumour to get about amongst the village gossips that he was calling upon Kirsty for purposes connected with the disappearance of Torquil Grant, an interpretation which was pretty sure to be put on his visit, should it come to be known of.

The twelfth had dawned ideally, with a blue sky flecked with fleecy clouds, and a sea rippling like diamonds under a gentle south-west wind, which tempered a fairly warm day. The ladies were to lunch with the men, and Roddie had been permitted to accompany them, so Tytler was free to dispose of several hours. He chose the dinner hour as the most likely

## The Portals of Love

moment to find the object of his quest, and it was just on half-past twelve when he knocked softly at the door of the low-browed thatched house, and without waiting for a reply entered.

The old woman was seated at the table partaking of a meal, consisting of tea and bread. She looked up with a low muttering as Keith closed the door behind him, and took no notice of his polite "good-morning".

"May I have a little conversation with you?" he asked, seating himself on a rickety wooden chair, and drawing it up to the table.

Kirsty glanced round at him suspiciously—she was by no means unpleasant looking. In her youth she had possessed more than an average share of beauty, and now though her face was covered by a network of wrinkles the features still preserved their clear-cut outlines, the pale greenish eyes still sparkled with the alertness of youth.

"What is it you're wanting?" she asked ungraciously. "You know well I've no dealings with the minister, so what brings his son here?"

She spoke for her class in what might almost have been termed a cultured manner, but she was a native of Inverness where the accent is purer than in any other part of Scotland. It is not uncommon for a native of Inverness to possess the supreme test of culture in accent—the impossibility of locating the nationality of the speaker. Keith smiled across at her.

"To put your mind at ease I may say at once that he hasn't sent me. I've come on business of my own, Mrs. Hislop," he replied.

"And what may that be?" she inquired, with a touch of sarcasm.

"I want you to tell me where Torquil Grant is." He launched forth the words with deep earnestness, and leaning forward looked straight into her strange eyes.



## The Portals of Love

For a moment she met his gaze steadily, and he could feel that she was intent on reading his thoughts ; then she withdrew her eyes and leaning back in her chair she began to laugh.

"What concern is it of yours where Torquil Grant lies?" she asked, glancing round at him as if the subject was one of exceeding mirth.

He took note instantly of the word "lies". It suggested death, and he at once felt more confident of learning something definite. Kirsty was not the woman to make a heedless slip of the tongue.

"Perhaps it concerns me more closely than you think," he said again.

"Maybe it does, maybe it doesn't. I'm not disputing the point. You're like most folk in this world, you're always looking across the sea for what you want to find, instead of looking amongst your own feet. You're like your father in that, he's always looking either up to heaven or down into hell, and taking no thought for his own flesh and blood ; but look you here, Mr. Tytler, his pride will have a fall—it's the spiritual pride that has the longest drop."

"I daresay he'll have to learn to become more tolerant before he dies," remarked Keith, humouring her in the hope of something more interesting to follow.

She bent her head over her cup and stared hard into the dark-brown liquid it contained.

"There's one he despises now that will be raised up far above him," she muttered. "I see strange happenings in Seaview, and it's her that will know where Torquil Grant lies, and no other."

She lifted her eyes and looked at him with a strange elation ; her gaunt frame quivered as if under some strong excitement.

He controlled his own keen interest and desire and spoke as naturally as he could.

## The Portals of Love

"You mean my sister?"

Her eyes sparkled with something more than animation.

"It's her I mean and no other," she muttered; "and if you were not very dear to her it would not be Kirsty Hislop's voice that now speaks. But, my lad, take Kirsty's advice: seek no more now to find out where lies Torquil Grant. There are things that are better left with God, and that's one of them. 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, saith the Lord,' and maybe His vengeance won't chime in with what men call human justice, so just leave it alone and content yourself with ignorance, which is what your father's always done, and which on this matter you may wisely follow. It's a safe thing to be able to say you don't know, and it's safer to say it when it's true than when it's false, and you'd be a mighty poor hand at lying."

Her ambiguity was intensely irritating to him; of much she had said he could make no sense. What he had gathered was that Grant was dead, this she certainly believed; but was she right or was she wrong?

Suddenly he leaned forward to her again.

"How do you know those things, Kirsty? What is the meaning of your strange power of foretelling, for I know you can foretell. I remember about — John Macrae."

A sudden smile crossed her face and faded again.

"Out of the secret places of thought, lad, that's where they come from," she whispered. "The ways of the unseen are manifold, and must be sought alone, and the soul set free to listen to the voice. Should you desire the leading of the Spirit you must number your days so that there may be great spaces of solitude to let in the hushed silences which bring the echo of the eternal voices."

He looked at her with astonishment; such words came strangely from her, as she sat in her patched,



## The Portals of Love

threadbare garments, amid surroundings which suggested absolute poverty. Yet there were certain points about the room which were only just beginning to dawn upon him. Some beautiful foreign shells and corals adorned the mantelshelf; over the box-bed was spread an old Persian rug; from the ceiling depended a dried sunfish, and a large bit of unpolished jade reposed beside a Chinese idol on the dresser, which was crowded by odd bits of good old china. He recognised that all those treasures were gifts from those who had sought her aid and found it serviceable. He had heard that sailors before going to sea consulted her as to their fate, and that turning out to be of a propitious nature some curio bought in an eastern port had been her reward on their safe return.

As he bent towards her she laid her brown hand for a moment on his head and fell into her ordinary vernacular.

"There's luck in store for you, my lad," she whispered, "and it's never a minister that you'll be. It's no gospel shop will tie your tongue and conscience. You're one that's born free. I see the mark upon you, and you'll get your heart's desire."

"Do you know my heart's desire?" he asked, and was conscious of changing colour as he raised his eyes to hers.

"Maybe I do, maybe I don't, that's neither here nor there; but what I tell you is true, and now you can go and leave me to my dinner."

He felt himself dismissed, and that it would be discourteous to remain longer. He rose and held out his hand. "May I come again?" he asked.

She looked up at him keenly and critically as if to fathom his motives.

"Yes, lad, come again when you like, and keep your own counsel; remember the tongue's a more dangerous weapon than the hand, and let Torquil Grant lie; he's

## The Portals of Love

got water for his bed, and, next to fire, it makes the cleanest shroud a corpse can be wrapped in."

He let himself out of the cottage in a strange state of mind. He had gone in as more or less of a sceptic—he would never have dreamed of going near Kirsty had he not promised his sister that he would—and now he felt a deep conviction that Elizabeth and Kirsty were right. Torquil Grant was dead—drowned—her words could convey no other meaning. She had not stated he was murdered, but her warning to him to inquire no further and to leave vengeance to God was plainly stating that such was her belief. Who could be the murderer? Who was this secret enemy whom Grant undoubtedly possessed, and who still roamed free and undetected? Had any one at that moment told Tytler that the guilt lay upon the head of Malcolm Macleod he would have utterly disbelieved it. He would have remembered that tranquil quarter of an hour when the household had met for family prayers, but a quarter of an hour after Torquil Grant must have been done to death, and would stoutly have declined to believe it possible that the murderer himself and his accomplice in evading the consequences could have thus calmly comported themselves. He walked home in a state of deep abstraction, he could make nothing of the problem, but he at once sat down on reaching his room and wrote as full and detailed an account as he could remember of his interview with Kirsty Hislop, and that letter he addressed to Miss Percival, 200 Shaftsbury Avenue, London, W., and with his own hand he dropped it into the post-office.



## CHAPTER X

WHEN Macleod of the Fastness entertained he did it thoroughly well. On his vast moors there was no lack of game ; his bags would compare in number with any in the North, and within the Castle he saw for himself that all went off with *éclat*, and that his guests were made as much at home as possible. This meant to him matching his parties and for the time being falling into their mode of life, so far as he was able.

The house party assembled for the twelfth were all picked persons from out that circle which is supposed to compose the entourage of Royal personages, and no one who was acquainted with the strict *régime* of the Fastness on ordinary occasions would have known it under present conditions. Macleod never consulted his wife about his list of guests, he arranged that quietly with Miss Herne and then carried the names to Mrs. Macleod and desired her to write the invitations. She knew very little about the visitors, and never became very much enlightened, as they had neither the time nor inclination to explain themselves ; and their hostess understood practically nothing of their topics of conversation which were very often about themselves and the doings of their intimates. She heard many things discussed which shocked her amazingly, but she never said so. All that vast world of modern thought which the modern woman of the world dips into and catches up sufficiently correctly to talk upon with some show of knowledge was to her an unknown quantity. The vast subject of the occult which now honeycombs

## The Portals of Love

society in all its grades was a strange language of which she knew nothing. The latest stage at which the higher criticism had arrived, and the latest anonymous production by a new interpreter of Christianity she heard glibly discussed and criticised, then pushed aside for some other startling interpretation of the theory of evolution. To poor Mrs. Macleod it was all a curious jumble of unknown theories from out a world to which she was a total stranger and in her secret soul thought wicked and irreligious.

She acquired a certain amount of satisfaction in entertaining so many distinguished members of the Peerage, and quietly held her tongue when they discussed those many subjects of which she was ignorant. That freemasonry which exists amongst that particular set and class, in which all is known about the pet ailments, virtues, vices and peccadilloes of its members was also a mystery to Mrs. Macleod. It needs a good memory and a particular type of intellect to pick up and acquire its technicalities if one is not born into it, and that was the species of intellect Mrs. Macleod did not possess and never could have cultivated. She was quite aware that she was entirely out of it and never would be in it, and it was a constant source of wonder to her how Liliias, who lived as retired a life as she did, seemed *au fait* with all the little dealings and doings of that particular circle.

Lady Tynmouth was the bright particular star of the party, a clever, brilliant woman in her way, with an energy suggesting a fine constitution and which carried with it an irradicable curiosity. She and the Prince pursued a continuous banter as they sat side by side at lunch or after dinner in the drawing-room.

The twelfth had fallen on a Friday, and Saturday had again been occupied by excellent sport. On Monday and Tuesday the remaining moors were to be visited and the party was to break up the following day.



## The Portals of Love

On such an occasion as the present Sunday was very much like other days, with the exception that there was no shooting and that several members of the party went to church, it must be confessed more out of curiosity than in hopes of deriving any benefit thereof. To Mrs. Macleod's annoyance the Prince, whose official business it was to observe the Sabbath for a few hours, announced his intention of attending the Episcopal Church which was situated seven miles away, and she as hostess had to accompany him, her husband, Roderick and Tytler going as usual to the kirk escorted by Lady Milbourne, a *passée* beauty of uncertain age, and Miss Herne. It was a dull cold day, rather inclined to rain, and none of the party was sorry to be once more indoors again. A fire had been lighted in both fireplaces in the spacious drawing-room and drew the chilly members towards its warmth whilst they waited for the luncheon-gong to ring.

"Ah! Mrs. Macleod, I do hope you have enjoyed yourself as much as I have," cried Lady Milbourne, looking round with a smile on her face as her hostess entered. "I have been thoroughly entertained by that quaint old person who preached in the kirk."

"Did he give you a good sermon?" asked Mrs. Macleod uneasily. She had failed to accustom herself to observations not meant for literal acceptance.

"Perfectly delicious, my dear! We all revelled in it, did we not, Miss Herne? He described the ark in the most graphic manner just as if it had been his own houseboat, and as if he really believed in the possibility of the thing."

"Perhaps he does believe in it," suggested Lilius quietly, whilst Mrs. Macleod forced an artificial smile and glanced at Roderick to see if he was listening. He was, and with both ears, and the unhappy mother cast about in her mind for some excuse to dismiss him from the room, but finding none gave up the idea.

## The Portals of Love

"I wish I had gone there," chimed in the Prince, "we had a beastly dull sermon, the twaddle one usually hears in the country."

"When we women get the vote we mean to begin educating the clergy," remarked Lady Tynmouth; "they've been trying for centuries to educate us but we mean to turn the tables."

"I think we ought to begin with our own sex. I should advocate beginning at once and not waiting for the vote," observed Lilius.

Lady Tynmouth looked angry.

"Why, you don't mean to say you are against us?" she questioned sharply.

"I see no use in adding illiteracy to the already illiterate mass; the enormous majority of women are still too mentally servile to be of any use politically," replied Miss Herne.

"I guess they'd have made havoc with the Education Bill," murmured Lord Tynmouth. "The parson chaps have too much power as it is. I'm sorry Birrell hadn't more courage. Religious instruction ought to be placed once for all in its proper quarter, the home. Women are too reactionary to be given a vote."

"Considering that we have been married for twenty years, that is an extraordinary statement to make," said his wife.

"We all know that there are any amount of enlightened and cultured women like yourself, Lady Tynmouth," chimed in Kenneth Macleod; "but do not let us forget the overwhelming majority who still give over mind and conscience to the Church; that fact constitutes the keynote of man's objection to the enfranchisement of women. Women keep the Church alive, and I regret to add that they also keep active the insincerity of the clergy."

"Hear, hear!" exclaimed Lady Milbourne, clapping her hands. "That must always be so, as long as they



## The Portals of Love

insist on clinging to exploded dogmas such as we heard preached to-day."

"Any chap can see the antiquity of the Deluge legend by strolling into the British Museum and looking at the terra-cotta tablets," remarked Kenneth. "Of course the Bible account is very modern in comparison."

"Country ministers ought not to tackle such subjects," grumbled Lord Tynmouth; "they haven't access to the literature of modern criticism. How can they be expected to know that there is scarcely any considerable race of men amongst whom the Deluge tradition does not exist, and they always destroyed the entire human race except their own progenitors."

"The Bible narrative was copied from the Chaldean as given by Berosus, the historian," observed Lord Milbourne dogmatically.

Mrs. Macleod looked into the fire. How could the Bible, which was the word of God, be copied from anything, she wondered indignantly.

"The Egyptian Bible, by far the oldest in the world, knew nothing of the Deluge," remarked Sir George West, who spent every winter amongst the desert tombs at Luxor.

Roderick had been listening intently to the conversation, the sermon had given him a great deal of anxious cogitation. During an unfortunate pause in the murmur of voices at lunch he raised his high young treble.

"Please, Lord Milbourne, how did Noah find room for all the birds and beasts and insects, and how did they live so long without air, for Noah didn't open the windows till they had been shut up for two months, and how did he feed——"

Lord Milbourne held up his hand in feeble protest and smiled.

## The Portals of Love

"Ask me another, my boy," he said. "You may as well ask if Noah took soundings as he seemed to know the depth of the water."

"Roderick, how dare you bother Lord Milbourne," broke in Mrs. Macleod angrily. If only his father had permitted him to dine upstairs she thought desperately.

"We are all brought up on those interesting old fables, my boy," remarked Milbourne good-naturedly; "but bless you, they don't hurt, we've got strong digestions when we're young."

"When we're young we are absolutely nurtured on lies," murmured his wife plaintively. "I never could see why children are supposed to be incapable of accepting the truth. All my sister's children firmly believe they arrived in the doctor's pocket. Such a vulgar idea," she whispered across to her hostess.

Mrs. Macleod blushed. All the wonderful phenomena of creation were to her indecent.

"There are so many different sorts of lies nowadays," remarked Lilius to Macleod. He laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"Are there?" he said. "I know there are two sorts of liars, the man who intends if possible to keep his word and the man who doesn't."

"There's the evasive lie," chimed in Lady Tynmouth, "the colouring or narrative lie, the conventional lie and the lie absolute."

"Ah! but remember that the object of the fashionable *raconteurs* is to please and amuse and touch the emotions. It is merely an impertinence to question his accuracy in detail," objected Miss Herne.

"I know the evasive lie, having been in Parliament," said Sir George West. "The evasive acrobatic lie is what all able ministers of extreme conscientiousness and sensitiveness confine themselves to."

"A few not romantically scrupulous ministers in my profession follow their example with rhetorical dex-



## The Portals of Love

terity," remarked Kenneth Macleod, with a smile of reminiscence.

"I have known diplomacy when asked troublesome questions have recourse to suppression of truth, suggested falsehood or a combination of the two," said Tynmouth.

"Society could not exist were the truth always told," declared his wife. "Austere veracity is utterly incompatible with good manners, amiability or common civility."

"That is one of those truths which has grown into a platitude, my dear," he answered.

"Life itself is the greatest platitude," sighed Lady Milbourne dreamily. "It is just like the artichoke I am now eating. I slowly and ponderously pick off one tiny leaf after another, nibbling a tiny portion from each until at last, just as I am becoming horribly bored, I come to the heart which is all eating and no picking."

"The main thing is to know when you've got to the heart of life," said Ulvadale; "you've got to know yourself first."

"Oh! don't trot out that old Delphic rot," cried Sir George irritably. "Know thyself! All very well, but how? It's like telling a pair of scales to weigh themselves."

Roderick had been punished as usual for asking awkward questions and had resignedly set himself down to his usual task of committing six verses of Genesis to memory. Keith Tytler left him alone to complete the work, and at Ulvadale's request set off with him for a walk across the cliffs.

At first they discussed ordinary topics, but before long Ulvadale entered upon the subject he had at heart.

"What are you going to do with your life?" he asked. "Are you going to follow your father's profession or not?"

## The Portals of Love

Keith hesitated for a second, then he spoke out boldly.

"No, I am not. The fact is, Lord Ulvadale, I have formed a series of opinions which differ altogether from those of my father and which make my entering the Church impossible."

"I guessed as much," observed Ulvadale. "Your case is only one of many; it is getting harder and harder to find men who will subscribe to the old dogmas. Every year there is a decrease in the number of those who select the Church as a profession. I should feel the same were I in your place. Don't imagine for a moment that I slight the possibilities of greatness lying in the profession, but the difficulties in Scotland are too great for an educated man of the present day to struggle against, unless he's a rank hypocrite. The old men are crystallised and content with what they have. It's different in England, but that's no use to you. Have you got any other aim in view? You can't go on being a tutor all your life."

"I shouldn't wish to be," answered Keith, "but at present I've nothing in view. What I should like would be literary work, in fact I would take any work which did not bind my conscience down to any particular line of thought."

"Right," said Ulvadale approvingly. "I just wanted to know your ideas on the subject, for when the time does come I'm willing to give you a leg up. Such interest as I possess I shall be glad to use in your service; so come to me when you're ready and we'll see what we can do conjointly to get you suitable employment."

Keith thanked him warmly for his kindness. Here was indeed a friend raised up to help him in his future difficulties which he saw approaching fast.

"How long do you propose remaining on here?" asked Ulvadale, waving off his thanks.

"Till about Christmas," Keith replied, "unless I'm



## The Portals of Love

unmasked and kicked out before then. I'm fond of Roderick and believe I do help him out of his many difficulties, but it's an awkward position."

"Very, I should say," assented Ulvadale drily. "Those dear, good uncultured women are the very devil with their obstinacy. They are too stupid to learn and too lazy to think. That sort of woman plays the mischief with our boys. They rear them on the old fables, and then when they go out into the world and discover the lies they have been taught they go off at a tangent and believe in nothing; that was very nearly my case."

"It is what I'm afraid of with Roddie," said Keith. "His mother insists he is taught what she believes, that the world was made in six days, stars before planets, grass before light, and all the rest of that nonsense; he'll turn round on her some day."

"Of course, but there's nothing to be done with crass ignorance such as that, and naturally one doesn't wish to interfere with her plans or with her offspring; the only way out is to leave the work alone. Let some other chap take it on, there are any amount of men who will swear black's white if they're paid for it. Take my advice, chuck it, you're worth something better than to lie to a wretched kid."

"The fact is I can't preach what I don't believe, Lord Ulvadale. If I were permitted to preach on the majesty of God and on the wonders of creation, on the simple ethics of life and on right conduct, truth, honesty, morality, I could throw myself heart and soul into it, but as you know I may not do that. I am bound down to assertions I utterly repudiate. I feel so certain the highest science must be the truest theology, that they must ultimately be mutually consistent and actually one. No two parts or aspects of the universe can be permanently discordant."

"Exactly," said Ulvadale; "but that happy hour

## The Portals of Love

has not yet struck—there's a lot of education to be gone through before it does ; therefore you must chuck it if you're an honest man, that settles the matter. I'll be in London very shortly. Call on me at the Bachelor's and I'll see what I can do. I can't stand your father's perorations, yet I admit there's something fine in his immense sincerity, the heroic grandeur of his faith is a survival of the gloomy mental habit of the Middle Ages. Lady Milbourne would say he was the reincarnation of Calvin."

"He's terribly intolerant," admitted Keith ; "he's a slave to his convictions and absolutely blind in his prejudices."

Ulvadale shook his head.

"And the worst of it is that in this world it isn't the blind who lead the blind, but the blind who lead the seeing and push them into every ditch they come across."

"No man is free who isn't willing that others should be free," said Keith.

Ulvadale smiled a trifle sadly.

"We are all rather like that, my boy. We think we have attained freedom when we've only attained toleration. I don't know how you feel about it, but I want no one to tolerate me. It's an insult. I claim the right to think my own thoughts whether they agree with other people's or not ; but you know the old saying, 'Orthodoxy is my doxy, heterodoxy is every one else's doxy'. You may know when you're called a crank, as you very often will be, that it means some chap is trying to convince you instead of letting you convince him. So it goes on. We're all rather apt to forget that truth is no stationary thing—it grows as we grow, it widens out like the rings of water on a quiet pool. The only thing to do is to make the best of one's opportunities for learning whilst the sun still rises on the just and the unjust, and the tares and the wheat still grow peacefully together."



## CHAPTER XI

A DEEP gloom had fallen upon the Fastness—the pall of death and irreparable loss. The heir to the property was dead, and Roderick, his half-brother, was called to his place as the future possessor of that fine inheritance.

It had been in the dark days of November that a telegram had come from over the seas to announce the intelligence. It had been signed by the unknown name of Williamson, and it intimated that a letter was on its way, giving all details.

For two days afterwards few persons saw the laird. He shut himself up in his own room and took his sorrow in silence and solitude, and it was his wife who announced the blow to the household, which was followed by a paragraph in the papers to the effect that Captain Malcolm Macleod had died suddenly of pneumonia in Melbourne, Australia.

Lilias Herne also kept herself wrapped in solitude through that gloomy time, during which the elements seemed to moan without in accord with the profound melancholy reigning within.

A succession of heavy storms raged furiously over sea and land, exacting their yearly toll of dead from out the fishing community, and great forest trees fell a prey to the wild onslaught of the north-east gales which devastated the coast and ravished the woods far inland. Autumn now hung upon the verge of its grave, and thick hoar frosts made the country look grey with fear till the tardy sun arose and threw a

## The Portals of Love

wan smile of departing glory over the remains of the vanished summer. Winter was nigh with its rotting rains, its wild storms and drifting snows.

There was much genuine sorrow and regret throughout the length and breadth of Macleod's domains when the news spread that the heir was no more. He had been a favourite with all sorts and conditions of men and women. His frank geniality and liberal open-handedness had endeared him to his father's people, and those who had known him from boyhood and watched him grow up in their midst heard with sad regret of the premature cutting off of so promising a young life. It was prophesied that his father would not long survive him, and that Roderick, when arriving at his majority, would make but a poor substitute—a boy who was pampered at home by his mother, and idolised and spoiled by his father.

To Liliass Herne those were hard and bitter days, and with a stealth amounting almost to hatred she watched the attitude of her uncle in his simulated grief. Condolences poured in on the Fastness, and she thought constantly of those letters which Macleod sat for hours penning in reply to the numerous friends and acquaintances who hastened to express their deep sympathy and regret. All fear of the murder being found out had passed from her—she could detect no one person whose interest it was to pursue the vain inquiry. The dead man's few relations had arranged his affairs and possessed themselves temporarily if not permanently of his personal belongings. It was recognised that he could never return to claim them, and Macleod was looked upon as a very generous loser. The few onlookers who had spoken of murder had not gone beyond speech. It was not their business to investigate, and the police had from the first adopted Macleod's theory, that for some reason only known to himself Grant had absconded with three thousand pounds and would never more



## The Portals of Love

be heard of. Instant arrest would greet him if he attempted to set foot this side the Channel. They concluded no one knew that better than the runaway. Miss Herne saw clearly that suspicion would never fall on her uncle or Malcolm. Their worldly position exempted them from all doubt in the mind of the world, which invariably forgets that the same nature may dwell under the silken robe of a king as under the rags of a beggar. Now that poor Malcolm was dead, dead to the world as if he had been brought home to lie in the family vault, her last fears vanished, and for some days she gave herself up to the luxury of unrestricted grief, feeling safe in the belief that it would be put down to the one cause—the death of her cousin.

To Mrs. Macleod the news brought many emotions ; her kind heart was genuinely touched by the loss of her husband's first-born, but her grief was tempered by the knowledge that her own son was now heir to the Fastness. It was natural that this should be so, and in the midst of her external mourning her heart fluttered with pride and joy at Roderick's altered prospects. She found herself thinking over this at all times, even in the middle of the long prayers Mr. Tytler thought it necessary to offer up during his frequent visits. He spoke doubtfully of Malcolm's prospects in the heaven world, never seeming to be quite sure whether he should be thought of as suffering eternal torments or lying snugly in Abraham's bosom, but he counselled hope for the latter result, and spoke to Roderick with terrifying warnings upon his brother's untimely fate. During that period Keith had an anxious time with his pupil, who was in a curious mental condition of sorrow for his brother's loss, anxiety for his present whereabouts and consternation as to whether his own beliefs were firmly enough rooted to secure salvation for himself when his time should come. Tytler had impressed upon him that unless he believed absolutely in the blood of Christ

## The Portals of Love

it was wholly impossible he could be saved, and his bitter regret was that he had not ascertained Malcolm's beliefs before he departed. In vain Keith counselled his relying on the love, justice and mercy of God; his thoughts were firmly fixed on the old-world theory of the Atonement, and though he could not understand how an all-powerful God and Creator had managed His affairs so badly as to necessitate the sacrifice of His own Son to redeem a world which was already absolutely at His mercy and command, still the belief had been so deeply impressed upon him that it rarely was absent from his mind for any length of time, and caused him acute suffering.

Keith Tytler saw with a sad heart how deeply Lilius Herne felt the death of her lover. They had grown insensibly into a firm friendship, and when she withdrew herself into the solitude of her own apartments and remained there, rarely coming out to mingle in the family life, he missed her presence and companionship sorely. Every one remarked how splendidly brave Macleod was in his loss. After the first day or two he went about his ordinary avocations, though his aspect was one of deep gravity and a rather repellent aloofness, but Miss Herne's behaviour suggested to several onlookers that the heir to the Fastness had been more to her than cousin and friend. None saw this more clearly than Keith Tytler, and his timidly offered condolences had provoked such a tempest of sorrow that he had felt that for the time being the girl was better left to herself, till the first fresh pangs of her grief should have worn themselves out. He had begun to feel an intense longing to get away for a few days for change of air and scene, and a letter from his sister precipitated his actions and decided him to apply at once to Macleod to grant him a week's leave.

Elizabeth wrote of Malcolm's death with manifest sorrow and regret, calling him the best friend ever a



## The Portals of Love

woman had, and that in losing him she was bereft of one to whom she owed a debt which could never be paid. She spoke again of Grant, reiterating her firm conviction that he was dead, and expressing regret that the necessity of earning her living prevented her returning to Seaview and pursuing her inquiries in person. She urged Keith to petition immediately for a holiday, and to come to London and stay with her in her flat, where a bedroom awaited him, and where she had much to discuss with him.

He considered deeply his future plans as he walked that afternoon upon the wild, wind-swept cliffs, her letter in his pocket which he read and re-read many times. There was Ulvadale's promise also to consider. Had the time not come when it was his duty to make an open confession to his father of his changed intentions? Was he not almost a traitor in continuing his present occupation when it not only did violence to his most profound and earnest convictions, but also was carried out at the expense of subterfuge and hypocrisy to those whom he served. He hated his task more intensely every day. The narrow, cruel dogmas he was forced to instil into his pupil, his extreme difficulty in meeting the boy's intelligent questions made his work extremely hard and most obnoxious. The thought of leaving the Fastness and Lilius Herne made him intensely miserable and wretched, but conscience, that still small voice, cried out within him in no uncertain tones. Before he had finished his walk he had made up his mind that the time had come when he must bravely face the consequences of his own beliefs, and go out into the world of men to fight for himself—a world where the breadth of his views would not be counted as a sin unto him, but rather the reverse. He felt that the friendship now subsisting between himself and Miss Herne almost necessitated his acquainting her first with his determination. She would

## The Portals of Love

understand, she would not condemn, and her sound common-sense and shrewd worldly judgment would be of inestimable value to him in this crisis in his life. Often it had been on the tip of his tongue to tell her he had seen his sister, and what her life now was, but some shyness had always restrained him from mentioning her. Now he determined to acquaint her with Elizabeth's success, and of the fact that he was going to see her if Macleod would give him a few days' leave.

About an hour before the dressing-bell rang he made his way to Miss Herne's apartments and knocked softly at her sitting-room door. She bade him enter and he found her sitting reading before a bright fire.

She looked at him with an inquiry on her face as she bade him draw up a chair and sit down. He had never voluntarily come to her room, though several times she had invited him to do so. In the bright light of her reading-lamp it struck him with a sudden pang of sorrow to see how altered she was. How worn and pale was her face, with that far-seeing look of trouble and experience which stamps a face with age as nothing else does. Her black frock seemed to throw up the pallor of her face and make her much slighter in figure than she formerly had been.

"I have come to ask your advice. I hope you won't mind my interrupting your reading for a little," he said, gently and a trifle anxiously.

She laid down her book and smiled sadly. "I have all my life in which to read, but one cannot always hope to have the confidence and companionship of a friend," she answered. "We have become great friends, Keith—have we not?"

He could have gone down on his knees and kissed the hem of her garment in the fervency and gratitude of his deep joy at her words. For a moment he literally could not speak, so moved was he. She saw



## The Portals of Love

something of what he felt in the intense radiating light which shone in his eyes.

"Your friendship is the one thing in my life," he said at last, and his voice was firm and deeply grave. "I look upon it as the best, the greatest gift the Almighty has bestowed upon me."

She looked at him with very tender eyes.

"Amen," she uttered softly, then she looked before her into the glowing heart of the fire.

"Tell me of your troubles," she said, "for through the suffering of my own heart, I may be able to help you."

It was the first time she had directly referred to what she suffered, and her words touched him with a deep reverence for her. They were two lonely souls, she as isolated as himself. What more natural than that they should be drawn together.

"I have come to a determination. I am going to leave the Fastness," he said slowly.

She filled in his pause.

"So am I," she said simply.

The announcement startled and elated him, yet at the same second it brought a fear. He looked at her hesitatingly, the colour coming into his cheeks.

"I am going to live in London—to take up my permanent abode there," she said, but she did not add, "I am going to leave this place I have learned to hate with the horrors of its history. The hideous drama may unfold itself afterwards as it pleases. Malcolm is dead, nothing else matters,"—"but go on with what you were saying, you also were going to leave—why?"

"Because I am living a lie so long as I remain under this roof and eat the bread of my employers," he exclaimed.

She looked round at him with a curious smile.

"Yes! That is true. I have long thought so," she remarked.

## The Portals of Love

He shrank away from her eyes, as if in overwhelming shame; her words stabbed him acutely and she saw it.

"I have never blamed you. I think you have done right to pause before throwing up your means of livelihood, before finally committing yourself, but I knew it was bound to come. It will be a great upheaval in your life; you were right not to act precipitately in so momentous a crisis. I presume you have renounced all thoughts of becoming a minister?"

"Absolutely," he replied. "I have carefully questioned and examined my own heart. I am helpless in the firmness of my own convictions—they hold me in a vice of steel. I cannot argue against them."

"Why should you?" she asked quietly.

He made an eloquent gesture, half of despair, half of resignation.

"If I could have believed what I have been taught, it would have been easier, better."

She shook her head decidedly.

"Your reason is given you to use, not crush under. Life is a flowing river, not a stagnant pool. What is truth? No fixed quantity. What is it to your father? Merely the stage his intellectual development has reached. Truth to you is the milestone of your reasoning faculties at which you have arrived. Realise that you have a long way still to travel, and that many more such milestones are before you, and you will do all right. It is the mind which closes its doors and writes *Finis* upon them that is so hopeless."

"I know and have already realised the truth of your words," he said gravely. "I have no fear for myself, but I deeply regret the sorrow I must bring upon my parents, who have only me to look to now."

"You cannot help that," she said firmly. "Each soul must work out its own salvation. The world is many years older since your father chose his belief;



## The Portals of Love

time has moved on, evolution marches and has left him behind. I always thought he treated your sister with the cruellest harshness. You must not mind my speaking of her, now we are talking confidentially together. I do not wish to criticise or inquire into your private home life and its troubles, but I must let you know that my sympathies all go out to the lost Elizabeth, wherever she may be; and if I knew where she was, I should go and tell her my opinion of the way in which she has been treated and try to be a friend to her."

His eyes were soft as a woman's as he looked at her with profound admiration.

"I know where she is. I meant to tell you now, this evening. I am going to see her—she is doing well—oh! splendidly, and earning a large salary."

She stared at him in surprise; his news was wholly unexpected, but it pleased her to hear it.

"Why! how could you keep all this to yourself?" she cried, "that isn't friendship. Why on earth didn't you tell me before?"

"I did not like to. I thought perhaps you looked upon her in something of the same light as Mrs. Macleod does," he stammered.

"Mrs. Macleod!" she exclaimed, with superb disdain. "Did you ever know me look upon any subject in the same light as Mrs. Macleod? Tell me instantly all you know."

"She is an actress—the principal actress in the National Theatre," he said. "Her stage name is Miss Percival—Violet Percival."

She gazed at him half-incredulously.

"You mean to tell me that Elizabeth Tytler and Violet Percival are one and the same person?" she questioned.

"They are—you have heard of her?"

Miss Herne lay back in her chair and laughed.

## The Portals of Love

"Heard of her! Well, rather! Oh! what a strange and wonderful world this is. Is there anything impossible in the whole universe, I wonder. Why, Violet Percival is said to be the most beautiful woman in England—men, and women also, rave about her."

"I'm very proud of her," he said, with a deep note of pleasure and tender earnestness in his voice.

She fell into a train of thought for a few moments, out of which he dared not wake her, till at last she spoke again.

"So you are going to see her," she asked. "When?"

"I intend to ask for a week's holiday to-morrow. I shall start for London as soon as possible after; but there is one thing I must ask you, and that is to keep secret my sister's identity. She was here at Seaview for a few hours this summer—she came to see my father and mother, but with no better luck. My father was every bit as angry and intolerant as before, and ordered her out of the house. He considers she is a lost creature, fallen so low as to be beneath even pity. They have no idea at home who she is. All they know, or want to know, is the unpardonable fact that she is on the stage."

Her face took on an expression of bitter contempt.

"I can understand your father, but your mother!" She broke off as if too contemptuous and scornful to proceed.

"My mother is deeply to be pitied," he hastened to say. "What is she to do? If she attempted to disagree with my father she could not live under the same roof."

"Were I in her place I should not attempt to live under the same roof," she flashed out. "I should go and join my daughter and leave him alone with his bigotry."

He shook his head sadly.

"She believes her duty lies at home," he said. "She



## The Portals of Love

suffers greatly, but she has much work to do in the parish, and she considers her first duty is to her husband and his flock. We talked it over quietly—her heart is with Elizabeth, her will is to stay where she is and do what she believes to be her duty. She is willing to leave her daughter in God's hands until He thinks fit to reunite them. It is very pathetic how she longs for death. And now I am going to bring another great sorrow into her life."

All the bright anger and contempt died out of her face. She suddenly realised how terrible a tragedy was about to be enacted in the Manse, in this little, homely northern parish, with its little, petty gossip and unenlightened ways and beliefs. Hearts were to be broken, lives were to be crushed and blighted, all of which were no doubt as dear to the Almighty as the hearts and lives of the most brilliant philosophers and geniuses in the universe. All this sorrow and misery was to be brought about in defence of the Almighty, to whom men refused the power to manage His own created, to whom they persisted in attributing a relentless, cruel intolerance which was but the reflection of their own crass ignorance and stupidity. Suddenly she seemed to understand Mrs. Tytler's position, to understand what the woman suffered in secret and uncomplaining silence and strength. She had always looked upon her as a colourless, uneducated cypher, now she saw rise up before her a courage and faith which had all the strong elements of martyrdom, and which ennobled her exceedingly. There was repentance as well as sorrow in the sad eyes she turned on Keith.

"I understand now and I am deeply, deeply sorry," she said very gently. "I'll tell you what I will do—when the worst is over, I'll go and make friends with your poor mother, and try to comfort her. I suppose when you tell your father you are absolutely

## The Portals of Love

unorthodox, he will treat you as he treated Elizabeth. We can't help that, we must try to bring some hope and brightness into that poor woman's life. I don't intend to leave here till after Christmas. I haven't told a soul but you of my intention as yet, so please don't mention it, and I will go to the Manse directly you have gone to London, and when I'm sure your father is out, and have a good long talk with Mrs. Tytler. A woman's sympathy is always worth having—when it's genuine, as mine is."

"You will be an angel of mercy if you do go," he said. "You take half my misery away. I feel now I can face my father with more courage. I have always feared for the trouble I would bring on mother, never for what I bring on him, he is so adamant in his righteousness."

He told her all his sister's story, as Elizabeth had told it to him, and she listened with the deepest interest. She detected at once his unquestioning and unbounded faith in the girl's moral character, and though she did not believe so absolutely as he did in the purity of Elizabeth Tytler, she still rendered her the benefit of the doubt, and honoured him exceedingly for his implicit confidence in his beloved sister. It pleased her to listen to his eulogy of her courage, cleverness and goodness, but when he arrived at the point where a man, whom he did not name, had advanced her five hundred pounds she took leave to hesitate in her complete absolution of Elizabeth's morals. Her latent doubts in no sense detracted from her desire to see and befriend the girl, rather did her uncertainty accentuate the desire. With the wide-mindedness and absolute independence she possessed she had come to view the errors and delinquencies of human life in a very large and tolerant manner; she refrained from judging knowing that the secret of men's actions can only be known to themselves and their God.



## The Portals of Love

He went on to tell her of Ulvadale's offer to find him employment and use his influence in his favour. It was just like Ulvadale she thought, always kind-hearted and generous; her own heart went out to him in gratitude for the kindness he showed to her friend.

"You will need all your courage during the next few days," she told him. "Every man's hand will be turned against you. Remember that though the Inquisition days are no longer with us, and their scenes of torture impossible, yet the old spirit of the rack and the thumbscrew linger still in the hearts of men. Had your father lived in those days he would have committed any torture for the glory of the Lord. I daresay he is the reincarnation of some old inquisitor."

"I can face it," he said quietly. "I have your approbation of what I am about to do, and I know that it is my duty."

"Yes! It is your duty, and you certainly have my approval and always my friendship. You must remember that during the time that lies before you."

"I am not likely to forget that which I hold most dear," he said, in a low voice of intense feeling. "I suppose Mrs. Macleod won't speak to me again."

"Well! I should doubt it," Liliás answered reluctantly. "She would make no difference in her friendship for you if she followed the promptings of her own heart, but she is too timid to do that. She will fear public opinion, and she will fear for Roddie. She will, I am afraid, believe you may contaminate him with your terrible unorthodoxy; poor dear, she means so well, but she has neither the intellect nor the courage to learn. One feels so horrid in speaking of her as one does. But—well! you know what I mean?"

"Yes! I know very well what you mean," he said, laughing in spite of himself. "And what about Mr. Macleod. How will he take my resignation?"

## The Portals of Love

Her face darkened into seriousness ; some expression passed over it he did not understand and which left him wondering.

"I'm not sure," she said slowly. "It all depends on what sort of humour he's in. He may be in an expansive humour and give himself away ; he may be on guard, in which case he will treat you to a very severe lecture on want of filial duty and presumptuous conceit in your own unformed opinions. I should imagine he would be in the latter condition, it has become second nature to him."

He listened to her with secret surprise, she spoke in sarcastic tones ; what she said came altogether as a new revelation to him. He had always believed Macleod to be in much the same unenlightened state of mind as his wife. As if in answer to his thoughts Lilius went on :—

"Perhaps you haven't discovered it, but he has read a certain amount—old books such as Paine's *Age of Reason*, which is a very one-sided criticism, but he would be very sorry to confess to unorthodoxy. His attitude of mind is that of a great number of clever men who believe that old-fashioned ignorance is good enough for other people, and the less they know the better—enlightenment being only for the elect. He goes to church as an example, and he is just as much alive to the utter nonsense he hears there as you are. He does not take it as an insult to his reason, but an excellent sort of teaching for the infantine minds who imbibe it. Still I don't believe he will be so down upon you as Mrs. Macleod will. He can afford to dare more than she can."

Keith looked gravely into the fire pondering over what she had said. He knew how true it was of many people, it somehow hurt him to think it of Macleod, whom he had always believed to be sincere in a strong, blind, unthinking piety—the sort of piety



## The Portals of Love

the fisher folk possessed, patriarchal, lurid and unquestioning.

Lilias watched his face, noting its seriousness. She wondered if he quite realised that by to-morrow night he might be homeless, at any rate in Scotland; but he did realise it, as he showed when he next spoke.

"I shall see Mr. Macleod directly after breakfast," he said quietly, "then I shall go straight to my father. Even if the worst comes to the worst they must allow me to pack up, and Dr. Bright will give me a bed for the night. If things do turn out like that, may I see you to say good-bye?"

"You will find me here at half-past five," she answered. "In any case I shall expect you, but it will only be *au revoir*, as we will meet again soon. I shall be in London very shortly for at least a week for Christmas shopping. I shan't lose sight of you—never fear."

The dressing-gong had clanged through the corridors some time ago and he rose to leave her.

"We shall feel like conspirators at dinner to-night, shan't we?" he exclaimed boyishly.

"It is just about what we are," she answered smiling, as she moved into her bedroom. "Good luck to you, things may go better than we anticipate."

## CHAPTER XII

DIRECTLY after breakfast the next morning Keith made his way to the business room where Macleod always wrote his letters before going out. He found him seated at his desk, a pile of correspondence before him and his pipe alight in his mouth. He looked up with a tinge of irritation and an interrogation in his dark eyes.

"Well?" he queried rather testily.

Keith lost no time in coming to the point.

"I came to tell you, sir, that I wish to resign my duties at the end of the year, or possibly you may wish me to do so at once. I have decided not to follow my father's profession."

Macleod lay back in his chair and an amused look crept over his face.

"May I inquire why?" he asked.

"My religious opinions do not permit of my joining the ministry. In fact, sir, I think it my duty to tell you that my beliefs would be classed as absolutely unorthodox. Under the circumstances I feel I have no right to go on teaching your son."

Macleod laughed out with genuine amusement. He believed he was talking to a mere child.

"You know what the old Duke of Wellington said: 'You are not asked to believe, you are only asked to say you believe,'" he observed sarcastically.

"But that is just what I find I can't do, sir," Tytler answered respectfully.

Macleod shrugged his shoulders.

"It is a pity for your own sake that you can't. You



## The Portals of Love

young men of the present day are so damned inquisitive. Why should you want to pry into what doesn't concern you? Our religion as it is taught in the churches is an excellent one for the masses. It suits the women down to the ground. If they attend to their household duties they've no time for thinking, and a good job too. What do women want with thinking except to mind their duties. Think what you like, your mind's your own, but don't offer others a piece of it. You don't suppose I wear my heart on my sleeve, do you?"

"I've never thought about it, sir," said Keith, truthfully enough. "I'm only concerned with the fact that I ought to think differently to what I do if I'm to remain in your service and go on teaching Roderick. I want to be honest."

"Honest?" Macleod's brows went up and an ironical smile crossed his lips. "My dear boy, who is honest? We don't now put our hands in another man's pocket or lift his cattle, but we still try to get six to four the better of him in other ways. Don't be a young ass, Tytler. Go on with what you're doing for another year, the boy will be ready then for school and you can take up some profession that suits you. Your private opinions are not my concern, only you must keep them to yourself."

Tytler flushed and looked uncomfortable but determined.

"I'll go on if you wish it to the end of the year, sir," he said quietly, "but the work has become not only uncongenial but hard. The boy is very intelligent and asks questions which under present circumstances can't be answered. He's very sharp indeed and thinks for himself."

"Pshaw! What does that matter?" asked Macleod testily. "Tell him to shut up. If his mother likes all that stuff and nonsense drummed into his head, well,

## The Portals of Love

let her have her way, it really isn't worth disputing about. He'll soon go to school and have something else to think about, and he can read afterwards for himself. It pleases her and it can't hurt him."

"But I maintain that it does hurt him," said Tytler obstinately. "What's the use of teaching him lies instead of facts which he's bound to discover in time. I've got to insist that the world was made in six days instead of six periods. I daren't tell him the account of the Deluge in Genesis is a younger version of the Babylonian legend, or that Ararat is by no means the highest mountain on earth, or that the stars cannot possibly have come into existence after plants, the sun and moon after light."

Macleod's face became suddenly grave, he looked up into Keith's earnest eyes with a severe glance.

"Certainly not. I won't have my boy taught anything of that sort," he said sternly. "Don't you see that if you prove the story of creation and the fall of man to be merely mythology, you bring the whole orthodox scheme to the ground. Do away with the apple, the serpent and the fall, and you do away with the need for the Atonement. If Roddie cares to, when he's older he can find out those things for himself, but he's got to succeed in my place, and he's got to be orthodox whether he likes it or not. I want him to be a quiet and respectable member of society, not a fire-brand. Whatever doubts I have I keep to myself, and so must he when he succeeds. Free-thinkers are always unpopular. He must go on as he's doing, and in years to come he'll probably end as I have, in not troubling his head about the matter. Look at me. I don't bother about who made the world or how long the Creator took to do the job. All I care about is how to get on in it. I don't worry about Jehovah and His tyrannies, and no more will he—he'll just take the good that comes along and be thankful it's no worse.



## The Portals of Love

I was reared just as Roddie is reared, and naturally in the course of time, like every other boy, I discovered all the impossible statements in the Bible were nonsense, and from that moment I never bothered my mind about the matter. I've had other things to attend to in life and more important matters to think about."

"But, sir, can there be anything more important?"

Macleod stared at the determined young speaker; for a second he thought that Tytler was trying to be cynical, but a glance undeceived him.

"It seems to me, sir, that a correct, pure and grand conception of the Almighty is the only important thing in the whole world. Threescore years and ten on earth and eternity elsewhere, presumably with God, means that our short space down here is of little or no account, and the life to come the only thing worth thinking about. I should have liked to save Roderick from flinging aside the whole book as worthless by teaching him its real allegorical meaning. I would have liked to prove to him that a man may come into real touch with his Maker and live a spiritual life, and at the same time do his duty here and attend to his worldly concerns."

Macleod shook his head decidedly.

"You'll become a raving lunatic if you don't mind, Tytler. If you had your own way you'd make the boy as ridiculous as you are yourself. I don't want my heir to be a thinking machine, or to always have his eyes glued to a book; all I want is that he should be a gentleman and a good sportsman. That's served me—it'll serve him. I think upon the whole you're right, we'd better make a change at the New Year. Meanwhile, keep your views to yourself and go on as you're doing, it isn't for long; and take my advice, don't air your opinion in public here—it may answer all right over the border, but in the North we've no desire for more information than we've got. We have

## The Portals of Love

our Sabbath once a week to keep us up to the mark, and I don't believe in prying into abstruse problems; perhaps we've souls, perhaps we haven't—we'll all find out soon enough when we get to the kirkyard. Meanwhile, all that concerns us now is to make the best of things as they are. The boy will have lots of shooting and fishing and stalking. The Fastness is as fine a sporting estate as there is, and to keep up its excellence on all points will give him lots of occupation just as it has given me. Now, do you understand?"

"Perfectly, sir, and thank you," replied Tytler quietly. He understood absolutely the line of thought his employer pursued; it was the line of so many men. "Would you mind giving me a few days' leave? I'm feeling the need of a change rather badly," he asked.

"Certainly, certainly. Take a week whenever you like," Macleod assented pleasantly. "No doubt you have felt with us during this heavy trial. I keep up, but sometimes it is hard."

"I have felt it very deeply, sir. I know how hard it must be to you to be cheerful. I will go to-morrow, Saturday, and return on the following Saturday if agreeable to you."

"That will suit perfectly," answered Macleod. "Now I must go on with business, and by the way, Tytler, not a word of this to my wife. You understand?"

"Perfectly, sir. I shall leave you to mention my coming departure."

He left the room with relief that the interview was over. A still harder interview lay before him which he meant to seek in the afternoon. For two hours he worked with Roderick mechanically; his thoughts, his brain were busy elsewhere. He hardly expected to find such tolerance as Macleod had shown him in his own home. He knew that his struggle with his father



## The Portals of Love

would be sharp and hard ; it might, nay probably would end in total estrangement.

After lunch he set off at once for the Manse, his pupil being taken for a walk by Mrs. Macleod. It was a chilly day, the winter was near at hand in that northern region, but the trailing golden skirts of autumn were yet visible here and there in russet beech hedge and brake. The air was damp and depressing, with a fog creeping in from the sea and shrouding the cliffs and distant woods in a grey pall. There had come the first brief snowfall but a week before ; it had not lain and the flakes in melting had rendered the road heavier than usual. In the sadness of the season Keith looked back on the days of his boyhood when wild winds and stormy waters, springtime and winter were alike to him in his youthful optimism, ere the weight of the moral atmosphere he now laboured under had the power to touch or oppress him.

As he walked briskly towards the Lodge he met the doctor driving through the avenue, taking a short cut to a cottage on the estate. He reined up as he perceived Tytler.

"Where are you off to?" he inquired.

"To the Manse to see my father. I'm going to London to-morrow for a week."

"Going to London, are you? Lucky chap! I wish I'd time to go with you. How are they all at the Castle?"

"They're all right, but naturally not in very good spirits," answered Keith.

"I don't think your mother's looking up to much, Keith. I'm glad you're going to see her," said the doctor gravely.

"She has a hard life, both mentally and physically," replied Tytler.

"That's just it. The power of mind over matter can be exerted in more than one direction. Well! I

## The Portals of Love

must be off. Look in for a few minutes if you've time this evening. I hope to get home about seven."

Keith came up close to the wheel of the cart.

"Could you give me a bed if I require one to-night?" he asked in a whisper, not desiring the groom to hear him.

The handsome face of Dr. Bright bent down over him, there was a twinkle in his eyes.

"Of course I can. So you mean to explode the magazine this very day."

"Yes! The time has come. I must."

"I think you're right, honesty's best. I shall wait results with interest."

Tytler pursued his way to the Manse through the dreary grey of the fading light. The path up to the door was thickly carpeted with withered leaves, sodden and dank. The bare branches of the trees stretching their delicate silhouettes across the low-hanging sky were gemmed by crystal tears which dropped every now and again on mother earth, shaken down by the moaning wind sighing out from the west. He looked up into the grey hopeless-looking sky and back again to the dreary garden—everywhere it was unspeakably dismal.

All the windows facing the front were shrouded by blinds, neither Mrs. Tytler nor Martha Black thinking it worth while to raise them in those short winter days, the living rooms looking to the back, and callers of importance being few and far between.

Keith opened the door and softly entered the house which was silent as a tomb. He passed on down the passage to the sitting-room and looked in. His mother sat by the fire, a large basket of mending by her side. There was something infinitely pathetic in her attitude of bending submission and patience. The worn hands plying the needle, the worn eyes strained over the sheet she was darning. She looked



## The Portals of Love

up with a wan smile of welcome as her son entered, and it struck him she looked very ill and aged. He had not seen her for a week, but even in that short time she appeared to have changed. Sorrow was playing havoc with her frail body and weary mind. He noticed that her eyes were red-rimmed as if from recent weeping. He bent to kiss her cheek, and his heart was heavy within him as he dropped into a seat by her side.

"I've got a week's holiday, mother, you'll be glad to hear," he said with an attempt at cheerfulness. "I'm off to London to-morrow."

A tinge of pink crept into her cheeks, her eyes flashed and she glanced timidly at the door. London meant only one thing to her—Elizabeth.

"To London," she echoed in a whisper, "then you'll see her!"

"Yes, mother, I'm going to stop with her, live under the same roof. Won't it be grand?"

She clasped her hands feverishly and her lips moved mutely; the eyes, tear-laden now, were staring into the fire. She nodded slowly without speaking.

"Have you any message for me to give her, mother?"

She turned and looked at him, a strange smile parting her withered lips.

"Tell her I'll be waiting for her when the long Sabbath of the tomb be past, and, God willing, her hand will be in mine through the valley. She'd be sure to feel a bit lonesome after being used to company, and brightness and life in a great town where there's always lots of folk to keep her company. She'll be glad to see her old mother waiting for her, though God grant I have to wait many years. I don't doubt Jesus will let me be with her when the time comes."

"No, mother, I don't think you need ever doubt that," he said earnestly. "If you go first you would come for me also, would you not?"

## The Portals of Love

"Ah! my bonny boy," the joyful, loving assent in her voice thrilled through him like exquisite music. He bent and kissed her with profound love and reverence.

"One can have duplicates of many things on earth, but only one mother," he said, as he gently stroked her hand.

"You'll tell her how I think of her always, Keith; you'll tell her how gladly I would take her to my heart again but for him," she whispered anxiously.

"She knows that, she understands how it is with you," he said consolingly. "She realises that your first duty lies here."

She nodded her head. "Yes, for the present, dearie; but tell her I'll not be long before I'm free, and maybe it's as some folks say that the spirits of the departed are permitted sometimes to visit the earth again. If that's true, Keith, I'll come to her sometimes. I couldn't come now, for I've no clothes to be seen in alongside her, and I'm not used to company manners."

"I wish you wouldn't think so constantly of dying, mother," he said, almost harshly. He wished to hide his distress which might only add to hers. She looked at him reproachfully.

"You surely wouldn't grudge me the rest I'm sore in need of, Keith. Dying is very easy, it's only living that's hard. Martha would keep your father always tidy and comfortable, and I've made him two dozen new shirts this summer. I know my time's drawing near, for I've seen the Lord Jesus."

"You've seen Him?" he exclaimed, in startled, uneasy astonishment.

She smiled quietly at his surprise and bent her lips nearer.

"Yes. I've seen Him, Keith. It's a week ago that I was in the kitchen peeling potatoes for dinner. Your father was out in the parish, and Martha had gone to



## The Portals of Love

Seaview to see her aunt, who was ill. I was feeling very low and thinking of her, when all at once I looked up and there stood the Lord Jesus all shining and blazing in sunlight though it was raining outside, 'His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was flooded with light.' He only stayed a moment, but He looked at me across the table; His glorious eyes pierced me through and through, and though He did not speak I knew what He said. My heart went beating like mad and a joy came over me such as I never felt before, it fairly dazzled me. I knew at once that it was what I would feel in heaven. I fell on my knees and bowed my head, and when I ventured to look up He was gone."

"What did He say to you, mother?"

A smile of exceeding beauty lit up her pale face.

"'Come unto Me all ye that are weary and sorrow laden, and I will give you rest.' That's what He said, Keith, and I knew from that moment that all would be well with me. I've never had a trouble since, everything seems easy now. Though I don't see Him I know He is always caring for me, and has sent an angel to be always with me."

His eyes were full of tears as he listened to her. A strange radiance lay upon her face, that radiance which is not of earth. Through the shades of her setting life the work of heaven could be seen beginning. The harsh plainness was stamped out by a something ineffably holy, she possessed that hidden force which makes a lifetime strong. He could understand her who seemed to have learned so easily the ABC of heavenly lore. He knew that for her from death would come light, from pain beatitude. She could understand him, but it was different with his father. Her story had moved him to the very depths of his being. Wholly unable as he was to accept the Old Testament God, he possessed the most profound belief

## The Portals of Love

in the God of love and in the ministry of the Christ. Both to him were ever living, working powers in the lives of men, to him there was nothing incomprehensible in her story.

"I don't believe in death," he suddenly exclaimed vehemently. "It's nothing more than a wonderful experience. It's a silly word that means nothing. Who ever dies? Our bodies perish, but what value are they? It's our souls that are immortal. I read yesterday in the paper that the Bishop of London has been telling his congregation that five minutes after death we're the same as five minutes before. Death does not change a man, and he believes in an intermediate state. It's what I've always instinctively felt, mother. We're none of us fit to go straight to God on leaving here, and maybe from that intermediate place the spirits can come back and see their friends. I want you always to remember that my faith in God is fixed and unalterable. God is all that this world contains. The world is God, and we who crawl upon its surface are but infinitely small fragments of Divinity. I believe in the Christ as a Divine Son of God, and to me there is nothing impossible in your story. I believe it absolutely. Why should the Master not show Himself to His own."

She did not understand all that he meant, but she grasped the fundamental points.

"It would not matter to me who disbelieved," she said simply, "because now I know. There are times that come to me when all my present life, Seaview and all those I know, are blotted out, and a sort of vague immensity comes over me. I feel as if I were floating in a space where there was no time but just eternity. I can't explain any better, you know I've no words and little learning. I would not tell your father, it would only make him angry. He wouldn't believe that the Son of God could visit the likes of me. He'd



## The Portals of Love

think me raving. Tell me, when are you coming back, Keith?"

"I shall be back to-morrow week, mother, and Miss Herne is coming to see you. She told me that she wished to know you better, and she would come some day when she knew you would be alone. She wants to speak with you about Lizzie. She knows all about her and admires her very much. She thinks father treated her very harshly."

A shade of obstinacy crept over her face. "I won't have her say a word against him, remember that, Keith," she exclaimed firmly. "Your father's a good man and acts up to his lights. He was always very clever and knows a great deal. Maybe I'm wrong the way I cling to your sister, but I'm very weak—not strong like him—and my heart gets entirely the better of me. I've been a poor wife to him in many respects, not being able to see things always from his point of view."

"We are all more or less like that, mother. No two of us are born with precisely the same minds and reasoning powers. Don't be afraid, Miss Herne will say nothing to offend your feelings. You will find her most sympathetic. Now I must go and see father. I can't stop to tea to-day. I must be off directly I've seen him, so I'll say good-bye, mother, and trust me to tell Lizzie all you want."

She kissed him and rose, moving to a large work-basket which stood in a corner of the room. From beneath a pile of garments, in various stages of making, she drew forth a piece of tissue paper.

"I want you to give her this from me," she whispered, unfolding the packet. "See! it is a fine cambric handkerchief, and I've worked her name in the corner with my own fingers. Tell her, Keith, that I've worked in my love with every thread I've drawn, and that if eternal life be in us, our eternal union is sure and certain, and we ought not to weary for God's good

## The Portals of Love

time—it will come when He sees fit. I've been waiting a chance to send it to her. I wouldn't trust it by the post, things get lost, they tell me, going all that long way to London. Now, my boy, you'll take it for your old mother and give it to your sister."

She folded the tiny article and put it for a moment to her lips—the thread of love had always run through her life's darkest woof—then with shaking hands she wrapped it again in the paper. Two crimson spots of excitement burned in her cheeks, she felt almost as if in actual contact with the girl who was lost to her.

He took the little parcel from her and carefully placed it in the inside of his pocket-book. He did not trust himself to speak again, but with one long lingering look and a reverent kiss he passed out and left her alone.

He crossed the passage and knocked at his father's door. A gruff "Come in" bade him enter and he found himself in Joshua Tytler's presence. The minister was preparing his sermon for the coming Sabbath and was seated by his desk in the window. A bright fire burned in the grate, and a jet of unshaded gas above his head lit up his rugged handsome face and threw his dark hair and beard into bright prominence. He swung round and laid down his pen as Keith entered and they shook hands cordially. However much Tytler might disguise his feelings, at heart he was proud of his son, proud of his good looks, his bright intelligence and the position of trust he occupied at the Fastness.

"Are you very busy? Can you spare me a few minutes' conversation, father?" Keith asked.

"Certainly, lad, sit you down; I'm almost done. Well! How's everybody up at the Castle?"

"They're all right, father."

"That is a real Christian family, a worthy, God-fearing people, and may the Almighty bless them all,"



## The Portals of Love

said Joshua fervently. "Few would have bowed so submissively to the Divine will as they have done in their great sorrow. The laird, he's one to be respected, and Mrs. Macleod grieving as if it had been her own son."

Keith made no reply to this, having too clear a recollection of the morning's interview to endorse the words.

"Mr. Macleod has just given me a week's holiday. I'm going to London to-morrow," he said.

"To London?" Joshua's face darkened and the smile faded out of it. "What takes you there?" he asked abruptly. "I'd rather you went to Edinburgh. London's a godless, wicked place and not for the likes of you. I'm told the churches are rotten with heresy."

"I want a complete change. I haven't been out of Scotland for two years and then only for a couple of days," answered Keith evasively.

"I'm sorry to hear it, lad. For you that's going into the ministry you'd best remain in your own land. Travel will only unsettle your mind and make you restless. If you want a change come home to the Manse for a week, or you might take a run to Aberdeen."

Keith sat looking down at the carpet. Now that the moment had come he felt no fear of what he was about to say, only a curious excitement, an instinct that he had arrived at a crisis in his life.

"I wanted to talk to you about my future, father. I wish to tell you that I'm leaving the Castle at the end of the year, and that I've decided not to join the ministry. I need a wider, freer life."

Now that the words were out he felt calmer, and strung up to any eventuality. Suspense and hesitancy were over. He had fired the first shot, the battle had begun: in a moment he would be in the thick of the fight. He braced himself for conflict and looked up.

Tytler was sitting staring at him dumbly. There

## The Portals of Love

was a lurid light in his eyes, the veins in his forehead had suddenly swollen like whip cords.

"You're not going into the ministry?"

The words burst forth with restrained passion. As yet Joshua could hardly believe his own ears: he wanted further confirmation.

"No, father. I'm totally unfitted for the life, the work. When I tell you I absolutely disbelieve in the Divine inspiration of the Bible you'll understand it would be out of the question. To me the books of the Old Testament are not even history, they're only interesting old legends. The Mosaic cosmogony has surrendered to evolution."

Tytler sat staring at him in a petrified silence, a silence of horror too profound as yet to break into speech. The hands which gripped the arms of his chair were strained like claws round the wood, he leaned slightly forward, his eyes riveted on his son as if fascinated with sheer dread.

"I've not come to this decision without hard thought," went on Keith in a quiet level voice. "I know the Bible as well as any man living, and the more I study it the more convinced I am that to believe the Old Testament to be the inspired word of God is nothing short of blasphemy."

The sound of his own voice rather accentuated his courage than otherwise as he continued determinedly: "I don't believe God Almighty perpetrated all those bloody, barbarous crimes. Apologists say He had to commit them to keep in order a rude and unlearned people. It's a lie. God never committed every imaginable crime in order to make the people He Himself had created, good. He never worked such desperate evil that good might come out of it. Can thistles bear figs? I'm only a poor student and He's Lord of heaven and earth, and if for striving to understand Him better and exalt Him high above all those fierce



## The Portals of Love

intended to hand down to man an infallible book He would not have recorded it in a language whose written words consist only of consonants, leaving readers a thousand years after to fill in the vowels by conjecture. The very fact that such a language was chosen was unanswerable evidence that God never designed to give us an infallible book. If it were really inspired why had it been lost and only brought to light again in multitudes of torn fragments, in different languages, and in such a confused state that no man could extract from out the mass one single portion which on the face of it proclaimed itself to be of Divine origin? Of what use to show Joshua Tytler that his revelation was founded on evidence which was itself but founded on presuppositions and held by the force of faith and a liberal imagination? No anger or irritation stirred in him, he knew his father and exactly what he had expected had come to pass. With Joshua it was all or nothing. He only knew God through the printed pages of a book, he saw Him in that light and no other. His God was but a few hundred years old, He dated from the earliest known manuscript. The God of the Chaldeans, of the Babylonians, the mighty civilisations that had arisen, flourished and fallen centuries before the advent of Christ were nothing to Joshua Tytler; he took no heed of history, science, geology or astronomy. The marvellous discoveries arrived at by men who had used their God-given powers of thought to elucidate the problems of life were to him so many free-thinkers who had dared to assert that the world was not made in six days but in mighty geological periods.

"Good-bye, father, won't you even shake hands before I go? It may be for the last time."

"I will take the hand of no man who denies his God," he said fiercely. "If ever you return to me with a humble and contrite heart, and confess your deadly sin freely to the Lord, then time enough to say if I forgive you."

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## The Portals of Love

vindictive acts and profanations He sends me to hell, well, all I can say is I'd deal more magnanimously with Him were our positions reversed, but I don't believe in a Supreme Being resembling an eastern tyrant, a divinity whose name you write under the portrait of the devil. I believe in a God who will do more for me than I can ever ask or think, and that quite independently of the wretched, debased beliefs in the inspiration of books that no man knows who wrote, and which turns the supposed author into an incarnate fiend. I mean to live for the vindication of God, not for His degradation. Never will I bring myself to preach such blasphemies from the pulpit."

"Stop!"

Tytler had risen and now towered above his son, one hand on his open Bible, the other raised threateningly. For a moment Keith thought that quivering hand was about to descend upon him and instinctively he rose also but maintained his ground. The one word thundered forth with terrific emphasis. Carried away by the torrent of his own words and with the intense feeling which prompted them he had not noticed the awful change in his father's countenance, which was livid as a corpse, white with a wrath which was fearful to behold, the eyes flaming with the frenzied zeal of the fanatic.

"Begone out of my house and never set foot in it again," he thundered. "No blasphemous infidel shall be said to be my kith or kin. I've done with you forever. I'm God Almighty's humble minister and proponent of His sacred word, and I'll serve Him faithfully so long as I've breath. No free-thinker, no atheist shall cross my threshold or hold communion with mine or me. As guardian of His inspired word all scoffers and unbelievers will I cast out, as God will cast out all such into hell fire there to perish everlastingly. In denying the Divine inspiration of the Holy

## The Portals of Love

Bible you deny your God. I warn you most solemnly that from now henceforth you are lost. You dare to set up your reason against Divine inspiration which depends on the revelations made in Scripture. The light that was in you has gone out. Walking in the vanity of your mind your understanding has become darkened. We believe the Jewish revelation because the Christian confirms it. We believe the Christian because Christ and His Apostles have given it. Had the Old Testament been wrong in any place would not Christ have warned us? From this hour I wash my hands of you. I am placed here to obey God and preach His blessed word. I would be a traitor to Him if I owned you more. His enemy is mine, a hundred fold accentuated."

Keith stood with bowed head letting the torrent sweep over him unchecked. What use would be any argument against such blind, intolerant fanaticism which was like some incurable malady, "a visitation" as it used to be called? Of what use to point out that the Apostles had been in their graves over a hundred years before the writing of one of the New Testament books? Of what use to point out that not a single Hebrew manuscript had come to us from earlier times than twelve hundred years after Christ? Not a word of the Bible was in the hands of man which was older than the days of William the Conqueror.

According to received chronology Moses wrote the Pentateuch some 1451 years before Christ. Yet the oldest Hebrew manuscript dated more than a thousand years after Christ. A dead blank of over two thousand years in which not a trace of the Bible was to be found.

Of what use to remind him of those well-known authenticated facts in order to prove that the Almighty might have been maligned? Of what use to ask why God did not preserve right down through the ages from the days of creation His book intact? Had God



## The Portals of Love

intended to hand down to man an infallible book He would not have recorded it in a language whose written words consist only of consonants, leaving readers a thousand years after to fill in the vowels by conjecture. The very fact that such a language was chosen was unanswerable evidence that God never designed to give us an infallible book. If it were really inspired why had it been lost and only brought to light again in multitudes of torn fragments, in different languages, and in such a confused state that no man could extract from out the mass one single portion which on the face of it proclaimed itself to be of Divine origin? Of what use to show Joshua Tytler that his revelation was founded on evidence which was itself but founded on presuppositions and held by the force of faith and a liberal imagination? No anger or irritation stirred in him, he knew his father and exactly what he had expected had come to pass. With Joshua it was all or nothing. He only knew God through the printed pages of a book, he saw Him in that light and no other. His God was but a few hundred years old, He dated from the earliest known manuscript. The God of the Chaldeans, of the Babylonians, the mighty civilisations that had arisen, flourished and fallen centuries before the advent of Christ were nothing to Joshua Tytler; he took no heed of history, science, geology or astronomy. The marvellous discoveries arrived at by men who had used their God-given powers of thought to elucidate the problems of life were to him so many free-thinkers who had dared to assert that the world was not made in six days but in mighty geological periods.

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## The Portals of Love

Keith turned and went to the door without another word, the interview was ended. What more was there to be said?—generations of thought divided them. So this was the end: the last time he would set foot in the old Manse, his birthplace, his mother's home. He drew a deep breath which was almost a sob, and looked round him curiously as he traversed the little hall and let himself out into the raw November darkness.

When Joshua heard the closing of the door upon his son he dropped down like a stone into his chair, and buried his head in his folded arms upon the open Bible which lay upon the table. For long he sat there in the throes of one of those awful encounters of the individual soul with itself, which are formulated in the eternal problem of predestination, drinking into the full the fact that he was now childless. With anguished humiliation and despair he saw the fruits of his early labour, his later hopes in his son crumbled to dust. Keith, whom he had reared so sternly and carefully, who from his earliest infancy had been fed with the milk of the Gospels, had turned apostate. Such an hour as the present he prayed he might never again pass through. It was as if the devils whom Christ banished into the herd of swine had been permitted to come again to earth. Not only were the lost spirits tormenting him, but one whom he had esteemed as God's had sold his soul to Satan for the sake of a little of his evil power whereby he might affect others. Not one ray of remorse dawned within him. He had acted up to what he believed to be right, but he told himself that God was afflicting him sorely and he must patiently bear the agony of the visitation. He unquestioningly laid the blame of his misery upon the Almighty. "Have mercy upon me for I am desolate and afflicted," he cried aloud, and told himself it was God's will that he should suffer, as he clenched his hands in an agony



## The Portals of Love

of supplication to be relieved from the terrible load which he was called upon to bear.

He tried to recall to mind wherein he had failed in his duty and could recollect no lapse, no carelessness in his fervent ministry to his people. No listlessness, negligence or supineness in his fierce love, constant submission and untiring adulation of his God. Some insidious hidden sin he must be possessed of or God would not have found it necessary to punish him so unsparingly. He thought of all the martyrs who had suffered greatly in defence of their faith, and gave thanks that strength had been accorded him to defend the Divine words from unfaith, even at the expense of losing his only son, the only child left to him on earth. No momentary weakness had assailed him, he had seen his duty from the first instant. The man who was at enmity with God must be at enmity with Joshua Tytler. No greater enmity could he conceive of than rejecting the Divine revelation contained in the Scriptures. Only one course had been possible to him, it had been the choice 'twixt God and man, and he had chosen the former and once more vanquished the devil, that Archfiend who still walked the earth, active even as in Job's day when he bargained with Jehovah for the soul of the Patriarch, and it seemed to him that like Job he was afflicted with sorrows that were heavier than the sands of the sea, and the arrows of the Almighty were within him. The night had closed in when at last he rose from his knees, wearied out with long, fierce wrestling in prayer. The tea hour had passed and his wife, according to custom, had not dared to invade his privacy. He opened the door of the living room and advanced a few steps. Mrs. Tytler sat at her mending, the cat sleeping at her feet, the kettle bubbling on the fire ready to make tea at an instant's notice. A dish of hot toast stood on the hob awaiting his appetite. She looked round at his entrance

## The Portals of Love

and was about to speak but the words died on her lips as her heart leapt violently, then faded away in her breast. She caught her breath spasmodically as her lips whitened.

"Listen to me, Janet Tytler," he said sternly, "from henceforth you have no son. Never let me hear the name of Keith mentioned in this house again. For His honour and glory and our humble obedience to Almighty God I lay this command upon you. By His Divine wrath I bid you take heed that you do not forget my words and in meekness and humility bow before the Divine decree. Do you hear me?"

There was silence for one long minute, then her answer came clearly and firmly:—

"Yes, Joshua, I hear you. I will obey."

He went out again closing the door violently behind him, and passed into the night.

Janet Tytler lay back in her chair, her eyes closed, her hands folded on her lap.

"Give me a quiet grave, release and not reward, for the daily task is too hard for me," she prayed.

God sometimes sends a swift stillness to our lives. A bivouac on the battlefield of life. In times of great spiritual agony the silence is sometimes broken by what appears to be a miracle.

Suddenly her world, like a vast tidal wave, was rolled back leaving her on another, a fairer shore, where beyond planetary limits she was cradled in a higher creation where the operations of God were not thwarted and blurred as on earth. A smile dawned on her wan face. The shabby, mean little room was transformed; Heaven had come down to earth, and low voices whispered in her ear mighty, wonderful and God-sustained truths as she abandoned herself to the vision celestial.



## CHAPTER XIII

JOSHUA TYTLER strode straight to the Castle, his long determined steps making short work of the ten minutes' walk through the fir woods. Though but half-past five the way was pitch dark, but he knew every yard of the road and the fierceness of a mighty sorrow and wrath lit up the gloom from the internal fires which raged within him.

He was shown at once to Mrs. Macleod's sitting-room where that lady sat knitting and warming her toes at a cheerful blaze. Joshua entered like the rushing of a mighty wind, turbulence filled the quiet atmosphere, his big presence in its rusty black seemed to dominate all else as he hastily shook hands, his brows knitted and eyes burning like live coals beneath them staring down on her.

"I have come on a most painful errand," he began without preface. "My son is an outcast, he can no longer serve under this honoured roof. He has been with me this afternoon and has had the shameful presumption to tell me he has turned infidel. He denies his God and the Holy Scriptures."

Mrs. Macleod gazed up at him in frightened dismay; for a moment she wondered if he had gone mad. He looked mad, and a terrified shiver ran through her.

"What on earth are you talking about?" she asked to gain time.

"It's not to be wondered at that you fail to understand me," he replied with a terrible irony, "for this very afternoon I have cast out my only son from the Manse as a lost heretic and free-thinker."

## The Portals of Love

Mrs. Macleod gazed at him, her eyes wide with amazement and a slowly gathering horror.

"Good gracious!" she ejaculated weakly.

Instantly her thoughts darted to Roderick, who had been so lately exposed to the leprosy of this terrible being. What irreparable harm might he not already have done to that tender plant, her boy's mind. She thought of the tiresome questions he so often asked and a shudder ran through her.

"Oh! How truly shocking! You amaze me, Dr. Tytler," she exclaimed again.

"I have taken counsel with God, Mrs. Macleod, and it was my duty at once to come and acquaint you with the result. The lad who was my son is no fit person to instruct your heir."

Mrs. Macleod drew herself up and assumed an expression of dignity which she intended to be haughty. She was now mother to the heir, a very different position to that which she had formerly occupied. She signed to him to take a chair and seated herself, smoothing out her crape bows with her unkept fingers.

"This house has always been a God-fearing one," went on Tytler, "far be it from me to be the means of introducing the serpent of doubt within its peaceful walls. I only pray God this visitation may fall on me alone and not on the innocent and unsuspecting. Keith must come here no more; the devil has entered into him."

"Certainly he must leave if that be the case," she replied with decision. "I will tell my husband at once and he shall be instantly sent about his business; it would break my heart if Roddie became contaminated and lost his faith as I am told so many men of science do. I fear your son must have been reading in his leisure hours, that is the only way I can account for it. I'm sure I always try to keep the Castle free from those terrible scientific books. It was only after the last shoot that I discovered in



## The Portals of Love

Lord Melbourne's bedroom a sixpenny edition called *The Riddle of the Universe* by some German. He had left it by mistake and I burnt it at once. Being only a sixpenny book it could not have been worth much. I just glanced into it and directly I saw what it was about, into the fire it went. Why, the poor servants might have taken it down into the Hall. My heart goes out to you, Dr. Tytler. I'm dreadfully grieved."

In truth her kind heart did feel deeply for him and for her son also. Keith's disbelief shocked and horrified her, but her heart though sorrowful for his lost condition was nevertheless resolute as to his dismissal. She began to have no doubts that Roderick's inquiring state of mind was entirely due to his tutor's stimulation, and her anger began to rise in consequence.

"I fear his evil influence is already bearing fruit," she exclaimed with fresh animation, "only the other night the child asked me why God made the devil. I told him that God did not make the devil, but he said: 'I thought you said God made everything; then who did make the devil?' I was perfectly horrified and of course sent him to bed at once. Next morning he came to me triumphantly and said, 'Mr. Tytler says there's no such person as the devil'. I really was very angry and made him at once read me the first chapter of Job, where God asks Satan where he has come from. I explained to him that every word of the Bible was true and that he must never doubt. I happened to be very busy that morning or I should have spoken to your son about it. I'm sorry I forgot."

Tytler shook his head gloomily.

"He denies the Divine inspiration of the Bible, so naturally he wouldn't believe that God and the devil talked together. If a man questions one verse of the Bible he may question all. Is it for us to judge the Lord's word?"

## The Portals of Love

"I fear then that he is a regular infidel," she exclaimed, the colour rising in her cheeks.

"That is so," he responded simply.

He bowed his head before her, he was suffering an agony of shame and humiliation.

They talked for a few minutes longer and then Joshua took his leave, sorrowfully promising to find another young man of a humble God-fearing mind to replace his son.

At the moment when Tytler was talking with Mrs. Macleod, Keith was sitting by the fire in Miss Herne's room. He had been telling her about the occurrences of the afternoon, and that he was now cast forth into the world and must at once put his shoulder to the wheel of fortune. He thought it probable that his father would speedily seek Mrs. Macleod and acquaint her with the state of his beliefs, so it was no real surprise when soon after six o'clock, as he was about to rise, a footman entered and handed him a note from the Laird. It was very short:—

"Mrs. Macleod has been made aware of your condition of mind, and I feel with her it will be best that our connection should at once cease. Kindly leave word where you sleep to-night, as I wish to forward the salary due to you in the morning."

Keith read it over and handed it without a word to Lillas. She stood beneath the lamp, the paper in her hand, and he saw her cheeks flood with colour.

"And they dare to call this a free country," she exclaimed vehemently. "Britons never shall be slaves. What mockery!" She burst into a short pained laugh and held out her hand. "Here, at least, you have a friend, Keith. There is at least one woman in this narrow sphere who permits you to have freedom of conscience."

He took her fingers and put them to his lips for a second in silent gratitude. It was infinitely consoling



## The Portals of Love

to have one true friend amidst such fierce and universal condemnation.

"We must always remember that they are sincere in their own convictions," he said gently. "I know that my father is, and though it may seem a strange thing for me to say under the circumstances, I honour him for his unswerving fidelity to what he honestly believes to be true. I happen to think he is mistaken, but I accord him full liberty to hold his own belief, just as I claim the same freedom for myself. Our minds are fashioned on different plans. I happen to have so profound a reverence, so gigantic a conception of the Almighty, that I cannot willingly hear Him degraded as in the Old Testament. I believe Him to be love, comprehension and mercy, instead of hatred, non-understanding and revenge. There is the whole difference of opinion, very small in a way, yet very wide apart. So wide that in days past it lit the fires of Smithfield and organised the Inquisition. Were I living in the days of Pope Innocent III. I should be committed to the rack without mercy. I don't often speak of these matters, as you know. So long as I honestly could I kept my own opinions to myself, but now the murder is out, and but for the parting with my mother and you I will gladly shake the sands of Seaview from off my feet."

"Ah! Your mother! Poor thing, how will she take this fresh trouble?" she asked.

He looked at her meditatively. "She will take it with a courage that will be given to her," he answered. "I know that she is not left comfortless. I leave her in the unfathomable mercy and love of Christ, the Master who is risen."

She gazed at him questioningly; his words rang out with strong conviction, they clearly carried some high knowledge of a faith which had been granted, something beyond credence. She discerned that to ask what he really meant would be encroaching on the

## The Portals of Love

holy of holies, where she had no right to tread. What had passed between him and his mother was sacred to both, it was holy ground.

"I will go and see her one day very soon," she said quietly; "meanwhile, where do you intend to sleep to-night?"

"I will go to Dr. Bright's, he will give me a bed, and in the morning I shall go to Aberdeen and on to London that night. May I write to you?"

"I shall expect you to write and tell me what you are doing, and all about Elizabeth. Tell her we shall meet very shortly when I arrive in town. Don't forget Ulvadale's promise, he will be a good friend to you. He is in London and the Bachelors' Club will always find him."

He thanked her warmly for all her sympathy and help and at last they parted, she still smarting with indignation at the treatment accorded him. Through all their interview her thoughts had persistently hovered about the ghastly tragedy which hung over the Fastness, and the part Macleod had played in it. How could he, she wondered, be so hard upon this youth seeing what his own secret was?

Keith left her with the glowing hope of future meetings and the joyful anticipation of once more beholding his sister. He was young, and life still looked very rosy to his inexperienced eyes. A deep belief in his own powers to rise in the world buoyed him up above the grey level of mediocrity. With Ulvadale's influence to set his foot upon the initial rung, what heights on the ladder of life might he not climb to? It was with no downcast mien, but a face of bright cheerfulness that he entered Dr. Bright's snug thatched house that evening. It was the doctor's hour of rest and leisure, though liable to be broken in on any moment by some sudden call on his services. His measured round in the mill of life and death was for the day over. From two till three was the hard hour, when



## The Portals of Love

Seaview brought its varied ailments to him for inspection, whooping cough and measles arriving hand in hand, to be followed by swollen glands enwrapped in flannel, and a nasty scald following fast on the heels of a whitlow, and a severed finger dropping in five minutes after. To dine regularly was a rare luxury to the parish doctor. Occasionally he would "run in," as he called it, for a snack, but supper was more often to be counted upon, and he and Keith were soon seated in the cosy panelled parlour partaking of an excellent meal.

Of all men in the world Bright was the best companion for him on that first entry into the life of freedom and independence. Many-sided by nature and gifted with the healer's soul as well as the healer's hands Bright gave him good counsel far into the night. He spoke with deep reverence of the light that was in all men, that light which came to illumine the world and teach those children of earth who have ears to hear that there is something more in life than is dreamed of in their philosophy.

Keith in commending his mother to the doctor's care touched upon the vision she had experienced, and Bright affirmed his belief that if a man so wills it he may come into actual communion with his God, who may still walk by his side in the cool of the evening and teach him wondrous knowledge through the human soul. The doctor's experience had long convinced him of immortality, and Keith, feeling like some young explorer about to set sail on the seas of a new existence, went to sleep with the words of Benjamin Franklin's epitaph singing in his ears.

"The body of Benjamin Franklin, like the cover of an old book, its contents torn out and stripped of its lettering and gilding, lies here, food for worms: yet the work itself shall not be lost, for it will appear once more in a new and beautiful edition, corrected and amended by the author."

## CHAPTER XIV

KEITH TYTLER looked round him with wondering eyes. The first rapturous excitement of meeting again was subsiding, he had at last released himself from the clasp of his sister's arms and he began to take note of his surroundings.

He had expected to find her domiciled in a quiet unpretentious little flat, plainly and soberly furnished. Everything he saw filled him with amazement; he felt as if he was in a corner of some enchanted palace; he was suddenly plunged into a new world, a new life.

The Sunday morning aspect of the streets had been strange enough. London looked cold, lifeless and deserted, the sun had not broken through the mists of night and all was wrapped in grey. This bower of beauty which made so suitable a setting for Elizabeth's loveliness was strangest of all, and his thoughts harked back to the shabby old parlour in the Manse. How far away it now seemed, but a day or two ago and innumerable miles seemed to lie between him and his sister, now here he was in the same town with her, under her roof and sitting by her side. How wonderful she was, what mighty feats this slim, frail girl had accomplished. What a contrast between her life and his own, but the thought, far from depressing him, added a sharper spur to the sides of his intent to come up alongside her in the battle of life.

"You admire my little quarters?" she asked, as she observed his abstracted gaze. She herself was seated by the fire in her dressing-gown, a marvellous garment



## The Portals of Love

it seemed to him, something of Japanese origin, in emerald green with great gold dragons sprawling over it. Her wonderful hair was not yet dressed and fell in heavy bronze masses over her shoulders.

"I think it's the loveliest room I've ever seen," he replied, continuing his survey, "but surely it must be very expensive."

He was really thinking more of the flowers which filled it than the actual decorations, such flowers, in such masses, must in the dead season have cost a large sum.

"Two hundred a year is what I pay," she answered. "The flat belongs to the girl who used to play my part. She married a wealthy man and left the stage, that is how I got my chance to play leading lady. But come into the dining-room, breakfast must be ready."

She rose and slipped her arm through his, and together they passed into the room adjoining, where a sober-looking female was putting the finishing touches to the little meal she had prepared.

"Well! You are the most extraordinary lucky girl!" he exclaimed as he took his seat. "Here I find you surrounded by every possible luxury."

She smiled enigmatically as she began to make the tea. She was not the sort of woman to mention past trials and miseries. She thrust them behind her as done with. Her brother would never know the details of her first weeks in London, friendless and alone. No one would ever know what she had suffered, the biting poverty, the bitter degradations, turned out of one poor lodging after another, worried by debts that were counted in pence, tramping in all weathers about the streets in search of employment. Alone, in the heart of the great city, what had she not endured? In telling him of her successes she had purposely omitted one month out of her life, in which

## The Portals of Love

she had drawn not one penny of salary, but sung on trial at a third-rate hall. Slowly the wheel of fortune had reversed for her, things began to look up, though very gradually. She could cook a dinner, trim a hat, make a dress, and so was able to eke out her pitiful earnings, and keep starvation from the door, but it had for long been a neck to neck race between life and death.

It certainly was a delightful little set of apartments which she now inhabited, decorated with great taste and refinement, each morsel of furniture a gem in its way. Its original owner, Miss Patty Blair, had been an unknown young person hailing from Chicago, but she had soon blossomed out into a celebrated and wealthy young star in London, and money had not been spared in the decking and furnishing of her abode.

She startled him as he was gazing round by a sudden question:—

“How does Macleod take his son’s death? Does he seem to feel it very deeply?” she asked.

“As deeply as his nature can feel, Lizzie; there are hard sides to his character, and he is too proud to show much outward grief. He has Roderick left, which doubtless has minimised the blow, but the Fastness is a very gloomy abode at present.”

“And nothing more has been heard of Torquil Grant?”

He shook his head.

“Absolutely nothing. No one expects to hear anything, Lizzie. If it is as you think, I believe the murderer will go to his grave undetected.”

A hard, obstinate look crossed her face. She did not continue the subject but passed on to another.

“Tell me what you are going to do, Keith. What line of life are you going to follow?”

“I don’t know yet,” he answered with rather a



## The Portals of Love

conscious look. "I'm afloat on the world now. I've lost my situation at the Fastness and I'm turned out of home."

She gazed at him in sudden consternation, the hand holding the tea-pot poised in the air.

"Turned out of the Manse! Oh, Keith!"

"It had to come, Lizzie. I knew it would. The instant I told father I could not be a minister the blow fell. He turned me out and ordered me never to return. It's no use fighting him!"

"Poor mother!"

The girl set down the tea-pot and great tears gathered in her eyes as she gazed abstractedly before her. The present luxurious surroundings were blotted out; once more she was within the grey walls of the old Manse. Sunday morning in the bleak grey of a northern winter, with the old familiar bells calling Seaview to come to kirk through the snow, and the wind or the rain. How strange a contrast!

Her brother looked at her and for a moment his own eyes were moist. He took his pocket-book out and extracted the little paper parcel.

"Mother sent you this," he said with an odd little catch in his voice.

She opened it slowly and examined the poor little gift, then she put it to her lips and big tears rolled slowly down her cheeks.

"You've taken the kiss she sent you," he said in a low voice. "She kissed it before she gave it to me, and I was to say that she worked it herself for you; and that her love is woven in with every thread she drew."

Elizabeth sobbed softly, her love for her mother was very deep—the mother who had always loved and trusted in her, and who had ever stood between her children and their father's harshness. Keith did not attempt to comfort her.

## The Portals of Love

"I'm quite happy about mother," he said with a strange exultant thrill in his voice ; "she's in safe hands, wonderful strong hands, Lizzie, hands that will do for her what we never could."

"What do you mean?" she asked looking up with bewilderment.

His colour rose, he hardly knew how far he might speak openly to this sister of whom he now seemed to know so little. Would she understand?

"What do you mean? Explain," she repeated in a sharper tone, as she dried her eyes.

"I mean that something, some one has come into her life to comfort her," he answered. "She has got beyond her own narrow limitations. Nothing that happens to her in this world matters any more ; she's risen above all that !"

She stared at him, still puzzled.

"You can't mean she's left the church and all her old beliefs?" she asked.

"No, but she sees through and beyond them. She's been like the little child that thinks the garden is the world, and suddenly discovers that it's not the world, nor yet is the world the universe, but that beyond both lie countless untold systems and universes. When one can think of and know that these immensities exist one does not chafe so badly at being caged, for through the bars the light of the universe shines."

She was silent, brooding over his words ; they still puzzled her.

"How did she arrive at this state of mind?" she asked after a long pause.

"By an inner illumination, Lizzie. It is said the pure in heart shall see God."

She leaned back in her chair and looked at him curiously, he spoke with such deep conviction. A canary caged in the window suddenly gave voice, and filled the silence with seraphic song as if it knew,



## The Portals of Love

understood and rendered thanksgiving. His words gave her a great wave of peace, something of the immensity her mother had sensed came to her, and filled her thoughts with a great faith and understanding of the puerilities of this little life, the sense of the Divine hand over all.

"Miss Herne is going to see mother," he said again after that thoughtful pause. "I have told her everything about myself and about you, Lizzie. She will be in town and would like to come and see you. She understands and sympathises, there is nothing narrow about her. She will be a real friend to you, dear."

She did not reply to this but merely nodded.

"I'm very glad you need not leave me again immediately," she said at last, with a little sigh. "I've only got the smallest room to offer you, but you'll be all right in it, and you will look upon this as home, dear, won't you?"

He thanked her and told her of his intention at once to try for some congenial work, and that on the morrow he meant to seek Ulvadale and claim his promised aid, and she rose at last from the table and went away to dress, leaving him to have his bath and make his own toilette.

The day had brightened as they strolled home together from Westminster Abbey. A warmer light had begun to suffuse the pale mists. A fresh wind blew, and the frail sunshine of November threw a silvery gleam over the tops of the tall houses, and with a fine touch of colour softly painted the red chimneys that rose into the filmy sky.

The service had been a revelation to Keith. One of England's greatest and most cultured preachers had occupied the pulpit, and had held an enormous congregation spellbound by his eloquence. Something amounting to envy entered Keith's heart as he listened.

## The Portals of Love

It suddenly seemed to him unfair, unjust that Londoners should be given such opportunities of enlightenment, whilst Scotland, even in her largest towns, was left in comparative darkness and superstition. It was a common saying that a Scotchman who emigrated never returned to his native land, and he thought he understood why.

The brother and sister sat down together to an admirable little lunch provided by a neighbouring restaurant where Elizabeth procured all her meals, her household being composed only of two, her maid and the one middle-aged woman who managed all the rest of the work. It was at the end of the meal when they had adjourned to the little drawing-room and pulled their chairs to the fire that Elizabeth broke to her brother a piece of news which astonished him greatly. They had been discussing the mystery of Torquil Grant and the possibility of unravelling the problem, and to his astonishment his sister still persisted in her determination to discover the secret of that strange disappearance. He had hoped to find her activity and eagerness in the matter subsided. "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," had been often in his mind in pondering over the case. Terrible as it seemed that the murderer of Grant should be at large, and that the crime should go undetected and unpunished, the warning given him by Mrs. Hislop had not gone unheeded. He felt that it would be well not to mix himself up in any efforts towards discovery; something bade him leave the matter alone and not concern himself with the affair. That Elizabeth had the greatest reason for mourning the dead was a side of the question he never lost sight of; but if her supposition was correct, if Torquil was actually dead, it was fruitless to continue lamenting for what was so utterly past and done with.

He was distressed to find that her determination to



## The Portals of Love

unravel the mystery was as keen as ever, and he naturally concluded this arose out of bitter disappointment and blighted hopes.

"I do not doubt for a moment, Lizzie, that the day isn't far off when you will find a husband whom you can really love, and who will be as good to you as ever Torquil Grant would have been," he said gently, after listening to her for some time in silence. He saw her flush up to the roots of her hair, in anger as he thought, and he hastened to add: "I don't say that Grant wasn't a fine man, as good and honest as is to be found, but he was too old and grave for you, dear; and after this life how could you ever have come back to Sea-view?"

She shook her head impatiently. "You don't yet understand, Keith—wait! To-day it may seem all play, but it's hard work, in right-down good earnestness. I know you look upon me as a sort of fairy who has waved a wand and all this is the result." She waved her hand round the room and laughed a trifle bitterly. "I've had to work very hard, and I don't believe there's a woman on the stage that wouldn't have jumped at marriage with Torquil, and a certainty of comfort and peace to the end of their days. The stage is a hard, hard life, and I'll gladly be done with it."

She looked at him with a sudden curious light on her face. "Would it surprise you to hear that on the last day of January I appear on the boards for the last time?"

He looked astonished, but he answered with a boyish laugh: "I don't feel as if anything could surprise me now, Lizzie".

"Not even if I told you that I leave the stage to be married?"

He looked at her with wide eyes, hardly knowing what to say, or believe, her ways of life and his were

## The Portals of Love

so widely apart. Was it impossible that this beautiful woman, surrounded by people who admired and flattered her, should not again have her heart engaged. She laughed out loud, a trifle mischievously.

"I know what you're thinking—how terribly fickle we curious women are; but remember, though I deeply respected poor Torquil, I never loved him. I was grateful to him in a way I can't describe; but though he reached my heart through gratitude, he never touched my soul through love. I believe I would always have been happy with Torquil. I believe I'll be something more with the man I'm going now to marry."

The door opened suddenly, and Keith through his absorption caught sight of his sister's face as she looked round; so transfigured had it suddenly become that he gazed at her with a held fascination.

"Any admittance?" called out a cheery voice.

Elizabeth rose, still with that wonderful look on her face, and laughed as she glanced at Keith. "You may come in, Ulvadale," she said.

Keith leapt to his feet and stood with his back to the fire, staring. There stood Ulvadale holding both Elizabeth's hands, and without a second's warning he bent and kissed her.

"Have you told him?" he asked her, as if everything in life was one huge joke.

"Not yet," replied Elizabeth, and laughed again as she looked across at her mystified brother. Ulvadale walked forward holding out his hand; his charming, plain face was wreathed in smiles. He was dressed faultlessly in London clothes. To Keith, who had never seen him out of tweeds or evening dress, they altered him completely. He had drawn Elizabeth forward by his side, his arm about her shoulders.

"How are you, Keith? Glad to see you, old chap. You and I are going to be closely related, as your sister has promised to be my wife," he said.



## The Portals of Love

Keith shook hands but his tongue was tied. He had turned quite pale; were they mad or was he, he wondered. Could Ulvadale possibly be in earnest? He looked from one to the other half-shyly. Elizabeth was seating herself on the sofa, and Ulvadale dropped down by her side and covered one of her hands with his. "I hope you've been taking it easy to-day," he said gently, then he looked across at Keith.

"Elizabeth works very hard. I like her to rest on Sunday. You must help me to look after her in the meantime, until she comes to me for the remainder of her life."

Keith broke into a nervous laugh.

"Really, you have so taken my breath away that you must give me time to recover," he exclaimed. "Do you mean in all seriousness to tell me that you and Lizzie are going to be married?"

"In the first week of February. I'd like to marry her to-morrow, but she persists in fulfilling the first half of her contract," replied Ulvadale. "We then propose to do a month's honeymoon, and on or about 1st March we shall arrive at Ulvadale for the spring fishing."

Keith sat down suddenly. All sorts of wild thoughts were chasing through his brain; he looked at Elizabeth, the same soft light was still in her eyes, the same faint shell pink in her cheeks. The pale sunshine poured into the little room and threw a shimmer of gold on the wonderful bronze of her hair. Suddenly the words of Kirsty, the spae-wife, when speaking of his father, flashed back upon him: "There's one he despises now who will be raised up far above him. I see strange happenings in Seaview, and it's her that will know where lies Torquil Grant and no other."

A shiver ran through him, how strange life was. His sister was casting aside this one great ambition of her life, with its intoxicating successes, hopes and fears,

## The Portals of Love

for another career, which, though it brought with it the simple duties of an ordinary woman's existence, brought also an enormous ascent in her ladder of life. She would withdraw herself from the eyes of all the world, and the glory of her presence would go to light up the sombre halls of Ulvadale, as the wife of one of Scotland's oldest peers. Certainly, he thought, Elizabeth Tytler was a wonderful woman, born to success, a star whose aspect was always in the ascendant.

"Do they know of all this at Seaview?" he asked suddenly.

Ulvadale laughed.

"No, they don't, wise as they are; but you must remember we folks here in London don't always know what's going on in Seaview."

"By Jove! When they do!" exclaimed Keith, and burst into an irrepressible peal of laughter, in which the engaged couple joined. He felt this marvellous surprise would take a lot of thinking out. As yet his mind had travelled no further than to old Lady Ulvadale and how she would view this marriage; he thought he could form a very fair idea, and the boy in him chuckled with mischievous delight at the certain opposition of the proud old lady standing aghast at the thought of an actress daughter-in-law. Elizabeth Tytler, the despised actress, the cast off daughter of the Manse.

"I don't want any one but you to know for some time," said Elizabeth, breaking in on his agitated thoughts. "Lady Ulvadale will have to be told first, and she will break the terrible news to Seaview. I don't want to disturb her tranquillity before it is absolutely necessary."

"It will disturb her with a vengeance," remarked Keith, with a brother's brutal candour.

"Listen, Keith," broke in Ulvadale seriously. "I want you to understand from the first that I'm going



# The Portals of Love

to stand no nonsense from anybody. I look upon my future wife as the equal of any lady in the land ; those who won't know her shan't know me ; but time will show such people to be the real sufferers. I can always ensure for my wife a charming circle, and the Seaviewites may hook it if they choose, and be hanged to them. My old mother will go to her Dower House and take her own line, so may the Manse and the Fastness, and what that line is won't matter an old bootlace to either Elizabeth or me. We don't want a special dispensation from Seaview in order to get married ; we're marrying for love, and that's good enough to go on with."

Keith sat looking at the speaker with full appreciation. How splendid he was, he thought. How magnificent to be so independent in thought and action. Coming from a circle where all were independent in action but none in mind, and therefore as so many bondsmen to custom and tradition, he esteemed deeply the indifference expressed for the opinion of his late little world of Seaview. He omitted to remember that a rich Peer possesses liberties denied to a commoner. The old saw that "the king can do no wrong" reflects down to a certain extent on those graduating below on the social ladder. From out this brain-whirl he emerged to the fact that Elizabeth was recounting to Ulvadale the circumstances of his dismissal from the Fastness and his banishment from home, to all of which he listened with deep attention.

"So the time has come when you will need my help," he said, looking across to Keith with his pleasant smile. It flashed across Tytler, for the first time, why Ulvadale had been so friendly towards him, but it in no way diminished his gratitude. The man who loved his sister was giving also to him by so doing. Every kind thought sent to her was reflected on him, the worshipping brother.

## The Portals of Love

"I shall be deeply grateful for your assistance," he answered. "I have set my heart on literary work. I know how hard it is to make a start. I don't minimise the difficulties before me."

"We won't think of difficulties," remarked Ulvadale. "In my opinion that means making them. Soon enough to think of them when they are surmounted. To-night you must come and dine with me at the Savoy. Elizabeth turns in early, and we will talk this matter over seriously. I knew the crisis would soon come, and I've been keeping my eyes open. My uncle, Sir James Waite, wants a secretary. He's the chap who lectures on chemistry at the Royal Institution. He's more than a chemist, he dabbles in occultism, if you know what that is, and he's a prominent member of the Psychical Research Society."

Keith looked mystified, and coloured at his own ignorance; he looked what he felt—downcast.

"What is an occultist? I've of course read the word, but I confess I don't know its meaning. I know I'm awfully ignorant."

Ulvadale laughed.

"You'll soon pick up," he said cheerfully. "An occultist is one who studies the unseen forces of nature and the spiritual powers in man. The Psychical Society occupies itself over the elucidation of dreams, ghosts, premonitions, and that sort of thing."

"But do many cultured people go in for that sort of study?" Keith asked in amazement.

"I think I may say all cultured people do, more or less," Ulvadale replied, with a smile. "Not to know something, however small, about spiritualism, mind culture, hypnotism, etc., is to proclaim oneself very uncultured in these days. To-morrow afternoon I'll take you to see my aunt, and you'll get a sort of insight into what sort of people the Waites are. The screw won't be much, but if your suited to the



## The Portals of Love

work it will be a beginning which will lead to better things."

Poor Keith looked considerably depressed by his own ignorance, and Elizabeth saw it.

"Cheer up, dear. Why here, in London, you can get any amount of books to read, and with your mind you'll gather the subject in no time; and you've got the advantage of approaching the work with an open mind."

"I guess Sir James will consider it an absolutely empty mind," he remarked sadly.

Tea was brought in, and they drew up their chairs round the table and made merry.

Elizabeth was in the gayest spirits, and Keith inhaled joy from the atmosphere which surrounded the lovers. There was no mistaking Ulvadale's devotion, a reverend adoration was displayed in all his attitude towards the woman whom he had chosen to be his wife, and there could be no doubt that whatever Elizabeth had felt towards Torquil Grant here was love at last, displayed in the most transparent manner. Ulvadale, like those others, had recognised her on the stage as Elizabeth Tytler, and presuming on a youthful acquaintance had sought her out. The finale had been arrived at very swiftly. With him it was a case of falling headlong in love on the first resumption of their acquaintance. Before morning he had made up his mind to woo and win her.

Though Elizabeth was proud of the name she had made for herself upon the stage, and the pinnacle to which she had climbed by sheer perseverance and hard work, she had never been blinded by the excitement of the life, its instability and unrest had never attracted her by their very uncertainty as is the case with so many women. She had looked forward to a quiet life with Torquil Grant; he could have given her every comfort, but little luxury; above all he would have

# The Portals of Love

placed her outside the great dread of her life—the dread of failing health and inability to pursue her career.

She had accepted Ulvadale in that transport of genuine affection which thinks little of externals, and only dwells in that unfathomable realm where two souls, two hearts blend in absolute unity.



## CHAPTER XV

THE next day passed like a dream to Keith Tytler, who spent the morning walking about the streets, gazing at the shops and longing for the night to come. All that day he hardly saw his sister, whose morning had been occupied at the theatre where she was rehearsing new songs and dances, and in the afternoon she informed him that she must rest.

She explained to him that it was a fair sample of most of her days, and he began dimly to understand of what her labours consisted, a continual striving to keep fit for the evening's work. Merely to stroll about the streets was sufficient amusement for Keith after his long seclusion in Seaview, and he began also to comprehend Elizabeth in the light of a public character as he came upon shop windows filled with photographs of "Miss Percival" in every conceivable attitude and costume, and saw her name flaunt out at him in scarlet letters from the knife-boards of omnibuses, the breasts and backs of sandwich men, and the gaunt hoardings of demolished buildings.

At 3.30 he called for Ulvadale at the Bachelors' Club, and with rather a nervous dread and considerable shyness he set out with his future brother-in-law to call upon Lady Waite who lived in Wilton Crescent.

"If you get wedged in amongst a lot of old scientists I shall hook it," Ulvadale told him candidly. "I'll call for you at the flat at eight, so if on looking round you find me gone don't be surprised. I'm awfully fond of the Waites, but they're too clever for me."

## The Portals of Love

A butler, who in appearance would have made an excellent Archbishop, ushered them at once into Lady Waite's presence, and Keith found himself in what more resembled a man's business room than a lady's drawing-room. Lady Waite was seated at a very large desk, which presented such a chaotic mass of papers and books that the spot for writing upon was reduced to a minimum. She was extremely plain, but enormously attractive. Every conceivable art of female adornment was rigidly excluded from her person. She stood up simply a woman, absolutely unadorned, and the fundamental meaning of the word unadorned was in her carried to its utmost limits. Her plainness of attire was a high art, and looked like a life-long study. Keith thought as she came forward he had never seen any woman before who was downright ugly. But suddenly she spoke to him, and it was not what she said, but the voice and the way in which she said it that suddenly made the indicator of his mind whirl round in an absolutely contrary direction.

"So you are the young friend Ulvadale has told me of," she said, taking his hand and drawing him down on to a sofa by her side. For a moment she looked straight at him, and poor Keith felt an uncomfortable sensation of being absolutely transparent. To Lady Waite he was apparently made of plate glass through which his internal mechanism could be clearly seen working.

"Have you made any study of the subjects we are interested in?" she asked. "I suppose my nephew has told you of what they consist, so far as he was able."

"Yes, he has told me, Lady Waite; but I am absolutely ignorant, I regret to say, of all those subjects. The only thing I can say for myself is that I could come to you with a perfectly open mind," answered Keith.



## The Portals of Love

"So that is the only thing you can say," Lady Waite laughed. "Don't, whatever you do, minimise one of the grandest and rarest possessions a man can own. An open mind is one of the hardest things to find. When Ulvadale told me you were the son of a Scotch minister I at once thought it possible you would suit Sir James. The sons of ministers who happen to have brains are generally intelligent, their bringing up stimulates the intellect; therefore you rarely see the son take up the father's profession."

Ulvadale began to laugh and Keith felt inclined to follow his example.

"Now I should have said quite the contrary, my dear aunt," he exclaimed. "I should have judged the atmosphere of a manse to be absolutely asphyxiating to brain power."

Lady Waite shook her head resolutely.

"I can assure you that the more rigidly dogmatic the father is the more highly intelligent will be the brainy son. Of course I don't speak of boys who are fundamentally stupid, they will never think for themselves on any subject; but now to revert to the matter in hand. I take it that by an open mind you mean that you neither believe nor disbelieve in psychic phenomena?"

For a moment Keith hesitated, and then became aware that Lady Waite was smiling.

"Ah! my friend, you spoke too hastily. What about the open mind now?" she asked.

Keith coloured in spite of his efforts to be composed; he had suddenly remembered his mother's vision which he knew he did believe in. Did it come under the generalisation of "Psychic Phenomena"?

"I suddenly remembered an experience which had been accorded my mother, and which I certainly believe in," he said confusedly. "I'm sorry I may not tell you about it."

## The Portals of Love

"You are right not to repeat what is a private matter," she exclaimed quickly; "that sort of experience should never be given out casually. But may I ask on what grounds, on what evidence do you so absolutely believe? I have a motive for asking this question."

Keith thought a moment before replying.

"I cannot explain in words, Lady Waite. I had no direct evidence. I can only say that as my mother recounted to me her experience I had the conviction that it was true. It was as if the knower within me knew unerringly. I'm sorry I can't be more precise and satisfactory. Some things one is uncertain of, other things come to one as moral certainties which nothing can shake."

"That will do," she said. "Now let me tell you something of what your work will be. We generally have staying in this house a subject under investigation, sometimes a man, sometimes a woman; at present it happens to be the latter—Mrs. Marshall, the trance medium. Once or twice a week we have sittings at which her powers are under test. Our circle consists of Sir Wilfred Barklay, the chemist; Mr. Clark, the M.P.; Professor Halse, of Cambridge; Professor Charbonne, of Paris, myself and my husband. Your duty would be to take full notes of the proceedings, the conditions under which the tests occur, their results, etc., a work which requires the closest and most careful observation. Nothing is too small to record, one can eliminate afterwards. Always bear in mind you are searching for fraud which is often most hard to detect. You will be only working for us, the other members of the circle will conduct their own observations. In the morning your work will be with me, Sir James is in his laboratory, but in the afternoon you must hold yourself in readiness to be useful to him. There is much correspondence to be done in the way



## The Portals of Love

of sifting evidence which comes in. For instance, we receive an account of a dream which has come true. From the dreamer minute particulars have to be extracted, and also from all those persons to whom he has recounted his dream. Sometimes as many as twenty letters pass upon one trifling case. Patience is the watchword of our work, patience and the keen desire to arrive at truth."

"It all sounds deeply interesting," observed Keith, who was wondering more and more how he was to embark upon this unknown sea without the smallest knowledge to guide him, and as if in answer to this thought Lady Waite went on:—

"I will give you certain books which you ought to read at once. There is *The Survival of Personality After Death*, by the late F. Myers—there you will see what patient and persevering elucidation means, besides the book is a gem of literature, written by one who was a master of the English language; then you must read Sir William Crookes' book—there you will find an inquiry into the realms of spiritualism conducted by England's greatest chemist, a scientist of world-wide renown. I will also send you Sir Oliver Lodge's book *Life and Matter*. After a week's careful study you ought to be able to catch hold of the fringe of the subject."

"You may depend upon my doing my utmost, Lady Waite. If Sir James thought fit to give me a trial I would work my hardest."

"And you honestly feel that our subjects would interest you?" she asked, searching his face with her penetrating scrutiny.

He broke into a smile which would have reassured her had she not been previously certain.

"They are the subjects I have been groping after all my life, Lady Waite. I have studied terrene evolution, but always feeling that a progressive im-

## The Portals of Love

mortality awaited man's endeavour to unveil it. It is my deepest longing to aid, however humbly, those men of advanced culture who seek to see what lies beyond the ordinary evidence of the five senses."

Her face had become grave again, she gave him a kindly comprehending glance as she turned her head at the opening of the door. "Ah! here is my husband," she said.

Sir James shook hands with Ulvadale, then turned at a word from his wife and offered his hand to Keith, who again experienced the sensation of being turned inside out for inspection.

"I have been trying to explain to Mr. Tytler something of what his work would be if he came to us," observed Lady Waite. "I believe it is work which will suit him."

The great chemist sat down and motioned Keith to his side. "Is it work which appeals to you?" he asked gently.

"It appeals to me intensely, sir. I only have grave doubts as to my efficiency. Earnestness and enthusiasm may not be a sufficiently strong recommendation."

Sir James was not lavish in either words or declarations. The well of his mind was so deep that very few were able to draw from it. Only on rare occasions, when strongly convinced that some controverted point was sound, did he raise his quiet emphatic voice, and on those rare interventions he left little desire in his opponents to answer him. He raised his massive white head and looked up at his wife who stood with her hands on the back of his chair bending down over him.

"Matters of intuition, as you know, I always leave to you, Emily," he said; "so I take your word for it that Mr. Tytler will be suited with congenial work. There is a word or two I should like to say in prelude



## The Portals of Love

to further conversation on the subject, Mr. Tytler, if you will bear with me for a moment. Your salary would be £200 a year, and you would live under my roof. My home would be yours, with perhaps a month's holiday at most, and at times when I could most conveniently spare you. Now, to less material matters. I welcome the fact that you have come from a very limited circle. I want what Kant calls 'the guilelessness of healthy ignorance'. I want no pre-conceived views, preferring to begin with the blank sheet; what you will later on inscribe upon that sheet will show your capacity or incapacity. Twenty years ago the *primâ facie* belief in scientific minds against research, bearing on the problem of man's immortality, assumed that such study was only undertaken by men who had no reverence for direct evidence, or by men whose personal craving for a future life was intense enough to blind them to the scantiness of evidence for such a belief. But all that is now radically changed, preoccupation with the unseen world may now be said to be universal in all cultured peoples. Even the uncultured amuse themselves in the vapid play-rooms of the Spiritualists." He paused a moment, and one of his rare smiles dawned slowly over his pale heavy face. "Perhaps I ought to speak with a deeper reverence of the séance room," he continued, "for it was there that for years I pursued my inquiries, and it was through this probation, so invariably unsatisfactory, that I came to the conclusion that I had no right to abandon the quest. I found nothing definite, but much that was uncomprehended. So long as the smallest point remains obscure, research must be pursued. I think it was in 1882 that the Society of Psychical Research was founded. One foundation was thought-transference, already within measurable distance of proof. Hypnotism and many other untouched subjects lay awaiting test and elucidation. Knowledge has advanced since

## The Portals of Love

then ; we no longer fear the jeers of the uneducated, we are no longer classed with fools and fanatics, we can afford to smile at those who still give forth utterances hostile to the quest ; the empirical science of nature and man will survive all dead metaphysical philosophies, and what Pater calls 'the strange vacuous atmosphere generated by professional divines'. The profanities, the impertinences of the professed theologian, in his intimate manner of laying down the law upon things 'which eye hath not seen' is, you will please recollect, abhorrent to me. The foremost scientists of the day are enlisted in the race. A slow race, Tytler, but as of old the tortoise of patient research will beat the hare of rash negations."

Whilst Sir James had been speaking several persons of both sexes had entered the room, and a little circle was formed round Lady Waite. No one had attempted to approach the great chemist, seeing him in earnest conversation. He looked round as he finished talking and rose. "Consider the matter for one week, Tytler, then let me hear your decision."

Keith thanked him warmly and was about quietly to withdraw when Lady Waite called him to her side.

"Don't go yet. Sit down here by me and listen, you will learn much of interest," she said.

Ulvadale had taken himself off, and Keith gladly did as he was bidden. For over an hour he sat in a strange confusion of mind, listening to the eager talk, the carefully picked arguments, the swift flow of intellectual novelties which passed from lip to lip in a brilliant interchange of mind, an interchange which ranged over the whole field of knowledge Fate as yet accords to man, from the last experiment of the biologist, the last speculation of the philosophers, to the last riddle propounded by the occultist. He heard the name of the Almighty spoken, but not as he had been accustomed to hear it, without reverence, as the



## The Portals of Love

name of an intimate personal acquaintance ; but with a profound underlying assumption of such awful magnitude that it were blasphemy to do more than touch upon His potentialities, or speculate upon His limitlessness. Yet, in the days to come Tytler gathered the fact that all those persons (brilliant intellects engaged in the deepest and most scientific research) looked upon the Bible as a mere collection of old myths and legends, interesting in their way, but utterly valueless as an instrument through which to approach the mysteries of the unknown. Their aim in life was not the reduction of all spiritual facts to physiological phenomena, they had passed that stage, but to gain a firm, scientific assurance of things professed to have been seen by some, but still unseen by themselves.

He walked home in a curious state of exaltation. Out of the quiet contracted existence of Seaview he had suddenly emerged upon a world of such dazzling brilliancy to him that it was hard to believe he still walked on *terra firma*. What marvellous lives those blest people lived, in what a world of teeming interest did they move ! In comparison to the poor little limitations of those at home how grandiose was their conception of the universe and its Maker. How profound their reverence for those limitless conceptions they strove to elucidate of God or His prototype. From the God who told the wretched Ezekiel to mix dung with barley cakes and eat it, to the God who set suns, planets and meteor streams in the heavens, how enormous a gulf.

He thought of Mrs. Macleod and Lady Waite, both women, yet could any two persons be further removed in intellect, the former with the brain of a hen, the latter with a brain of gigantic intellect, which had been used and trained to the highest point attainable. In his boyish wonderment and enthusiasm he laughed aloud as he strode up Piccadilly ; he had

## The Portals of Love

yet to learn the greatest of all lessons—toleration. He forgot that the hen must evolve greatly before *desiring* the brain of a Kelvin or a Crookes, and that by a wise decree of Providence the stupid are content to remain stupid until the Divine command, expressed in evolution, shall issue forth the words, "Friend, go up higher!"

At 8 P.M. Ulvadale called for Tytler, and by a quarter past the two friends found themselves seated in a box in the theatre. Keith was pale with excitement, and a pulse going like a mill-race. Ulvadale, understanding something of what he was going through, left him quietly to look round and take in his surroundings, whilst he lay back and opened and perused a packet of letters which he had only then found time to glance at. Keith gazed round the large circular building with its wealth of gold and white ornamentation and rich crimson upholstery, its dense sea of human faces in the "gods" and upper circle, its rapidly filling stalls, where women under the brilliant lights threw off their gay wraps, and exposed white shoulders and the sparkle of diamonds round necks and heads. Beautiful women with hair dressed as Miss Herne had hers dressed, and feathers and jewels quivering amongst the curls and puffs and plaits. What a wonderful sight it all was, he thought, as he adjusted the glasses Ulvadale had handed to him and looked again and yet again.

The music blared triumphantly a medley of tunes, the conductor moved his body like an automaton, a diamond on his little finger every now and again catching the light as he waved his baton in the air, and swept it down again gracefully, as if in blessing of the whole orchestra.

Suddenly Ulvadale leaned forward and touched him on the arm. "The King and Queen," he whispered, with a meaning glance towards the box opposite, and



## The Portals of Love

Keith looking quickly across saw for the first time the sovereign with his lovely consort.

For a moment Alexandra stood in the front of the box, her head raised, and poised on the long graceful neck like a delicate flower on its stalk, and Keith realised what the charm and beauty were that he had so often heard extolled. There were pearls round the slim throat, and a pink rose in the breast of the simple black gown. The most simply dressed woman present amongst that brilliant assembly, none could approach the Sea King's daughter in elegance and grace.

Suddenly the music stopped, the curtain rolled slowly up, there was the smell of escaping gas, and a blaze of yellow light pouring on to the stage. Keith leaned back and waited for what felt to him like the one supreme moment of his life. There were a great number of women on the stage, all dressed alike, all smiling very happily, and all singing lustily. Three men dressed in some extraordinary military costume sat by a table in the middle of this galaxy of beauty, conversing fiercely together, and apparently quite unimpressed by their surroundings. Suddenly one of them got up, seemingly having recovered his temper, and in the most inconsequent fashion began to sing a song to the audience, the presence of whom he apparently realised for the first time. Having finished, he returned to the table and took up the controversy as angrily as ever. Suddenly Keith's heart gave a great bound, the three men ceased speaking, and a voice that he knew came ringing out of the background of painted mountains and twining paper vines. Nearer came that clear bird-like voice, and in an instant Elizabeth stepped out from the green shimmer into the front of the stage and the full glare of the footlights. Elizabeth with her light young step, the yellow light flashing on the pearly teeth, the lovely eyes, the merry carelessness of parted lips and exquisite face. For a

## The Portals of Love

second the song ceased, as she bent her willowy form to the ringing applause that suddenly sprang from every part of the house in one long deafening roar. Then she swiftly turned, and throwing her hat aside, disclosing the unbound wealth of the glorious hair, she ran and perched herself on the table by which sat the three men—and again the song went on, wild, carolling and free, pouring from the lovely lips as the thrush's song pours out at break of day.

Keith took no heed of the play ; thoughts, fancies, recollections chaotic and bewildering were rushing through his brain. With the utmost difficulty could he believe that this was really his sister, this gay free-lance, this wild, graceful, petulant creature, all motion and vivacity and fire. Where was now the pale anxious face, with tear-filled eyes, the drooping, despondent form of the woman who in the garden of the Manse had told him of Torquil Grant's engagement to her, who had repeated with fierce conviction that her lover had been murdered. Surely that pale, stricken woman could not be this audacious beauty, with her gay laugh and sweet coquetry. His thoughts darted back to her words of yesterday morning, when he had told of his dismissal from home. "Oh poor, poor mother!" and the great tears had gathered in her eyes. His mother would at this hour be sitting by the fire mending, and waiting for half-past eight, when Joshua would read prayers and a chapter. The night would be dark, cold and raw, with the muffled thunder of the restless ocean carried over the desolate land in the teeth of the rough north-easterly wind. It would be moaning down the chimney like the wail of a myriad lost souls, and the mother would be thinking of them both, praying for her lost children, longing always for the beyond and that meeting she felt so sure would come to pass. The extraordinary difference between the lives of mother and daughter, who



## The Portals of Love

yet were linked so closely heart to heart, the violent contrast of the two scenes—the one of the old lost home in the wind-swept North, the other the sensuous luxury, warmth and brilliance of the theatre wherein he sat—appeared to him to baffle thought or description. Elizabeth, the outcast of the Manse, risen to this height of power and glory, the penniless lass, the minister's daughter, the runaway whose name was forbidden for very shame to be uttered in the grey old house, was standing there triumphant in her loveliness and glory, holding a brilliant, packed audience, which included the King and Queen, by sheer force of her loveliness. Elizabeth, who was soon to become a Peeress of the realm—what would his father say if he could look upon the scene for just one moment and gather some of its significance. Would he realise how futile his harshness had been to crush out the life and spirit of his daughter? Would it anger or would it shame him to see her now, the centre of all attraction riveting the gaze of hundreds amidst which sat the King and Queen of England? How would he feel when it burst upon him that his despised child was about to marry the man of highest rank in the county, that her future home would be the grand old castle, the owners of which he so venerated and looked up to?—and as he wondered, for an instant he knew that it would make no difference to his father's feelings. Only would he feel a deeper shame at seeing his daughter the beholden of all eyes, the deep centre of all attraction. The daughter of a minister of God play-acting instead of biding at home, seeing to the house and reading her Bible. The Lady Ulvadale would not be altered in his stern sight from the girl who had formerly been Elizabeth Tytler.

He awoke from out his trance of thought, the curtain was going down amid wild applause; there was a rustle and stir throughout the theatre, and

## The Portals of Love

Ulvadale, whose presence he had totally forgotten, touched him on the arm.

"Well!" he said expectantly.

Keith drew a deep breath.

"Don't ask me yet what I think, remember how new this all is to me. It's Elizabeth, and yet it isn't. I've got to adjust my mental balance."

Ulvadale smiled.

"Ah! yes, don't think I don't understand, for I do. You'll be able to imagine something of what I felt when I first saw the piece and realised that Violet Percival was Elizabeth Tytler. She's wonderful! wonderful! there's no one in the world like her. Talk of pluck and determination!" He stopped with an expressive gesture as if unable to find words, and leaned back and resumed the perusal of his letters—he had long since found his mental balance.

The piece went on to its triumphant finale, and Elizabeth, with her song, and graceful dance, and sparkling vivacity, and her lovely frocks carried all before her. Sometimes she had to reappear and repeat her song, so insistent was the applause; sometimes their eyes met across the footlights, and she gave him a soft little smile, and then she disappeared, and the crash of applause, the lowering of the curtain after the final scene seemed as a summons back from dream-land. The lights were lowered, the dull shuffling of departure struck on his ear with no meaning, and again Ulvadale laid a hand on his shoulder.

"We'll go round and see her into her carriage," he said, throwing a silk handkerchief round his immaculate collar. "Perhaps you'd like to drive home with her this first night."

Keith started up and began to struggle into his coat; he was all excitement once more, and together they began to thread their way through the densely packed moving mass. He would fain have gone slowly and



## The Portals of Love

lingered to listen to the remarks he caught fragments of, but Ulvadale hurried him on with a brief "Follow me!" Though he saluted many persons he spoke to none, and pierced the crowd like threading a needle. "Lovely woman," "Wonderfully pretty," "Exquisitely pretty," were some of the remarks wafted to him before he reached the door and passed out behind Ulvadale. They walked through the murky night, a slight drizzle had begun to fall, and the horses were slipping about in their frantic endeavours to keep their footing on the slippery wood pavement. At a corner Ulvadale turned sharply to the right, up a much darker street, and at last dived into a dark doorway before which stood a brougham with a single stolid horse. Behind tailed off several smartly turned-out landaulettes and carriages of various descriptions; the chauffeurs and grooms were gathered in a knot from whence proceeded a hum of conversation. They had hardly stood in the doorway a minute before Elizabeth appeared coming down an ill-lit passage. She was muffled in dark furs, a boa being drawn across her mouth. As she came under the single gas-jet Keith noted at once how pale and tired she looked. All the sparkle had gone out of her face. Ulvadale took her hand and drew it through his arm.

"I came round to say good-night, dearest. Keith is going home with you. You had a bumper house," he said, as they crossed the pavement.

She looked up at him and smiled, but did not speak; her eyes expressed her answer, for a second they flashed, then dimmed into softness.

"Aren't you coming with us?" asked Keith, as he stood aside a moment. Ulvadale smiled and shook his head.

"No, I only come by day, old chap. See that she goes to bed soon."

He stood bare-headed whilst the driver roused the

# The Portals of Love

sleeping horse, and the shabby conveyance drove off. A few scattered loafers stood round to see the beauty depart. A flower-girl waved her hand and tossed a bouquet into the carriage. "Pleasant dreams, Miss," she shouted. "I'll 'ave violets for you to-morrow, if they're to be got in 'the garden'."

A couple of youths, on the prowl, with cigarettes dangling from their lips, and their crush hats tilted to the side, strolled by in vapid quest. A burst of mirth and confused babble came from the stage door as there emerged a bevy of choristers; the door-keeper touched his hat and shouted "Miss Vandaleur's brougham," and a chauffeur rushed from out the group. Ulvadale watched Elizabeth's shabby hired carriage roll down the street, then he walked sharply away.

Elizabeth lifted the flowers and fastened them in her coat.

"She's a dear, and such a friend of mine," she said smiling, and referring to the flower-girl; then she put her hand through Keith's arm, laid her cheek on his shoulder and closed her eyes. Her voice sounded weak as a child, the dark fringe of lashes lay upon cheeks as pale as the flowers in her bosom.

"Are you very tired, Lizzie?" he asked, as he put a supporting arm round her.

"Not exactly tired," she murmured sleepily, "but depleted. I suppose it is the natural reaction."

He was surprised to see her like this; he had looked to see her emerge from the theatre flushed with triumph, proud of her success and filled with animation; he did not understand how very soon all such feelings fade out with custom. A week after her success had begun Elizabeth hardly felt it existed. All thoughts and efforts were concentrated on husbanding her strength to get through the nightly work before her.

In a few minutes they found themselves back again in the little flat. The light was switched on in the



## The Portals of Love

dining-room where a good fire burned, and Alice, the maid, was ready to divest her mistress of her wraps. On the table there was spread a tiny supper, a cold chicken and some fruit. Alice removed a kettle from the fire and made some tea, after which she withdrew and left the brother and sister together.

He bent and kissed her almost with reverence.

"I'm awfully proud of you, Lizzie. I hardly know what to say, this has been the most wonderful night I have ever spent. I shall never forget it."

She smiled across at him, her eyes shining again, and began to eat, her slender fingers delicately peeling a banana. Below Torquil Grant's ring shone a great hoop of diamonds, the gift of Ulvadale. Throughout the play she had worn her hair hanging loose; now she withdrew two or three pins and shook it down again in a bronze cloud over her shoulders, as she pushed the curly mass from her brows.

"You saw the King and Queen?" she asked. "This is the second time they have been to see the piece."

"Yes," said Keith, "and I could not help wondering what father would have thought could he have looked on that scene for only one minute."

She shook her head and looked at him with dreamy, meditative eyes.

"Poor father! It would not have altered his views, which are fixed as the laws of the Medes and Persians. I often think how powerless one human soul is to alter the destiny of another. All father's efforts were powerless to check my career. I was born to soar, not to grovel. After a certain age each soul begins to think for itself and act independently. No child is the replica of its parent, it must be always just a little bit in advance, it seems to me."

Even the wild excitement of the evening had not thrust out of Keith's mind the events of the after-

## The Portals of Love

noon; he longed to tell her all his news and wonderful experiences, but motives of affection held him back, and when she mentioned the subject in another moment, he told her his news would keep till the morrow, and she ought to go to her rest—had not Ulvadale said so? He curbed his tongue, contenting himself with the thought that they would meet at breakfast next morning.

She kissed him and went away to bed, and he lit a cigarette and sat up far into the early morning hours, thinking of the wonderful future which Fate had spread out like a gorgeous carpet for his own and his sister's feet to walk upon.



## CHAPTER XVI

KEITH TYTLER had been for one week in the employment of Sir James Waite, and the fascination of his new work completely absorbed him. Had he been told before his entry into that household that the extraordinary scenes he witnessed were possible he would have repudiated the suggestion with all his force, the open mind he had boasted of would have been forgotten. Events he subsequently witnessed he would have formerly looked upon as an insult to his reason had they been recounted to him by the lips of another, yet they were no more remarkable than the events which are common to most séances. As it was he at first doubted his own eyesight, till becoming more accustomed as time went on to the supernatural, and observing the interested but by no means astonished demeanour of the group of savants with whom he worked, he came to the conclusion that amazing as the whole affair was it came under the heading of fact.

A deep perusal of the books which had been lent to him had prepared him for much fraud and trickery which were held accountable for many phenomena, but with his own eyes he had constantly seen the medium entranced in her chair whilst strange, ghost-like forms paraded the floor, appearing and vanishing without effort or sound. He had thoroughly examined the room; nowhere could even a child be hidden, and the key was in Sir James's pocket. His firm conviction was that under the circumstances fraud was im-

## The Portals of Love

possible. Yet to hear the little circle talk it would appear as if what had passed could be nothing else. The excitement of a first glance into the supernormal was strongly upon him, and he ventured to express his conviction that trickery was impossible. Sir James smiled.

"I know," he said kindly, "that is naturally your belief; but remember, please, that it is our business at present to treat the whole affair as a clever imposition and to discover how we have been so egregiously deceived."

He found that what he had experienced was a fair example of what was occurring and being patiently investigated in many learned circles all over the world. He was amazed to find how widespread was the research and how very numerous Spiritualists were. They swarmed in London, but in point of numbers Paris exceeded the English Capital. In the voluminous correspondence Lady Waite carried on with investigators in all parts of the world, he learned that there are numerous sects who pursue their own line of interest with intense earnestness, and that verily one half of the world knows nothing of what the other half is doing.

Keith wrote an enthusiastic account of his new and proud position to Miss Herne, not, however, mentioning the sittings, as that was a forbidden topic by order of Sir James. His whole life was now brimful of the most intense interest; he felt as if for the first time he knew what living meant. Often in the afternoon he had the chance of being present for an hour or two in Lady Waite's drawing-room, where the elect of the land (not the elect in the ordinary acceptance of the term, but the pick of England's brains) gathered together for tea, and what they termed gossip. But what gossip it was!—incursions far into the realms of philosophic speculation, aerial voyages into the vast depths of the heavens, where some suspected star still baffled



## The Portals of Love

discovery, but was destined not to elude the patient brain that calculated and dealt with stupendous figures. What a revelation this was to Keith to learn that stars are discovered by the brain far more often than by the telescope. In time he became familiar with the wonders of the X Rays and began his own speculations upon the N Rays, not yet sealed by the official blessing of science, but being keenly investigated by Sir James, who hoped by substantiating them to find the clue to the séance room manifestation.

Miss Herne's answer to his letter was made in person. She walked in one afternoon in the midst of a deep argument upon reincarnation, and at once made herself one with the company. She had known the Waites for some years, and was welcomed as an old friend. Youth was beginning to assert itself in a new elasticity of body and spirits; she looked much better, something of the old look of calm peacefulness had returned to her face.

It was after six o'clock when Keith at last found an opportunity for half an hour's private conversation in a quite corner of the room. He was all anxiety to learn something of his mother.

"Yes, I have seen her several times," Liliás replied to his eager question, "and we have become great friends. Your name like Elizabeth's is forbidden in the household, and the Sunday after you left we had a most violent sermon on the modern want of faith. I can't say your mother is well, but I can confidently say she is happy. As you hinted some wonderful revelation has been accorded to her, which has altered the whole complexion of her life. I don't believe she will live long, and I don't think you ought to want her to live. Her earthly existence, now that both her children are gone from her, is utterly devoid of love and sympathy; she has only the parish to fall back upon, and all her thoughts are now centred in a certain

## The Portals of Love

future in which God—not her husband's God, but one of her own conceiving—is going to give her back her own, and make up to her for all she has lost. I got her to open her heart to me on the subject of you and Elizabeth, but could gather nothing definite regarding the wonderful something that has brought her such content. She sent you and your sister no end of loving messages."

"She will miss you terribly when you also have left Seaview," he said, his voice not quite steady.

"I fear she will, but I shall return sometimes to the Fastness, and then I will see her again. I promised my uncle that I would pay them occasional visits, and I spend Christmas with them."

"Is he beginning to feel the loss of his son less?" asked Keith.

It was his indirect way of finding out how she herself was bearing her loss. He saw her face change swiftly from gravity to a deep pain, and he instantly regretted the question. He knew he had no right to probe the deep wound the death of her lover must have inflicted.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"He never felt it deeply," she said, in a low, bitter voice. "I felt it infinitely more; but what is past is irrevocable, Keith. I try to banish the subject from my mind."

To him it was a curious remark. Why should the dead be banished? Ought they not to be kept in hallowed and sweet memory?

"Uncle John always loved Roderick best," she went on in a lighter vein. "By the way, your successor is utterly spoiling the boy. He panders to every whim, and is putting all sorts of ridiculous ideas into the child's head about his new importance. All this Mrs. Macleod encourages in her own elation at finding herself mother to the heir. Mr. Smith is a mere ignorant time-server, and a snob into the bargain.



## The Portals of Love

Now, tell me of Elizabeth. I thought of trying to find her in at tea-time to-morrow."

"She will be delighted to see you, Miss Herne. To me, who am naturally prejudiced in her favour, she is perfectly marvellous. I have been to see her act several times, the house is always full and she gets a wonderful reception; but sometimes I doubt if her health will hold out. She has to be always resting and saving herself for her night's work. She lives otherwise a very, very quiet existence."

He longed to tell her of Elizabeth's coming marriage, but the lovers still laid the seal of secrecy on his lips, though the marriage was to take place in six weeks.

"And you are satisfied with your present position?" she asked, and then laughed at the sudden light of pure happiness which dawned. "A needless question, I can see," she remarked. "Well, it is an excellent stepping-stone to something better."

"I couldn't conceive of anything better," he exclaimed enthusiastically, "and I hope in time to supplement my pay by writing articles. If they are worth accepting I shall succeed in this, as Sir James knows all the well-known editors and will ensure my work being read. I have built all sorts of castles in the air. I even aspire to being an editor myself one of these days."

She smiled gently. "Build as many castles as you like, but always ensure their foundation being laid on earth," she advised. "Well, I do think you are extremely fortunate in your present position, few men have such an interesting occupation, or are privileged to dwell in constant communion with such charming and intellectual people as the Waites." She looked round on hearing an exclamation from Lady Waite, who was standing by the door bidding good-bye to the last of her afternoon callers.

"Why, my dear Ulvadale, what a pleasant surprise!" she said.

## The Portals of Love

Ulvadale advanced into the room; he was as usual perfectly dressed, but he looked hastily round with a glance that might almost have been called shy. Perceiving no one but Keith and Miss Herne, he brightened up again all of a sudden.

"How delightful to find you here, how thoroughly appropriate," he exclaimed, as he hurried up to shake hands with her. She laughed.

"I'm glad you find it delightful and also appropriate; but why the latter should be thoroughly so, I can't imagine," she said.

"Because I wanted to see you particularly, Miss Herne."

She sat down again. "Oh! I see, you are congratulating yourself on killing several birds with one stone; but I beg to inform you it will be your duty instantly to call upon me on my arrival in town, no matter whether we have met to-day or not."

"Delighted," said Ulvadale, making her a little bow. "You will find me on your doorstep to-morrow afternoon without fail."

"Come and sit down, Ulvadale, and tell me what you've come for," said Lady Waite.

"One would think I was a professional beggar," he remarked, obeying her by drawing up a chair into which he sank.

"No, my dear, you will never rise out of the ranks of the amateur. Come now, out with it. What sex is the biped you want to place to-day? though I grant you that your last contribution has proved highly satisfactory."

Keith coloured. "Thank you, Lady Waite," he said quietly.

"How do you know I haven't come to inquire if Tytler suited you or not?" asked Ulvadale slyly.

"Because, my dear, you invariably wash your hands of your protégées directly they're placed," answered his aunt.



## The Portals of Love

Ulvadale smiled faintly. "This all comes of being so infernally good-hearted," he said. "I worry and bore myself to extinction out of pure good nature over some one I don't care a red cent about, and then, when I don't continue to worry over the good fortune I have brought them, I'm blamed for it. One can't like everybody one tries to help, at least I can't. I needn't say you, Keith, are an exception." He shot a glance full of friendly meaning towards his future brother-in-law. "Well, now," he continued, "I came this evening purposely late to catch you alone, and tell you a secret which in six weeks will be common property for all who care to possess themselves of the precious information."

"Shall I go away?" asked Lilius, half-rising.

"Certainly not, Miss Herne. I want you to hear; that is why I referred to your presence as being thoroughly appropriate. Keith, you may stay also."

"You are going to be married," said Lady Waite, with firm conviction.

Ulvadale looked at her with raised eyebrows. "How extraordinary that you should have guessed rightly and the very first time," he exclaimed.

"I'm very glad that I have guessed rightly. It's quite time you were married. Well, who is the lady? Do I know her?" she inquired.

Keith felt himself turn scarlet, and his heart begin to thump with anxiety as to how the coming announcement would be received. He thought it madness of Ulvadale to act as he was doing.

"No, there is only one person besides myself in this room who knows her, and that's Keith Tytler," said Ulvadale calmly.

Keith felt two pairs of female eyes suddenly turned on his disturbed countenance.

"Good gracious me, I've got it!" exclaimed Lady Waite, with her usual terrible penetration. "You're going to marry Violet Percival."

## The Portals of Love

"You would make your fortune if you would take to professional thought-reading, Aunt Emily. You've got it in one again," observed Ulvadale admiringly.

Lady Waite gave a little gasp, and Keith held his breath and glanced at Liliás, who was smiling broadly ; then she took her nephew's hand and drew it into her lap.

"She's a very, very lucky woman, Ulvadale, and I hope she knows it," she said, with a little catch in her voice.

"How long have you known of this plot?" inquired Liliás sharply, turning upon Keith.

"Only since the day of my arrival in London, and I was sworn to secrecy," exclaimed Tytler. "And oh, Lady Waite," he went on in his terribly earnest way, "my sister does indeed appreciate her good luck ; and though I say it myself, I know she will make Ulvadale a very good wife, she is so sweet and good and gentle, and she has been so brave all through her trials and her hard life, and she is so absolutely devoted to him."

Lady Waite was looking at him sympathetically ; she liked his open, earnest championship.

"I'm quite ready to believe all you say, and you must not think that I should ever be prejudiced against a woman for earning her own bread ; in my eyes it is a very grand thing to do, Mr. Tytler," she said gently. "If all you say of your sister were not true, it would be a great grief to me, for as you can see, I care very much for Ulvadale."

"It is true, however, my dear aunt," broke in Ulvadale ; "and when you know Elizabeth you will realise the truth for yourself. She's a very beautiful woman ; but, thank God, she's something more, and she's the woman I love—the only one I ever wanted to marry."

"I shall go and see her to-morrow," declared Liliás. "I was going in any case, and I hope you will be very, very happy, Ulvadale. How soon are you to be married?"

He took her hand and pressed it warmly. She had



## The Portals of Love

always been so good a friend to him that he would have grieved to lose her.

"In six weeks and quite quietly," he answered. "I am going to write to my mother to-night telling her of my coming marriage. She will take it very hardly, I know, but that cannot be helped. In this matter I must please myself. I cannot permit her to settle my future for me. She decided my past and must let that suffice. She is already much prejudiced against Elizabeth, who was treated as Keith has been—turned out of the Manse because she chose to earn her own living in her own way."

Lady Waite was looking very grave. Keith had confided his story to her before he was engaged for the secretaryship, in fact had insisted that she should hear it.

"Your father must have a very hard nature," she said, with a touch of sternness.

"He is hard in the absolute sincerity of his own beliefs, which are not ours," Keith replied. "Yet, suffering as both Elizabeth and I have done through those beliefs, I yet hold that there is something grand about his vigorous and intensely earnest defence of his God. His Deity comes first, as is right—the misfortune lies in his conception of that Deity."

"A truly terrible one," said Lillas, "utterly unrelenting and merciless."

"And what is worse, extremely narrow," exclaimed Lady Waite. "Oh! the misery that awful God, extracted from out a bundle of worthless manuscripts, has caused for centuries past. When will humanity come to its senses on the subject? However, let us turn to a pleasanter topic. You must be married from this house, Ulvadale. We are your nearest relatives, and things must be done properly. I insist upon that. Mr. Tytler will give his sister away, and who is to be best man?"

## The Portals of Love

"You quite take my breath away," cried Ulvadale, genuinely moved by so much kindness and energetic thought on his behalf. "We shall be married from this house with the greatest gratitude and pleasure, and Keith shall present me with Elizabeth, and Kenneth Macleod shall be my best man. I wrote to ask him to-day."

"And I will be bridesmaid—don't leave me out," exclaimed Lilius.

"Right you are—you really are a brick, Miss Herne," observed Ulvadale, regarding her with eloquent eyes.

"We must settle all that with the bride," remarked Lady Waite, with a note of caution. "Perhaps we're running on too fast."

Ulvadale waved his hand.

"That's all fixed. Lizzie likes what I like ; and, poor dear, she hasn't got a bridesmaid. She isn't the sort of girl who makes friends with the lot she's been thrown amongst. She'll be only too delighted if Miss Herne will officiate."

"The next thing is, when am I to see your Elizabeth?" said Lady Waite, smiling at his manly way of taking for granted his future wife's mind being his.

"I'll bring her to see you to-morrow morning if I may. She has nothing on at the theatre ; only a few weeks more of that drudgery and then done with it for ever, thank goodness. I won't bring her in the afternoon as you've always so many callers, and I don't want London to be on our track for a few days yet."

They discussed the important topic for another half-hour and then they parted ; Lilius going back to her Club to dress and return to dine quietly with the Waites, Ulvadale to his Club where he sat down and penned a long account of the afternoon's proceedings to his lady love, and arranging to call for her at one o'clock and take her to lunch quietly at Wilton Crescent. He felt in a deeply grateful frame of mind towards the



## The Portals of Love

aunt who was so ready to befriend him, and exulted in the thought that Elizabeth would be able to hold her own in breeding and beauty with any woman in the land. However beautiful, he knew that it would have been impossible for him to have married a woman who was coarse or dissolute; but this daughter of the northern Manse was as exquisitely refined, as pure in mind and as gentle mannered as it was possible for a woman to be, and in his infatuation for her and his delight in her physical loveliness he never lost sight of those important facts.

Lady Waite, though she accepted the fact of her nephew's engagement in the manner her intimates would have expected, was by no means so sanguine when she afterwards penetrated to Sir James's study and told him the news.

"It is one of those matters one can only take in two ways, there is no third course," she said. "One must either absolutely accept or absolutely reject. My experience of life leads me always to choose the former, when it is humanly possible. The girl may be horrid or she may be charming. In such cases an optimistic frame of mind is best. One ought to make the best of people, not the worst. If she is nasty, well! I must try my best to make her nice, that is all one can do."

"Judging by Tytler, she ought to be all right," remarked Sir James consolingly. "He's a gentleman, every inch of him."

"He is, and charming and good-looking into the bargain; but sisters don't always happen to take after their brothers."

"Perhaps they don't, but occasionally they resemble them," observed Sir James; "and as you say we must hope for the best."

## CHAPTER XVII

AT Seaview it had been snowing hard for four days and at last had ceased. The weather-wise predicted more to come as they looked up at the sullen grey skies which seemed so threatening, and thanked God for the temporary lull. A bitter north wind had whirled the great flakes over sea and land in dense fleeces, which ten degrees of frost caught hold of as it fell and welded into a compact and iron-hard carpet of considerable depth, ever growing deeper as night succeeded day and the storm lasted.

The little town was well-nigh blotted out of existence; the able-bodied men were all away fishing in southern waters, and the women, children and old men were busy every few hours cutting a passage out of their houses and wrestling with the ever-increasing volume of snow which hemmed them in. Dr. Bright now discarded roads, not from choice but because there were none—the old tracks were buried out of recognition. He drove his spanking mare yoked to the little sleigh, and merrily she jangled her bells as she flew across country. Occasionally they came to an unexpected ditch, at times a presumptuous hedge dared to protrude above the enveloping mantle, but such obstacles mattered little to the cheery doctor and his horse. They took a bee-line and stuck to it. The Fastness standing so high had escaped the drifting, but made a target for the onslaught of the storm which whirled round the towers and gables and



## The Portals of Love

fast over the paper beneath chilblained hands—hands that looked as if they had never been warm in spite of the grey wool mittens she wore. Though there had been no post in and no post out for two days, Lady Ulvadale relaxed none of her correspondence. Tuesday's letters and Wednesday's letters were placed in two neat heaps. Thursday's letters, in process of manufacture, were being placed by Miss Crosbie in a third pile, and every now and again she paused and glanced admiringly at her work. It really pleased her to see how many stamps she had used in three days. The letters she never found very amusing, they dealt principally with her mistress's hobby—missionary work—and were all addressed to various members of the clergy.

The door opened and the butler entered with a tray piled high with letters and papers.

"The mail just arrived, my lady. The train got through at ten o'clock last night," he said, as he walked up to Miss Crosbie and deposited the tray beside her chair according to custom.

"Did the postman walk or drive?" asked Lady Ulvadale.

"I didn't trust to his coming and sent in a boy this morning, my lady," the man answered, as he began to make up the fire. Once or twice he glanced curiously at the old lady, as if in anticipation of something interesting to follow; and at last, having put off as much time as he possibly could, he slowly withdrew.

Miss Crosbie stood up, busily arranging the mass. What looked like private letters she attended to first; there were not very many—five in all. Those she handed at once to Lady Ulvadale and returned to the desk and went on with her sorting.

Lady Ulvadale adjusted her spectacles and turned over the envelopes. Four were of no interest, the fifth was from her son, and this she opened leisurely.

## The Portals of Love

buried its beautiful outlines beneath a deep pall. A magnificent but mournful spectacle it stood in the deep, death-like silence, its surrounding woods bending under their weight of dazzling purity.

For two days no train had reached Seaview, but a rumour had come, no one knew how, that at last a way had been cut, and the isolation would be ended. The telegraph wires had given way under the stress of the storm, and for all that Seaview knew England and the rest of the world might be all demolished by an earthquake or any other cataclysm. Seaview being not wholly new to such wintry experiences took the matter very philosophically, and in default of authentic news manufactured enough to keep interest in life alive and brains from stagnation.

Away across the country, six miles from Seaview, Ulvadale Castle lay silent, like an enchanted castle that had been asleep for many generations. Lady Ulvadale did not bother her head about the storm or the lack of worldly news. There was a well-filled store cupboard, lots of sheep and poultry handy, and the doings of the world were of little interest to her. She sat by her fire in her own little boudoir, a small table by her side on which reposed her well-worn Bible and her grey crochet; a shawl, in process of making, in her fingers. This shawl had been the wonder of her son's life; he had never seen any other work in her hands. To his eyes it never seemed to grow, yet to his knowledge his mother had been making it for thirty years. He never saw the large heap of shawls, all of the same size, make and colour, reposing in one of her ladyship's cupboards—a heap that towards Christmas decreased almost to vanishing-point, and began again to grow in size after the New Year.

Miss Crosbie, Lady Ulvadale's companion, sat at a large business-like desk in the window, her pen running



# The Portals of Love

"BACHELORS' CLUB,  
"PICCADILLY.

"DEAREST MOTHER,

"I am going to be married on the 1st of February to Miss Elizabeth Tytler, only daughter of the minister at Seaview. The marriage will take place from Aunt Emily's house in Wilton Crescent, so if you feel inclined to be present you will know where to find us. Horrid weather here—foggy and cold, and lots of unemployed about. If charitable people would look after those at home and leave alone the savages abroad, who have the advantage of the sun which our poor devils haven't, there would be no unemployed or poverty about. Never did approve of missions! Hope you are well. By the way, I propose to bring home my wife about 1st March, for the spring fishing—she's bred to the climate.

"Your affect. son,  
"ULVADALE."

The old lady made no exclamation, she merely lay back in her chair, the open letter in her lap, too stunned for the moment to think or speak. Meanwhile, Miss Crosbie was speaking, but to deaf ears:—

"Five appeals from the Head Committee of the Central African Mission. No, six; I beg your pardon. Two from the Christian Mission to the Soudanese Arabs; no less than nine from Northern India. Dear me!"

She spoke in vain. Lady Ulvadale made no response. She laid the letters aside and began opening the papers. The *Seaview Chronicle* attracted her first, and she glanced down the births, deaths and marriages, then she opened the paper and ran her eye down the news. A smothered exclamation burst from her lips as her eyes devoured a startling announcement.

"We are authorised to state that a marriage will take place in London, on 1st February, between Miss

## The Portals of Love

Elizabeth Tytler, only daughter of the Rev. Joshua Tytler, LL.D., of the Manse, Seaview, and Viscount Ulvadale, of Ulvadale Castle. We venture to offer our respectful and sincere congratulations to his lordship and Miss Tytler, who, as a child, was well known and liked in Seaview."

Miss Crosbie read the lines carefully over twice. She still could not be certain whether her eyes played her false or not, then with the paper in her hand she crept round to Lady Ulvadale's chair. One glance at the old lady's face showed her that the blow had fallen.

Miss Crosbie gave a little gasp, the look on the old woman's face frightened her.

"Shall I run for a little brandy, Lady Ulvadale?" she whispered timidly.

The sharp grey eyes opened suddenly. "Certainly not. Order the sleigh and pair to come round as soon as George can put to," she ordered brusquely. Miss Crosbie laid the newspaper on the table and crept from the room to give the order, then she returned. Lady Ulvadale had not moved; she fixed her eyes on her companion with such a look of fury that the poor creature wished she had remained outside.

"Is there anything of importance in the paper?" she demanded.

Miss Crosbie took up the *Seaview Chronicle* with shaking hands.

"There is a very startling announcement," she faltered fearfully.

"Read it out," ordered Lady Ulvadale.

In a voice trembling betwixt fear and excitement Eliza Crosbie did as she was bid.

"Well! what do you think of that?" asked Lady Ulvadale, in tones that struck terror into the companion's abject soul.

"Oh! Lady Ulvadale, it is too, too terrible!" she sobbed.



## The Portals of Love

The old woman glared at her.

"How often have I told you not to use those eternal adverbs. A thing is either terrible or it is not—too terrible isn't sense. Never let me hear you say it again. This thing is terrible, which means it can't be worse. I think all the world is mad except Euphemia Ulvadale, that's what I think, Eliza Crosbie. How dare my son write and tell me such a disgraceful, scandalous piece of information?"

She glared at the terrified Eliza as if she was wholly responsible for the outrage.

"I'm sure I can't imagine," the poor creature replied, truthfully enough.

Lady Ulvadale tossed the letter into her lap.

"There! You may read what he says. I want every one to know to what depths that shameless hussy has brought him to."

Miss Crosbie read the awful epistle, tears trickling from her eyes. Eliza's tears were always near the surface.

"How inhumanly cruel," she exclaimed. "What a shocking creature she must be. No wonder dear Dr. Tytler turned her out of the Manse."

Lady Ulvadale's withered lips curled.

"A play-actress, a woman who shows her legs. How dare my son so demean himself? The daughter of a minister, forsooth! and a thoroughly abandoned woman. I wonder God does not strike him dead."

Eliza shivered. A fearful excitement was upon her. The guilty pair were actually coming to the Castle in March. What wonderful doings. In the midst of her terror rose up a faint thrill of joy. At last in a long grey life something had happened, and more might be safely anticipated.

"I shall drive straight to the Manse and confront Joshua Tytler with his daughter's perfidy. If he has had any hand in this shameless plot, I can only say,

## The Portals of Love

God help him!" said Lady Ulvadale, with fierce vindictiveness as she rose.

"Oh, Dr. Tytler would have never dared, never presumed to look so high for his daughter," exclaimed Eliza; "he hasn't seen her for years."

Lady Ulvadale muttered something under her breath not at all complimentary to "the cloth". She was absolutely inconsistent in her regard for Joshua Tytler. She never thought of him as on a level with her own class, and would have been extremely angry, not to say insulted, if any one had hinted that he was her social equal. Yet she submitted to his dictation upon the most delicate of all subjects, the religious life, where one would have naturally supposed, to carry weight the dictator could not be too highly educated, too manifestly superior in culture and learning to his fellow-creatures. It never occurred to her to question his authority on biblical matters, or to ask herself why he should know any more about the matter than she herself did. She possessed the ingrained delusion that God specially selected His ministers to be His earthly exponents; she fancied they must all have gone through some apprenticeship or initiation under His personal supervision. When Joshua spoke of the prophets as if they were his intimate acquaintances, and expounded Jehovah as if He were an oracle that he kept in a cage, and occasionally consulted or ordered about as the spirit moved him, she saw nothing grotesque or absurd about the position. She was not a woman given to tears or she might have shed them in profusion now. No shock, no horror had ever entered her life to equal what she now felt. What she experienced was not so much sorrow and grief as intense, unreasoning anger that her son had made such a choice—had indeed made any choice without first consulting her; and deepest humiliation and wounded pride mingled with her fiercer emotions.



## The Portals of Love

She had always trusted him absolutely, and had been under the impression that he had been entirely under her thumb, and absolutely amenable to any course she might suggest. The awakening was indeed a tragedy. Ulvadale had done much, without intent to deceive, to foster this belief. Possessed of good brains and a kindly disposition he had always "let the old lady down gently," to use his own expression. He never contradicted her, because he saw she was incapable of genuine argument, and was obstinately attached to her own beliefs. He was always pleasant and agreeable with her, but though she didn't perceive it he was humouring her as one humours a child. He knew his world and thought her beliefs harmless imbecilities that did no one any damage. When she dismissed, as she often did, servants or tenants on the estate for what she considered an insufficiency of religious enthusiasm, he quietly rectified the matter and said nothing. Her belief in Joshua Tytler and his fiery doctrines he thought of as merely a joke, and was glad the old lady had some one to amuse her. That his mother should bring to bear any serious influence on his life was a contingency too remote for him to speculate upon—it simply never entered his brain. In the large issues of life he took his own way without her being aware of it, just as he managed his estate in his own fashion, whilst she firmly believed it was managed according to hers.

She went away to wrap up for her six miles' drive through the snow, her bitter fury making her impervious to the elements. She always dined at four o'clock, and had three good hours before her in which to give vent to her feelings.

Meanwhile, the news had run through Seaview like a streak of lightning and produced considerable excitement. At the office of the *Seaview Chronicle*

## The Portals of Love

Ulvadale's letter was pinned upon the counter for all to read who cared, and there were many who went there for further confirmation, and feasted their eyes on the neat, firm signature. At the Manse there was wildest consternation. Martha Black was the first to hear the intelligence, having run round to the post-office for three penny stamps. She hurried home and burst into the kitchen where Mrs. Tytler was concocting an Irish stew for the minister's dinner.

"Oh! mem, there's such news. All Seaview's got it!"

Mrs. Tytler turned pale and sat down suddenly, her thoughts darting to her children.

"What is it, Martha?" she asked, and her eyes wore a look of terrible entreaty. Mrs. Black glanced round the kitchen and lowered her voice.

"Beggin' your pardon, mem, but it's about Miss Elizabeth—she be going to be married."

"To be married, Martha, who to?" Mrs. Tytler had gone paler, her hands straining together in her lap.

"You'll never believe it, mem, but it's to Lord Ulvadale, over at the Castle. It's in all the papers that's in this morn."

Janet Tytler let her head droop down on her folded arms on the table. Not a word did she utter. The faithful servant gazed at her in dismay. In her opinion this wonderful intelligence would certainly reinstate the daughter in her lost home. Her mistress ought to greatly rejoice. Joshua Tytler couldn't be hard on Lady Ulvadale, she thought, that would be too ridiculous. In her eyes it was a romance straight from *The People's Journal* or *The Family Herald*, both of which she steadily and surreptitiously read.

"Come, come, don't take on like that," she said. "Surely 'tis a wonderful rise for Miss Elizabeth; and now ye'll all be happy again together, and ye'll be going to the Castle to visit your own daughter."



## The Portals of Love

Mrs. Tytler raised her head ; her face was pale as a ghost's, and her eyes looked startled and terrified.

"Does Dr. Tytler know yet?" she asked, in a curious whisper.

"Not that I'm aware ; but I'll go and tell him if you like," answered the woman, who indeed would have liked nothing better than to confront the minister with the news—she rather prided herself on standing up to him.

"There's no objection, surely, that the Lord'll have to a prodigal daughter ; it's aye been a son, but maybe He'll no mind a change for once."

Mrs. Tytler started up and seized her arm. "No, no, you musn't go near him," she gasped. "He'll be terribly angry."

"Well, he aye was hard to please, like his Maker," answered Mrs. Black, in an injured voice, beginning to fasten on her discarded apron with an air of having done with the matter.

At that instant a sound of sleigh bells broke in on the stillness, and a violent peal sounded from the front door. Mistress and servant stared at each other in consternation, the nerves of both already being considerably disarranged.

"Lord hae mercy on us," ejaculated Mrs. Black. "But maybe it's the doctor," she added, in a less awe-stricken tone.

"Dr. Bright never rings, he just walks in," said Mrs. Tytler.

"Well, I'll gang and see," remarked Mrs. Black valiantly, as she made for the door. Mrs. Tytler followed in the background ; from a corner, by peeping round, she could see the front entrance. She shrank back with a smothered groan as she perceived Lady Ulvadale following Martha down the passage and in the background Miss Crosbie seated in the sleigh.

"I'll no put ye in a room without a fire, my leddy,"

## The Portals of Love

Martha was saying. "If ye'll be pleased to come into the parlour."

Soon the intrepid Martha was heard knocking at her master's study door, and after a short interval she returned to the kitchen where her mistress sat by the table.

"It's all right," she announced, "she's no asked for you; it's the maister she's speering for, and she's no best pleased—let me tell ye that."

Joshua Tytler rose and went in all unconscious to the interview that awaited him, and found Lady Ulvaldale standing very erect before the fire. "Well!" she exclaimed without preface, "what have you to say for yourself? eh!"

Tytler stopped short in his passage from the door and stared hard at her. Was she mad or had he not caught what she said?

"I beg your ladyship's pardon," he said.

"And so well you may, Joshua Tytler; but that won't mend matters. Of course you've heard the news?"

He looked at her again, a trace of excitement crossing his face; his mind also darted to his children, the terrible subject which so constantly engrossed his thoughts, strive as he might to banish it.

"I have heard nothing," he answered, with a grave dignity. "Will your ladyship not be seated?" He pushed forward a chair and crossed the room, turning to face her again with his back to the light.

"So you've not heard. Well! let me be the first to tell you, Dr. Tytler, of the most shameful, disgraceful scandal the world has ever known. My son writes me that he is engaged to be married to your daughter—but it shall be put a stop to."

For a moment he stared at her in stupefaction; it literally took him a minute or two before he could take home to his brain such an extraordinary piece of



## The Portals of Love

intelligence. His face had paled, that heavy anger which always arose at the mention of Elizabeth thumped in his breast.

"Yes! It must be put a stop to," he muttered stupidly, as if he were but mimicking her words, as he leaned his head on his hand and stared vacantly into the fire.

His attitude of what looked like dull apathy infuriated her still more. He was really stricken dumb, but she thought he was indifferent.

"Do you realise in any way the appalling situation? Do you not see what a terrible calamity has happened?" she cried. "Why, it's enough to make his poor father rise in his grave. No such disgrace has ever come upon our family."

"It must be put a stop to," reiterated Joshua, in a firmer voice. He was beginning to recover his presence of mind; the reality of what she had told him was at last beginning to dawn.

"And may I inquire how you propose to put a stop to it?" inquired Lady Ulvadale, in a voice that tried to be mocking but only succeeded in quivering with rage.

Tytler looked at her, a tinge of surprise in his face. In his innocence of worldly affairs he concluded that she was possessed of half a dozen methods of bringing her son to his senses.

"I put a stop to it!" he exclaimed; "and how should I, a minister of God, know about such matters?"

Lady Ulvadale fixed upon him eyes which pierced like gimlets.

"Stuff and nonsense! I've no patience with you, Joshua Tytler. Let me tell you that minister of God or not you'll have to bestir yourself. Do you imagine for one instant that I shall tamely put up with this unmitigated insult?"

"Your ladyship must accept the visitation of the

## The Portals of Love

Lord and receive His chastisement with due humility. We all have to suffer at times," he replied, with more force. Her words were beginning to sting.

Lady Ulvadale gave vent to a bitter, contemptuous laugh. She did not at all agree with this view of the situation. Certainly that was the attitude the poor had to take, it was also their duty to be humble, but with her it was very different. She had not the least intention of receiving such an insult with humility as a chastisement. What she desired at present was to chastise others.

"You must give me time, Lady Ulvadale," he remonstrated, with a tinge of irritation. "This news you have brought has been a great shock to me as well as to you."

With that curious contradiction, inherent in the vast majority of human beings, his words set going a fresh set of emotions in Lady Ulvadale's breast. She could understand the news being a shock to herself, but surely that was not the proper word to apply to his sensations. Such an alliance would undoubtedly bring him a steady glow of reflected glory. She embodied this belief in her next attack.

"I don't know about its being exactly a shock to you," she remarked, with considerable asperity. "For all I know you may secretly welcome the news with considerable triumph; but the awful fact that your disgraceful girl has trapped, captured, I might almost say kidnapped my poor son, is to me, in my position, nothing short of the direst insult."

The minister's spirit was beginning to rise under the lash of her insults; his chill, torpid blood was beginning to warm, stimulated to life by the stinging spur of her words. He raised his massive head and looked up at her from under his shaggy brows with a certain rough-hewn dignity.

"When I said your news was a shock to me, I was



## The Portals of Love

endeavouring to express my true feelings for your ladyship," he observed very quietly. "To me the marriage of Elizabeth Tytler means absolutely nothing."

The old woman stared at him, astonishment for the moment overcoming anger.

"Do you mean me to understand that you would not forgive her—that you would not be friends with my son's wife?" she exclaimed.

He met her angry, incredulous eyes with grave steadiness. "When Elizabeth left the house of her employer and took up the shameful profession of a play-actress, I considered that she had brought the deepest disgrace on the Manse and my holy calling, Lady Ulvadale. From that hour forth she was no daughter of mine. I washed my hands of her as I would of any other who set the snares of the wicked before the salvation of the immortal soul. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. If she were to become Queen of England to-morrow it could make no difference to me. To be at enmity with God is to be at enmity with me, who strives to serve Him with a faithful and pure heart."

She listened with feelings which were curiously mixed. Out of her violent anger against Elizabeth there began to stir a deep resentment against this obdurate father, who dared to state that his daughter, as Lady Ulvadale, would no more claim his friendship than would plain Elizabeth Tytler. She began to feel herself brought to a curious *impasse*. The dignity of her race, her intense pride of birth and name rose up in violent remonstrance at this fresh indignity offered it, yet at the same instant was her equally violent antagonism to receiving the girl as her daughter-in-law. She no more wanted Elizabeth than he did; yet how did he dare to state that Lord Ulvadale's wife would be nothing to him! She had

## The Portals of Love

the instinct to hide the curious tangle of sentiments which enmeshed her, and took skilful refuge in a flank attack.

"I see that my coming to you has been worse than useless, Dr. Tytler," she said, with cold dignity. "Your feelings regarding your daughter are not my business. I have no desire to discuss them. As you have apparently nothing to suggest, I may as well go." She rose but did not offer her hand. "I shall be sorry if at my time of life I have to look for a new spiritual adviser," she remarked, wholly unable to hide the spite and malice in her voice.

Tytler stood before her and bowed his head.

"Your ladyship will easily find another who is as able and no doubt abler than me. I do my best, but that best is but a very poor effort. Far be it from me to say that others would not serve you better."

He walked forward and opened the door and followed her to the entrance. Miss Crosbie, in a fever of curiosity, got out of the sleigh to help her mistress in, and hardly knew whether she dare shake hands with the minister or not; but he came forward with an absolutely inscrutable countenance.

"A cold day for ladies to be on the road," he said, with an attempt at a smile.

"To the post-office," snapped Lady Ulvadale to the groom, who was arranging the rugs.

The horses shook their heads and gaily jangled their bells as they pawed the deep snow.

"Good-day, Dr. Tytler," said the old lady, fixing her eyes on the coachman's back.

"Good-day to your ladyship," he replied quietly. The sleigh rolled away through the gate, no sound of hoofs, nothing but the tinkle of bells through the still, death-like quiet of the grey winter day. The minister watched the equipage till it passed out of sight, then he sighed deeply and retired to the solitude of his study.



## The Portals of Love

At the post-office Lady Ulvadale descended and despatched a telegram which ran thus :—

“Absolutely forbid the marriage. Return directly.  
“EUPHEMIA ULVADALE.”

An hour after the message was handed to her son who read it with a smile. “Old lady cutting up rough,” he remarked to himself as he tore the paper into little pieces, and continued his conversation with the man sitting next to him at lunch.

The young person who despatched the wire stood too much in awe of the old lady to present anything but a mask-like countenance until the sleigh had rolled fairly off on its way to the Castle ; but she took care that Seaview was put in possession of the contents of that wire within the next half-hour, and Seaview enjoyed it enormously and chuckled as it looked forward to fresh developments. The Fastness had received the paper earlier than had Ulvadale Castle, and Macleod read the announcement with some uneasiness. He did not forget the taunt uttered by Torquil Grant to his son during that tragic quarter of an hour—“Perhaps you were the man who financed Elizabeth Tytler”. He had never been able to see quite clearly through that affair, which Malcolm had denied with vehement assurances of Miss Tytler’s virtue ; but then, as he rightly argued to himself, that was what any man was bound to say. Only cads gave away women. Whatever his son was otherwise, he was always a gentleman. Macleod had no belief in Elizabeth’s purity ; he thought of her as a light woman who by her beauty had snared a rich and idiotic young peer, and he pitied Ulvadale whom he had known all his life. He saw at once, however, that a certain amount of tact and worldly discretion would now be needed. He wished Lilius had been at the Fastness, but failing her he must himself instruct his wife as to her future conduct.

## The Portals of Love

After half an hour's meditation on the subject he went to her room and showed her the announcement, which she read with every expression of horror and amazement.

"How can Ulvadale make such an utter idiot of himself? Why, it will mean absolute ruin," she exclaimed excitedly.

"Not necessarily," observed Macleod quietly.

She stared at him indignantly.

"Why, it must, John. Naturally no one will call; they will find themselves absolutely isolated."

"Don't be too sure of that," he said again.

"What do you mean?" she questioned abruptly. "Why, the idea is preposterous; she's an actress and only a minister's daughter. I certainly shan't go near her; besides, I don't care to know immoral women."

Like Lady Ulvadale, Mrs. Macleod held the same curiously mixed conception of the high spiritual infallibility and the low social position of Joshua Tytler. Socially he was her inferior, but ethically he was her superior.

"That is exactly what I came to discuss with you," remarked Macleod, taking a chair by the fire. "I don't want this affair to begin badly, and end in a muddle. We may take it for granted that the old lady won't know her; but don't, in your ignorance, run away at a tangent with the idea that the County is going to cut Ulvadale's wife, because it won't. He's far too powerful. Now, if the case were mine they might cut my wife, but they'll think twice before turning their backs upon a Viscountess. Even if they did, what would it matter to her? She could fill her house in a week with people from town of the highest social status."

Mrs. Macleod looked as indignant as she felt. "Do you actually mean to tell me that this Elizabeth Tytler, a humble minister's daughter, who has been



## The Portals of Love

turned out of her home and become an actress, will be received by the County?" she exclaimed.

"I do," replied Macleod calmly, "and I think it wise to warn you in time, Margaret. You know you won't like getting left, which is what will happen if you don't look out and use some tact. You won't appreciate being the only woman in the County whom Ulvadale doesn't ask to dinner."

"But, John, she is an actress and not a good woman," she argued, with as much determination as she dared infuse into her voice.

Macleod gave a gesture of impatience. "What is that to you? besides, actresses are received into the best houses nowadays—that prejudice is dead; and you've no proof that she's not quite as good as you are."

Mrs. Macleod flushed angrily. "I don't think you've any right to compare me to such a creature," she exclaimed, half-inclined to cry with sheer annoyance.

"I wasn't comparing you. I only bid you be most careful. The old woman is sure to be here in a day or two, filled with her grievances. Whatever you do don't commit yourself to what you'll be sorry for after. It would be the worst possible policy to quarrel with Ulvadale; in such cases the man of lesser rank always goes to the wall; besides, I like him. I have no desire to quarrel with him, and who he marries isn't my business—he has a right to please himself."

Mrs. Macleod fairly lost her temper.

"And I deny that he has a right to please himself," she exclaimed. "He has no right to bring a woman like that to Seaview and expect us to know her, it is perfectly scandalous."

Macleod regarded her with that cynical, sinister expression she had learned to dread. "He won't expect you to know her. As a matter of fact, he won't care a damn whether you do or not," he said

## The Portals of Love

with ominous calm. "I just want to point out that though your future conduct will be a matter of supreme unimportance to him, it will be a matter of the very greatest importance to you. Think over what I have said, and in time you will come to your senses." With that he departed and left her to her own outraged and unpleasant reflections.

That afternoon, as he strolled round the policies, he encountered Dr. Bright, who pulled up and offered him a cheery "Good-day".

"This is great news about Tytler's daughter," he observed, smiles wreathing his handsome, ruddy face.

Macleod looked grave. "I fancy the Ulvadale family will take it badly," he observed.

"No doubt they will till they come to know her," replied the doctor. "Her engagement to Lord Ulvadale puts at rest a doubt I have always had in my mind."

"And that is?" questioned Macleod.

The doctor bent down and lowered his voice almost to a whisper. "My private opinion has always been that instead of having bolted, Torquil Grant is dead. I'm so certain of it that I'll venture to tell you a secret he confided to me."

Macleod felt his heart begin to beat with something more than uneasiness. What in God's name did the man hint at, he wondered, and strove to control his expression and voice. "I don't believe for an instant the man is dead. I've the best reason to believe he absconded; but tell me what is this secret, naturally I'm interested," he said quietly.

"Torquil Grant and Elizabeth Tytler were to have become man and wife—the marriage day was fixed. Torquil died but a few days before the event was to take place. Take my word for it, Mr. Macleod, Elizabeth Tytler knows he's dead, or she never would have looked at another man."



## The Portals of Love

Macleod burst into a harsh laugh. "You apparently hold unbounded belief in the young woman's fidelity, Bright; it's more than I do. I guess my factor wouldn't have had much chance against a peer of the realm; but you astonish me about this engagement. I had no idea of it."

"No more had any one else, Mr. Macleod; but I only tell you now in confidence, seeing Torquil was your factor; but take my word for it Grant is no absconder. He would have gone through fire and water for the sake of Elizabeth Tytler. He worshipped the ground she walked on, and would as soon have thought of leaving her in the lurch as—well!—than as that sea would think of leaving those sands uncovered at high tide."

Macleod shook his head and pretended to ruminate, taking out his pipe and mechanically plugging in the tobacco. A horrible creeping dread was at his heart turning him sick with apprehension. Clearly the future Lady Ulvadale was to be a serious menace to the Fastness. He shook his head and looked up at last with a sarcastic smile.

"Maybe the lady is sharp enough to keep two strings to her bow, doctor. Who knows that she hasn't taken all Grant had to give her, and is about to grasp all that Ulvadale has besides. If Grant is dead the police would do well perhaps to inquire at Miss Tytler's door for information."

Dr. Bright gave a contemptuous gesture of dissent. "You don't know Elizabeth Tytler, sir—she's a woman in a thousand."

"She must be," sneered Macleod.

The doctor looked down on him, and at the moment disliked him as much as his nature was capable of ill-feeling to any man.

"Believe me or not as you please, Mr. Macleod," he said firmly, "but a sweeter woman ne'er drew breath

## The Portals of Love

than Elizabeth Tytler. She's as good and gentle a little lady as any in the land, and Lord Ulvadale—more power to him—has found it out. Good-day, and keep my secret, please."

"Oh! I'll keep it," laughed Macleod, turning the subject off as if it were something of a joke.

"Damnation!" he muttered under his breath as he strode away. "Do the murdered never sleep?"

Sometimes, despite all his efforts, thoughts of his banished son haunted him. There were times when he seemed possessed by his memory, when he almost felt himself one with the absent man, thinking with his thoughts, seeing with his eyes, writing with his hands. By this curious sense of possession he had come to form some sort of conception as to what Malcolm must be suffering, and that suffering for the time being became his own. During such periods he shut himself up as much as possible in his own rooms and let the tide of his horror pass over him in a mute state of passive suffering; but those about him saw a change, and told each other that the laird was feeling the death of his son very keenly, and would never be the same man again. Through those interludes of suffering he repeatedly asked himself what other course he could possibly have taken. Had he not done his best to save his race from an irreparable disgrace? Had he not saved his son from the shame of imprisonment? At those moments, to do Macleod justice, he freely acknowledged to himself that he had hated his son, and seized eagerly the opportunity of being rid of him for ever; yet, even had he loved him as dearly as he loved Roderick, what would it have availed him? Even had this been so he could not have acted otherwise than he had done. Oblivion was the only salvation for the unfortunate heir to the Fastness.



## CHAPTER XVIII

SEAVIEW showed a brave display of colour. The little station was gay with bunting which fluttered on strings from one length of the platform to another. Ulvadale and his bride were coming home, and even the elements in those early days of March had put on a semblance of spring to greet them.

"Glorious day," remarked Dr. Bright, as he hurried on to the platform and joined the little group assembled there in waiting to receive the happy pair.

"Perfectly glorious," answered Macleod, who had been conversing with the banker. "The train's signalled, they ought to be here directly."

"No signs of the minister," said the doctor, looking round with a little wink and a sly smile.

"No, he's for no reconciliation. I've done all I can and absolutely failed—it's the mother I'm sorry for," said Macleod.

"Ah, yes! poor body, she's one to be pitied. Joshua Tytler was always a hard man," replied Bright, his face growing grave. "However, she's not long for this world, her troubles will soon be past—ah! here comes the train!"

The little engine was puffing gaily into the station, and the little group stood back and silently scanned the carriage windows. A footman ran forward and opened a door, and in another moment Ulvadale was on the platform handing out his wife. The laird of the Fastness strode up to him and held out his hand.

## The Portals of Love

"Let me be the first to welcome you and Lady Ulvadale to her new home," he said pleasantly.

Elizabeth looked up into his dark handsome face with a smile.

"Thank you," she said. "We are old friends, are we not?"

"We are indeed. Why, I've known you since you were so high," replied Macleod heartily, though had she still been Elizabeth Tytler he would have considered such a reminder ought first to emanate from him. She turned round and met Dr. Bright's beaming eyes.

"You, I know, have not forgotten me," she said, holding out both her hands.

He looked down into the beautiful face, his own moved by deep feeling.

"Am I not here on purpose to say God bless Elizabeth Ulvadale," he said; then he stood aside to let others come up as they pressed forward. He stood for a few moments watching her with intense interest as she mingled with the little group. He had been in Torquil Grant's confidence and through him had always kept in touch with the banished Elizabeth. He was a student of character, and it amused him in a cynical fashion to mark the difference a Viscountess' coronet made to the erstwhile despised woman. It set a halo about her head and was apparently supposed to have changed her whole nature in the eyes of Seaview. Those who had mentioned her in slighting tones of contempt as the minister's actress daughter now vied with one another in doing her homage and paying her the deference accorded to a queen.

Mr. Hutchinson, the fat Radical Provost, who kept a grocer's shop in Seaview, and was one of Joshua's elders, had always been particularly severe upon the minister's girl; now he stood bare-headed before her, cringing with servility, and no doubt hoping to be



## The Portals of Love

given the custom of the Castle. Worthy Mr. Roxborough, the Ulvadale factor, was also present, the Dowager's most trusty henchman, who had "sat under" Tytler all his life, and applauded the minister's severity with all his might and the power of his lungs. He had been swift to see in which direction his interests lay and had "ratted" in a particularly bare-faced manner. Mr. McNeil, the banker, was also well to the front, a little thin man with the face of a white mouse and the narrow, shifty nature of a ferret. He had seen and recognised Elizabeth on the London boards, and had returned to Seaview bursting with his impressions which were of the very worst. Nevertheless, he now bowed low before the bride and repeated the little obsequious speech he had for several days been rehearsing. There was Sandy Smeaton, the Ulvadale head gardener, who would not have tossed the actress a handful of weeds, now bending before her and offering her the pick from out his cherished houses.

Elizabeth Ulvadale took it all very calmly but very sweetly, with that gentle high-bred grace which is at once so simple yet so stately, and which was part of her nature.

A celebrated dowager once remarked : "I am always very civil to girls, one never knows who they may become," but Seaview ladies had not possessed that worldly wisdom.

There was one resident at the Manse who firmly determined to get a glimpse of that homecoming. Martha Black had boldly asked for an hour's leave of absence and had donned her "Sunday best" and sallied forth to get a view of the newly wedded pair. She placed herself where she could not be easily seen, on the brow of a hill behind some whins at a place where the horses, after breasting the ascent, would still be at the walk, and where she could have a leisurely

## The Portals of Love

view. The tears stood in her honest eyes as she feasted them on Elizabeth looking up into her husband's face as they chatted together. It was the old Elizabeth, yet somehow she was different. It was not the beautiful clothes nor the fashionably dressed hair, it was something in the face which had altered. Though no less lovely she looked older and sadder; the girl had vanished for ever, she was a woman now. After they had passed Martha hurried home. Well she knew the anxious heart that would be awaiting her in the kitchen—a mother longing to hear from other lips the details of a sight which had been denied to her.

If there was one cloud on Elizabeth's horizon it was the unknown attitude of Ulvadale's mother. From her own mother she knew she had nothing to expect, Dr. Bright's letters to Keith had told her as much. It was known now that Joshua Tytler would never relent. Upon the receipt of a violent letter from the Dowager, Ulvadale had replied firmly but courteously.

"You are absolutely at liberty to take up whatever attitude you please. Everything shall be done to make you comfortable at the Briary, and if you do not choose to acknowledge my wife I shall consider you very foolish; but we will not resent your conduct, according you the same liberty we claim for ourselves. Please do not put yourself to any trouble or inconvenience on our account. I have given sundry orders to certain persons who will be responsible to me for the carrying of them out."

To this epistle no answer had been vouchsafed, and it was still an open question as to whether the Dowager had relented or not.

To Elizabeth it was a happy homecoming, because of her love for the man she had married, and who had chosen her out of all the world to be his wife. Her own home country drew her with its bleak wind-swept stretches and illimitable ocean, and the wide moors



## The Portals of Love

lying under the pale afternoon sunshine. The sound of the distant sea came like human sighs to her ears as they left it ever further behind them. There was a scent of violets in the soft mild air and the golden gleam of whins on the landscape.

Ulvadale Castle was to her a strange land, for she had never before penetrated beyond the lodge gates through which they were driving. There had been marriage rejoicings on a large scale at the time of the wedding, and she was glad that now all was quiet and she could settle down at once peacefully to home life. The grey irregular pile came at last into view through the leafless branches of the avenue. A very old, castellated and turreted structure, many-roomed and somewhat gloomy, a typical Scotch castle of which there are many in the North. To the side of the principal entrance was drawn up a carriage and pair.

"It looks as if my mother was in waiting for us," remarked Ulvadale, as they swept over an ivy-covered bridge and trotted up the approach. "I hope it may be so. I always prefer peace to war."

The servants were at the door to receive them, and Elizabeth passed into the large square hall before her husband, who had paused to give an order. Sitting on one of the great oak chairs which flanked the fireplace was the Dowager, and on the other side sat Miss Crosbie. Elizabeth advanced with some surprise, and the little old lady rose from her chair and held out her hand.

"How do you do, Lady Ulvadale, I hope you have had a pleasant journey," she said. "Let me introduce my companion, Miss Crosbie, to you."

Elizabeth shook hands with a smile, which was at variance with the Dowager's severe aspect.

"Thanks! we have had a delightful time, but I am quite glad to be home," she said brightly. "It was kind of you to be here to receive me."

## The Portals of Love

The Dowager glanced at her sharply. "I came to see my son," she remarked shortly.

"But you knew I should be with him." Elizabeth was determined to make the best of matters.

"There was no certainty of that, you might have separated by now," the old woman answered drily.

Elizabeth laughed outright. "Oh! Lady Ulvadale, has that been your experience of married couples? What an unfortunate one! Ah! here comes Ulvadale." She turned and ran up to him her face filled with laughter. "Your mother is actually surprised that we have not already separated," she said, linking her arm in his.

Ulvadale kissed the old lady and shook hands with Miss Crosbie.

"Sorry to disappoint you, but we've no intention of parting," he exclaimed. "You must have been reading some of the naughty divorce cases to her ladyship," he said, smiling at Miss Crosbie.

The spinster grew scarlet, and looked indignant. "Indeed, no, Lord Ulvadale. Her ladyship is always most particular about her reading," she stammered.

"Won't you come and have some tea. I'm longing for mine," broke in Elizabeth.

"Of course you will," remarked Ulvadale. "John, tell her ladyship's carriage to go round to the stables."

For a second the old woman hesitated. She had firmly made up her mind to return to the Briary directly she had spoken to her son, but curiosity mingling with some other and deeper desire urged her to remain. Ulvadale put his hand through her arm, and before she could make up her mind was leading her gently forward, talking all the time, whilst Elizabeth followed in the most natural manner with Miss Crosbie. They passed into the long low library where tea had been prepared. Elizabeth at once proceeded to pour it out, under the fixed, wrapt gaze of



## The Portals of Love

the spinster, who was absolutely stricken dumb by the calm sweet manner of Ulvadale's wife. She seemed to fit so naturally into her new position, and assumed her new dignities with such unconcerned self-possession, whilst the son waited on his mother, that the companion forgot her usual task of waiting on every one else, and was only roused out of the trance of admiration into which she had fallen by Elizabeth offering her a cup of tea and bread and butter.

"Eliza! What are you thinking of?" exclaimed the sharp, indignant voice of her mistress, who apparently was all eyes. "Hand round the cake at once and make yourself useful.

Poor Miss Crosbie flushed scarlet and started guiltily and with a whispered apology rose, but Elizabeth pushed her gently back. "Lady Ulvadale must allow me to wait on my own guests," she said sweetly. "You shall wait on me when I come to call on you."

Miss Crosbie felt that this was indeed reversing the order of all things so carefully arranged beforehand by her mistress. She could not remove her eyes from the beautiful vision hovering over the tea-table—her gaze followed the slender white hands with their sparkling rings that moved so softly and dexterously amongst the tea-cups. Ulvadale was telling his mother something of their travels, but the old lady listened spasmodically. She was much more interested in the new wife than in the description of Florence and Rome. Grudgingly she conceded to her own eyesight and observation that Elizabeth was not only a lovely woman but a sweet and gracious lady, who would adorn any family by the charm and dignity of her presence. Like Joshua Tytler she supposed all actresses must necessarily be immoral women; yet if immorality did exist it lay hidden very deeply, and was most cunningly disguised in Elizabeth Ulvadale.

## The Portals of Love

Almost had she melted and relented when her daughter-in-law rose and came up to her.

"You know what a stranger I am here," she said, smiling down into the stern old face; "do come and show me some of the principal rooms—if you are not too tired. You will show me those treasures which you have always particularly valued, and then I will also know what must be carefully cherished. Come! We will leave Ulvadale and Miss Crosbie alone for a few minutes."

The Dowager rose with her slim erectness. It was just the task she had longed to be offered. She had passed several sleepless nights over a casket worked by the fair fingers of Mary Stuart, a lock cut from the young chevalier's head, and a bit of his plaid. She had longed to remove them to the Briary with several historical and beautiful pieces of furniture, but she had not dared. They were heirlooms, but what would an actress care for such things? Now that she had seen and talked with her, she felt that it would be curious if the actress did not care very much indeed.

What a marvellous change, what wonderful doings! thought Miss Crosbie, as she saw Elizabeth pass her hand quite naturally through the old lady's arm, as together they passed out of the door chatting as if they had been lifelong friends.

In this manner did Elizabeth capture the heart of the Dowager of Ulvadale.



## CHAPTER XIX

ELIZABETH ULVADALE had been four months resident in her new home and had never known a dull moment. In their absorption in each other's society neither had desired to leave the country, and the idea of the London season had proved unattractive to both. Towards the close of the year a child would be born in the old house. Elizabeth never very robust had to take care of herself and curtail a great deal of her natural activity. During all that time she had not once seen her mother, though she had frequently heard of her through the faithful Martha Black. The old woman resented the prohibition laid upon Mrs. Tytler falling also on her shoulders, and indeed the thought of Mrs. Black holding communication with Elizabeth Ulvadale had never entered the minister's brain. Understanding something of what her mistress's sufferings were, the good woman had taken care to throw herself in the most deliberate way right across Elizabeth's path, and the result had exceeded even her expectations. Three times during one week Martha contrived to get a lift in the baker's cart as far as the Ulvadale Lodge, where she sat herself contentedly down by the side of the road to await the chance of Lady Ulvadale issuing forth.

It was not till a second week began, when she again observed similar tactics, that her patience was rewarded by the sight of a victoria and pair trotting down the still leafless avenue towards the exit. Martha stood up and awaited developments. For a second Eliza-

## The Portals of Love

beth's eye met hers without recognition, the next instant the horses were being pulled up and Elizabeth's hand was waving to her to approach. The two women met on the road, Lady Ulvadale having instantly descended from her carriage, and out of hearing of the servants but not out of sight she heartily embraced the woman who had borne her as a helpless infant in her arms. For quite a quarter of an hour they talked, pacing up and down the narrow footpath, and Elizabeth learned all she desired to know of her mother's condition, and told Martha of Keith's success and happy life in London. Lady Ulvadale would fain have driven her back to Seaview, but this Martha would not permit, reminding Elizabeth that if Dr. Tytler came to hear of their meeting he might prohibit any future interviews.

They parted at last with an agreement for a future meeting in a fortnight's time, many loving messages being sent from daughter to mother, and a faithful promise from Martha that in the event of Mrs. Tytler's becoming suddenly and dangerously weaker an intimation was at once to be sent to the Castle. From that time forth secret communication was constantly kept up between the Manse and Ulvadale Castle. Several times Elizabeth had caught sight of her father; he had been aware of her proximity, but he had passed her by as a stranger, striding on, as was his habit, with bent head and hands clasped behind his back. In those days afflictions multiplied upon the minister, and in many ways his part was very hard to bear; but the fierce energy of his sense of service to his God, the vigorous defence he felt called upon to make for his outraged Maker, the conscientious belief that the enemies of God were manifold the enemies of Joshua Tytler, supported him through all. He felt that the Almighty was punishing him severely for something. What that something was he had yet to find out, and the sense of infliction but hardened his heart the more



## The Portals of Love

towards those to whom he traced all his sorrows. Every man's hand seemed now turned suddenly against him. The coming of his daughter to Ulvadale seemed to have turned topsy-turvy the hearts of the men and women of Seaview. On all sides he heard her praised by those who would not have dared to breathe before him the name of Elizabeth Tytler. Now they spoke of her openly, and in a manner which clearly conveyed to him the general belief that she had raised herself far above the influence of his anger and excommunication. Outlaw her now as he would Seaview simply laughed, and treated his most sacred and profound feelings as a feeble played-out comedy. In those days the simple, honest, earnest heart of Joshua Tytler was learning many wonderful and painful truths. Unused as he was to the ways of the world, and wholly ignorant of all but the rude primeval doctrines and legends upon which he based his life, the desertion he witnessed and felt to be taking place stabbed him cruelly and most bitterly.

The first experience he had of much that was to follow was the vacant Ulvadale pew. The Dowager had deserted him, and now drove seven miles to Kirk-town, and sat under the Rev. Donald Macandlish. Family pride had triumphed over the hated thought of Elizabeth Tytler. Her son's wife was cut by the minister of Seaview. So tremendous an insult to the name of Ulvadale was in her eyes unforgivable. Within a week of Elizabeth's homecoming, and all unknown to her, the old box-pew was stripped of books, hassocks and cushions, and an astounded congregation gazed upon its staring emptiness the following Sabbath. Donald Macandlish was a meek and retiring man, who had too holy a terror of Jehovah to expound and exploit Him as Tytler had done, and the Dowager with her usual promptitude set to work to put backbone into the timid little man, and infuse something stronger

## The Portals of Love

and more stirring into his orations, all of which furnished her with a new interest in life for some considerable time. Of all people in the world, Mrs. Macleod next confronted him upon the subject. She did not desert him, but she certainly remonstrated with him upon what she termed the folly of his behaviour. She did it gently, but she did it tactlessly—she roused in him that rough, virile liberalism (so strong a part of his nature) which affirms "I am as good as you; I repudiate any social distinction between us". She told him that now his daughter occupied so exalted a status it was absurd that he, in his humble position, should still turn his back upon her. "It merely makes you look ridiculous," she had remarked unfeelingly.

She did not leave his church as the Dowager had done, but she forced him to see very plainly how foolish she considered his conduct.

Through all the turmoil of those conflicting emotions the only voice that touched Joshua's heart was the voice of Dr. Bright. The handsome doctor stood before him one night in his little study and laid both hands on the shoulders that were beginning to bend under their weight of sorrow. In the clear blue eyes there was a suspicion of tears.

"Joshua Tytler," he said impressively, "do you expect mercy from your God when you yourself are so unmerciful to others? Who are you that you should set yourself up as a judge of the Almighty's created? It seems to me you mistake your vocation, which is not to condemn but to follow the Master, who had always a kindly hand stretched out to the sinner, who condemned neither man nor woman."

The minister sank down in his chair and bent his silvering head, his strong frame shaken by sobs. The iron of his soul was pierced at last.

"Man, what's the good of your ministry without charity?" Bright continued remorselessly. "Charity



## The Portals of Love

thinketh no evil, suffereth long and is kind. As St. Paul says, if you speak with the tongue of angels and have not charity you're no more than sounding brass. Your daughter was an honest girl, she's now the honest wife of an honest man. In another five months, God willing, she'll be a mother. Joshua Tytler, for your dying wife's sake, if for no other, take your girl back to your heart before it's too late."

At the mention of Elizabeth's marriage the heart of the man hardened once more; he thought of how God had hardened the heart of Pharaoh. He remembered how every one bade him make peace with his girl because she was Lady Ulvadale; none save Bright had dreamed of counselling such a course whilst she had remained an actress. That very day the chemist had jocularly inquired of him if he had been over to the Castle lately to see her ladyship. Should he relent now they would all smile and say, "I told you so; now she's my lady he's had to be civil to her". He raised his rugged head, the heavy locks of his grey hair straggled over his knotted brow, his eyes once more glinted with the fire of the fanatic.

"God is no respecter of persons," he cried, bringing his fist down on the table till it rattled under the force of his strength.

Dr. Bright folded his arms, the battle-signal was in his eyes also.

"No more am I, Joshua Tytler. God and I are at one there. This day I have delivered two girls of illegitimate bairns. Practically every day of my life I do it, and God being no respecter of persons I believe He will care for those fatherless brats as tenderly as He will care for Elizabeth Ulvadale's heir—I don't presume to judge. Who am I that I should pretend to know what are the Creator's ultimate plans. I do my best to help my fellow-creatures, no matter who and what they are. That's my creed, Joshua Tytler, based

## The Portals of Love

on the sure and certain belief in the justice, love and mercy of God Almighty. Come now, put your pride in your pocket and walk over to Ulvadale to-morrow, or let me tell Lady Ulvadale she's welcome to come here to see her poor mother. Remember your wife's days are running short, and a poor, lonely creature you'll be without her. She is one of those who are all deeds and scant words. You've no right to part a woman from her child—children are not come by so easy; if you were in my profession you'd learn that; let the lass come to the Manse, if it be only to say good-bye to the woman who bore her."

"Never!"

Joshua had risen and was staring wildly out at the speaker. He felt now as if he were fighting for his very life, the life here and the life hereafter. Surely this was the devil in the form of the doctor who was tempting him to betray his God.

"Never!" he roared, "shall she darken my door, neither her nor her brother. Satan hath many powers, and when he is permitted he goes about like a roaring lion making his work complete. I tell you, Bright, there are those who are spiritual enemies in visible forms permitted to roam about the waste places of the earth. If a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him; the adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces. My wife has sworn to honour and obey me, and I must say she's done it; and I'm master of this Manse till we both go the way of all flesh; and now, doctor, I've said my final word."

Bright looked hard at him; all anger had died out of his face, nothing but compassion was left.

"May God forgive you! I pity you from the bottom of my heart," he said sadly, then he took up his hat and went. He had used the words Elizabeth had used the last time she had entered the Manse. They struck Tytler afresh in the limitless depths of his own woe,



## The Portals of Love

and he bowed his head upon his folded arms as the flood swept over him.

Elizabeth had never forgotten Torquil Grant. Amid all the fresh and brilliant impressions of her new life she found herself often reverting to his memory in a troubled brooding. Without arousing suspicion she gradually possessed herself of every scrap of information which was to be gleaned regarding his disappearance, and though she could see no new light her belief in his death remained unshaken. As the heart alone knoweth its own bitterness, so did she alone know what her early struggles and temptations had been; and through those tragic memories which now and again recurred to her, the name of Torquil Grant shone out as a hero and saviour of well-nigh sainted memory. The cleanly puritan bringing-up in the old Manse had laid a good foundation, and though imperceptibly she became accustomed to the vice around her, she never lost her shuddering abhorrence of it when it approached her in a personal and immediate form. In the National Theatre Joshua's belief that actresses were all immoral was fairly well founded on fact, though he was ignorant enough to suppose in the professional life there were no exceptions. The manager chose his chorus purely for their personal appearance, and boasted openly of their financial success. From time to time a girl married into the Peerage, the majority were the mistresses of rich men, the remaining few were sunk in the depths of degradation. The theatre was run on those lines, and excepting the leading parts, Cohen, the manager, had very little to pay in the way of salaries. Rich men paid him handsome sums to give place to pretty brainless dolls, who believed themselves to be Nellie Farrens in embryo. He took the money and swelled his chorus, he knew exactly what would happen; in a week or two the diamonds appeared and the

## The Portals of Love

brougham stood at the stage door. It was always the way. Cohen chuckled and told the girl she owed him her thanks for bringing her before the notice of the stalls. This devil in human form believed himself to be a public benefactor. On his conscience, had he possessed one, was the complete ruin of many women. In his own line he catered for the public, he had his malignant uses in the hell of that particular London world. It was into this world that Elizabeth, on mounting the ladder of success, found herself thrown. She discovered at once what was expected of her—her stage companions enlightened her; and Cohen in his own devilish fashion informed her that with her face and figure she ought to do well. Hatred she had never known till she came into touch with this man who took her £500 with a wink, telling her it was but a drop in the bucket to what she soon would be earning. Still she was compelled to be civil to him and bear with his insults. The most terrible thing about him was that all the time he believed he was being kind. All the girls in his employ spoke of him as "dear old Co". As best she could she bore with the life because it meant success in the form of a large salary. Her ambition was to put aside so much a year till she could afford to retire.

As time went on and he saw what "a draw" she was, Cohen left her alone and ceased to recommend first one man then another to her notice. He recognised her virtue but believed her to be playing a deep game, which he considered consummated when she told him of her engagement to Ulvadale. She let it pass recognising he could never fathom her life and motives, and bade him good-bye simply and quietly with the grateful conviction they would never meet again.

"You'll come behind some night, my dear, and show me and the girls all your finery; and if ever



## The Portals of Love

you and his lordship want a box just tip me a line," he had pleasantly remarked at parting. He had made the same observation to past Peeresses in prospect, and they had always come back and showed their airs and graces and new finery to the admiring circle.

With all her vigilance it had been impossible to steer clear of insult. How many offered her a home and as many jewels as she could wish for made her shudder to think of. After that came Torquil Grant, the only one amongst the many who had said "Be my wife". The offer in such words to the woman who had patiently waded through innumerable degradations brought such a flood of gratitude as only one who had suffered the like could know or in any sense realise. Her whole being went out to this quiet, grave man in a very transport of sheer gratitude and thankfulness. Unhesitatingly she accepted him as her salvation and liberator. She knew she had no love for him, but her limitless gratitude was sufficient to take its place. His death dashed her to the very earth as a storm beats down the delicate head of a flower, and whilst still in the throes of a terrible and cruel disappointment she met Ulvadale. Her heart had been given to him at once, her agony of despair was healed, but her gratitude to the dead man was undying. She told Ulvadale of her broken engagement and her belief in Torquil's death. She saw that he was disinclined to her opinion, and after that she never again mentioned the subject voluntarily, though willing always to discuss it if mentioned by others. She knew she would never forget, she determined to leave the mystery to time and her own determination to unravel it.

## CHAPTER XX

KIRSTY HISLOP threw a couple of turfs on her smouldering fire and looked round her curious little room to see that all was in order. The kettle was drawn aside, so that on her return it could be quickly brought to the boil; the big black cat lay on the arm-chair—manufactured out of an old apple barrel—and blinked lazily at her, as much as to say I will look after the house during your absence. She approached the tiny window, the light of which was greatly obstructed by growing pot-plants, and drew a letter from her pocket, which she read out loud to herself, as is the habit of many lonely living persons.

“DEAR KIRSTY HISLOP,

“You have known Elizabeth Tytler since she was a little girl. Will you do her a great favour? Meet me at four o’clock on Monday next in the ‘Muckle Cave’. I will be quite alone, and I have something very important and private to say to you.

“Your old friend, E. U.”

A smile which was almost sweet crossed the woman’s face as she refolded the letter and replaced it in her pocket. “Aye, the time’s come now,” she muttered to herself, as she took a key from the table and opened the door. She locked it securely behind her and turned off to the right down a long narrow lane of fisher folks’ dwellings which led to the brow of the cliffs. Few persons were about, and she passed rapidly down a zig-zag, well-worn path cut in the face of the



## The Portals of Love

cliff which would bring her on to the sands. Far below the sea was tossing and chafing, grey green, here and there broken into white. The remnant of a brief storm the night before seemed to have swept clear the horizon, for the purple mountains of Sutherlandshire lay filmy, yet clearly defined against a pale blue background. It was about half ebb, and the receding waters left behind them a strong whiff of pungent saltiness, which was more refreshing than unpleasant. The morning had broken squally and grey with sharp showers, but the day had brightened into a yellow glint of summer sunshine.

The sands were hard and firm, and Kirsty swiftly made her way along them for about a mile, then she gradually drew up closer under the rocks and began a scrambling climb amongst the loose stones and boulders which from time to time had fallen from the face of the cliff. There was not a sign of life about her save the wheeling gulls and a few rock pigeons which flew out at her approach from the grey and brown rocks. Above, the precipice towered rugged, massive and without verdure. Untouched by the ordinary tide in times of storm they were drenched in salt. Now in summer their summits were crowned by golden gorse. Without show of life the motionless reefs lengthened far out into the restless sea where neither white sail nor black hull touched it with life.

Kirsty scrambled on until she gained a tiny bay of comparatively smooth surface. It was long since she had seen the "Muckle Cave". She knew the whole coast-line for several miles was honeycombed with caves, many of which now had slipped from the memory of man owing to changes at their mouth having rendered entrance difficult. At last she entered a small jagged channel which she had a vague recollection led to the place she sought, and at the mouth of a yawning cavity, seated on a stone, was Elizabeth Ulvadale.

## The Portals of Love

She rose as she saw Kirsty approach and advanced to meet her, and the two women shook hands. It was the first time for many years that they had met.

"I thought you wouldn't forget me, Kirsty. It was very good of you to come," said Elizabeth.

Mrs. Hislop looked her curiously up and down with her strange eyes. "It was more likely you'd forget me," she said briefly.

Elizabeth smiled. "I always had a good memory and a warm heart for friends, and the time was when I needed them very badly, Kirsty. Just when I needed them they deserted me; but come, let us go inside out of the wind."

"You'll not be finding any lack of friends now, my lady," observed Mrs. Hislop drily, as she walked by Elizabeth's side to the mouth of the cave.

Elizabeth looked round at her with her quiet enigmatic smile. "You think not?" she asked with inquiry. "Prosperity is not usually thought to be the best time to develop true friendships; however, I have one who will never fail me—my husband."

They entered the great hollow chamber. Through the yawning mouth the afternoon light filtered faintly; it but dimly illuminated the grotesque convolutions of the fretted walls, fantastic with innumerable shapes and forms and cavities. The lofty roof above them was lost in sepulchral gloom and mystery. After a slight ascent the cave took a turn to the left into another and smaller chamber, but the two women penetrated no farther than a few paces within the entrance where not a breath of wind stirred, and where no sound struck the ear save the far-off muffled moan of the receding tide. They sat down together on a low rock and Elizabeth turned to her companion.

"Were you surprised when you got my letter, Kirsty? I wondered very much if you would do as I asked. I



## The Portals of Love

wanted to see you privately. I didn't want to rouse the village curiosity by coming to your cottage."

"I was expecting to hear from your ladyship. It was my duty to come," the woman answered, her eyes staring straight in front of her.

"You expected to hear from me. How was that, Kirsty?"

Mrs. Hislop turned and looked at her with a sudden light in her curious eyes. "I knew you'd never be allowed to rest till you found out where Torquil Grant lies. Murder will out, and those that pass by foul play don't rest in the next world so quietly as those that pass by slow disease. You see it's like tearing the heart out of an unripe plum. Torquil wasn't meant to go so soon. When a man's done to death with all his faculties keen and fresh and on the alert, he's much the same when he's what's called dead—dead!" she gave a short contemptuous laugh. "It's the stupidest, most unmeaning word in the whole language. Grant's more alive than I am, by a very long way, take Kirsty Hislop's word for that."

Elizabeth was gazing at her with intent, fascinated eyes; she gave a little shiver and leant nearer her companion. "I always knew he was murdered, Kirsty. Are you going to tell me who did it, and how it was done?" she whispered.

"It's you, and only you that I will tell; and had you never asked me I'd have gone mute to the kirkyard; but I waited. I knew you would ask. I knew that the spirit of Torquil Grant would work on you till you did; but here's a word of warning to you, my lady, before I begin. It's ill work stirring up muddy waters. I'll tell you how Grant died, but I'll tell you this further, that his murderer will never be brought to justice, except by the judge of all things, Almighty God. It's not for you to raise the furies of the law, and before I say another word you're going to give me

## The Portals of Love

your solemn oath, before God, that you'll never attempt to bring home the crime to any man, no matter who he be."

She stopped speaking and folded her hands as if waiting, her weird eyes fixed on Elizabeth's pale, disturbed face. There was silence between them for some minutes. Lady Ulvadale was thinking hard, and trying to see clearly where lay her duty. As she had no conception who had murdered her lover, she felt no resentment towards any one man in particular, only a dull resentment against fate for removing the man who at one period had meant so much to her, and to whom she owed unmeasured gratitude. The changed and brilliantly prosperous career she had now entered upon in no way obliterated her grateful memory of Grant and all he had intended to do for her. Her nature was too deeply faithful, too large and generous to so easily forget. It occurred to her now, as often it had done before, that the criminal must belong to the fisher class. He must be some fierce, barbarous ruffian who possessing some small grudge against the factor, in a moment of ungovernable fury had taken him unawares and done him to death, afterwards contriving to dispose of the body in the sea, most probably in the "Spindle cave," into which the dead man's lantern had been cast, though she knew it not. She knew that the "Spindle cave" told no tales, as she knew every legend, cave and natural configuration of her native village. She considered now that she might safely give Kirsty the promise she required. It was not her duty to give the wretched murderer up to justice, as Kirsty said the Almighty would see to that. In the hands of God surely she could safely leave him. She could not drag Mrs. Hislop into the crime, nor had she the right to bring the name of Ulvadale before the public in conjunction with so hideous a charge as that of murder. She decided finally, after a few



## The Portals of Love

minutes' thought upon those sides of the question, to give Kirsty the promise, and hear at length the tragic story which had haunted her so persistently and insistently that she felt she would never know real peace till she was possessed of all the facts.

Suddenly she turned and gave the woman her hand. "I promise, before God, that I will never attempt to bring the murderer of Torquil Grant to justice," she said solemnly.

Kirsty had been watching her quietly with that subtle understanding and insight which now goes by the scientific name of telepathy, but which was simple thought-reading. She knew what was passing in Lady Ulvadale's mind.

"And never, by word or deed, you'll hint of your knowledge to any living man or woman, save one, your husband; he's safer than the grave. You may tell him."

"By all that is holy I faithfully promise," answered Lady Ulvadale.

A sea-gull swept into the cave and dashed out again with shrill scream on perceiving its occupants, and she looked round in sudden terror. Now that the longing of months was about to be satisfied she began to feel sick with apprehension.

Kirsty held her hand with a firm grasp. "Amen," she said reverently, as she let it go with a final squeeze, and folding her hands in her apron she began her extraordinary recital.

"It was on the Sabbath night of July 19th, a lovely summer night, that I last saw Torquil Grant in the flesh. It would be about a quarter to nine that I met him in the glen below the Castle. He was carrying a lantern, and I came upon him quite suddenly and wished him good-night. He remarked it was a fine night, but a dark road—you know how black dark the Fastness glen is by twilight? I sat and watched the twinkle of his lantern mounting ever higher and higher

## The Portals of Love

up the face of the cliff, till it disappeared on to the terrace of the Castle. Then I rose and walked straight home. I sat down by the fireside and was just thinking I could make a cup of tea before getting into bed when I fell into a sort of trance. You won't understand exactly what that means, but I've always been subject to those trances, as my mother was before me, and during those times I always have visions. This time my vision was of the Fastness. I knew I stood in the library. I thought I saw Torquil Grant and the young laird in mortal combat, yet it was more a combat of mind than of arms. They stood glaring at one another, and I knew it was a question of money that was between them—money that the captain owed the factor and couldn't pay. There was a feeling over me that some one else was in the room, yet I could only see those two. All of a sudden I saw the young laird strike out with a mighty blow, and Torquil Grant fell under that blow like a forest tree snapped by a sudden fearsome blast. I saw him lying at the captain's feet and I knew that he was dead. I never had a doubt about that. Then again another man rushed into the scene—the laird himself. I saw Macleod spring forward and front his son, and I knew he was witness to the murder; then I became aware that there was still another person present, yet not present, some secret witness who would always remain hidden, and though I did not see her face in the vision I knew who that secret person was—a woman, the sweetheart of Malcolm Macleod—Miss Herne. There was a terrible feeling in the air though all was deathly quiet. In the vision there was a confused murmur as of many hidden sounds, yet in the room all was silence. Then I saw the awful face of the young laird in the agonies of remorse, and I knew he had never meant to hurt Grant. It had been one of those awful, swift acts of passion that are over in a second, but that wreck a whole life,



## The Portals of Love

and then I saw them—father and son—dispose of the corpse.”

She paused for a moment and her face was pale and horror-stricken, the tragic eyes staring out as if still riveted on some ghastly, appalling vision. Lady Ulvadale sat motionless, her eyes wide with a mingling of horror and astonishment, too confused and startled to know whether she believed or disbelieved so incredible a story, yet fascinated by the graphic narration, given with all the intensity and reality of a veritable eye-witness.

“Go on,” she whispered huskily, “finish your horrible tale. Whether true or false I must hear the end.”

“The end.” Kirsty flashed a curious look round upon her. “Aye, the end is more hideous,” she said slowly and deliberately. “They took him, the dead man, by the arm-pits, and, father and son, they dragged him to a little door at one side of the room, and behind it I saw a staircase which I knew led up to a turret, and they shut him in there and left him.”

“They left him there! but it is impossible,” exclaimed Lady Ulvadale; “the body would long since have been discovered. Oh! Kirsty, surely it was nothing but a terrible dream.”

“Call it what you like, Lady Ulvadale, but it’s a true account of what happened. Wait a bit, my story isn’t done yet. I wakened out of the trance. I was cold and stiff, though it was a mild night, and the Castle clock was just chiming the half after nine. I was shivering with a sort of numb fear, and the vision was as clear in my mind as if it had happened in my own room but a second before. Now, my lady, half-past nine is the hour the laird reads prayers up at the Fastness, as you might have read in the *Seaview Chronicle* that published Mr. Macleod’s evidence. I didn’t know that at the time. I saw the vision, and like you I said to myself at the time—‘It’s a strange

## The Portals of Love

place to hide a corpse, for maybe the housemaid will find it in the morning'; still I never doubted the truth of what I'd seen, and now I know that it was hidden behind that door the corpse of Torquil Grant lay whilst the Laird of the Fastness read his prayers. The night Sandy Macrae was drowned I saw him washed back and forwards on the crest of the waves at the mouth of the 'Scaur cave,' and as I looked a great green roller took him and carried him right in at its mouth. I heard the thunderous crash as it entered and the hollow roar inside, and then I saw the great wash of green, foaming waters rush out again, but never another sight did I get of the corpse of Sandy Macrae, and that's why I said to old Agnes Macrae, 'Your son's body lies caught in the rocks in the Scaur cave,' and the three brothers of the Macraes found him there as I had said."

"I know, I know, Kirsty, but go on; what did they do with the corpse of Torquil?" urged Lady Ulvadale. She was shivering now, her face was very pale and she drew her cape closer about her as she bent forward to peer into Kirsty's face.

"I rose at last and I made my tea," went on Mrs. Hislop quietly, "and then I went to bed about ten o'clock, my mind still held by the vision I had seen: soon I dropped to sleep and then came another vision.

I was standing in the long passage of the cells—it's the very old part where the monks lived, and the cells are used as store rooms. Along this passage the light of daybreak was creeping, and I saw the forms come treading softly along of the laird and his son—and his son bore on his shoulders the corpse of Torquil Grant. They crept along silently, softly, like cats, and then the laird opened a door and I thought we all passed through and went down some steps. I couldn't feel those steps beneath my feet, it was as if I floated in air, and at the bottom we entered



## The Portals of Love

the castle dungeons. We passed through two and entered a third, and in that there was a great round black hole. The young laird laid down the body on the floor, and father and son then pushed the corpse of Torquil Grant to the lip and heaved it down into the well."

Lady Ulvadale strangled the cry of horror at her lips with her handkerchief, her staring eyes wide with terror expressed the acuteness of her distraught thoughts, which well-nigh overcame her reason.

"It was that awful, dull splash and gurgle of the closing waters that awoke me." Kirsty was standing up now, and staring down at her feet as if she still saw that hideous, yawning gulf receiving its prey—she spread her hands low before her, as if to hold off that awful sight which, even now, in recollection, blanched her withered cheeks, and made her frail body tremble; the face she turned on Lady Ulvadale was tragic with a livid staring fear.

"I knew nothing more. I was awake in my own bed, bathed in a cold clammy sweat, and in my terror I thought it was the foul clammy well water that was pouring over me. I shrieked aloud, and sprang up, and out on to the floor. That roused me thoroughly, and brought me back to my senses, and as I stood shivering in agony and terror I heard the castle clock strike once more as it tolled out the half hour after two. I couldn't go back to bed, I was terrified of having another vision. I put on some clothes and I stirred up the peats, and I sat by the fire for a while sick and near fainting with all I'd seen, but never a doubt I had. About nine o'clock I put on my shawl and went out. I'd a fancy to see what was taking place in the Auld House. I sat down on a bank and I just waited, and after some time out comes Mrs. Brown with her bonnet on. I didn't need to speak, the first thing she says to me is—'I'm away to the

## The Portals of Love

Fastness to inquire for the master, he's not been home all night'. I just said, 'Maybe you'll find him there,' and then I went home, and that, Lady Ulvadale, is the story of Torquil Grant's death, and you're the one and only soul I've told it to, or ever will tell it to in this life. You're the only woman Torquil loved and you have the right to know his fate; he was always good to me and stood up between me and them that would persecute me; but for him your father would have had Kirsty the witch out of Seaview years ago. You know all that's happened since. You know that Grant's never been heard of or seen since, and you know that Malcolm Macleod left the country."

"And now Malcolm Macleod is dead," exclaimed Lady Ulvadale.

A curious smile crossed Kirsty's face. She gave vent to a short laugh, and an abrupt shrug. "Dead! Why, Malcolm Macleod is as alive as you are, my lady."

Elizabeth felt as if she had reached the utmost extent of horror and amazement; she only stared in silent bewilderment. What would this strange creature say next?

Kirsty saw her statement was almost unimaginable and laughed again with a tinge of sadness.

"I was fond of Torquil, but I'm sorry, bitterly sorry for the man whose hand struck him out of life. He's in a far country, my lady, and it's no more he'll ever see the place of his birth. The day he left the Fastness, it's dead to the world for ever and ever is Malcolm Macleod. He's gone out from the land of his fathers with the blood of another on his hands, and it's in a far country that he'll live down his crime, poor lad."

"It is simply inconceivable, incomprehensible," exclaimed Lady Ulvadale vehemently.

Kirsty made no direct response. She sat staring before her, as if lost in some far-off dream.



## The Portals of Love

"Remember your vow, Lady Ulvadale ; don't forget that there are two persons alive who were present that gruesome night," she suddenly resumed—"the laird and Miss Herne, and it's a broken heart she carries with her, for the lost love of Malcolm Macleod."

Lady Ulvadale sat buried in a half-dazed bewilderment. She felt how incredulous and untenable was the story she had listened to, yet she could not banish the conviction it brought to her. Much that before had been vague and doubtful was thereby made clear. With unwearying perseverance she had sifted all the obtainable evidence to be gleaned. That Grant never left the Castle that night made all things clear to her. The unalterable fact remained that no human being had set eyes on him from the moment the Fastness engulfed him. For a second the attitude of the police struck her as too unintelligent to be credited, then she remembered the social status of the man who had struck the blow, and the man who had aided in covering up the crime. Who would dream of inculpating Captain Macleod, who would dare incriminate the laird of the Fastness? She dragged herself to her feet and looked at her watch ; it was after five o'clock—the sun had burst forth from out of the clouds and threw a lurid slanting glory over sea and sky, the wind had died down and the ocean stretched away to the horizon in one vast heaving mirror of steel touched with flashes of copper. On the pale yellow sands lay long dark ribbons of sea-weed, marking the place where the low-breaking wave melted on to the shore.

## CHAPTER XXI

IT was the same night, a night which had fallen into deep June stillness. Not a tremor of wind stirred the fresh green of the trees that overhung the Manse. Great masses of cloud possessed the sky between which brilliant stars swayed and swung in flashes of dissolving radiance. Above the firs the Great Bear was keeping his eternal faith with the Pole in silent revolutions, and an old setting moon shone fitfully. Although no wind blew the sea was troubled and heaved as if with an internal unrest, its distant moanings falling on the ear of Janet Tytler as a requiem.

For long she had lain wide-eyed upon her bed and at her side the minister slept heavily. Janet could not sleep, something told her she would never more need sleep, and with the calm determination of one who is prepared, and has set her spiritual house in order, she folded her toil-worn hands upon her breast and awaited the glad summons. Her thoughts dwelt entirely with her children. Keith, who was doing so well in London, and Elizabeth, who dwelt within six miles of where she lay—Elizabeth, whose last loving message conveyed to her by Martha Black had been: "Tell mother, with my dear love, that if it be a girl child I bear, it shall be called Janet Tytler in the dear memory of her who bore me".

She felt no need of prayers or spiritual comfort in the ordinary acceptation, for months her life had been lived in the atmosphere of the only real prayer, an unbroken communion betwixt the God within her and



## The Portals of Love

the world-wide immensity from which she drew soul life. The more profoundly this communion developed in her the more divine sustenance she ever drew from the eternal source of being. Unlike other passing souls she felt no need to pray for those she was about to part from on earth. The conviction was too strong within her that soon, very soon, she would have no need for language, but would be in mystic oneness with all who were powerful to aid her loved ones. For her own soul she had no fear, long since she had known, with a perfect assurance, that all would be well with her.

Now and again a moan of pain would have passed her lips but she resolutely held it back so that no sound should disturb the slumbers of Joshua. The hour of two chimed out upon the quiet breaking morning from the Fastness Tower, and the Manse clocks answered forth the second hour of day in submissive echo to the great ruler of Seaview time. As she listened a great longing possessed the woman to arise and go away into some quiet corner to die alone. Here, in the room and the bed where for thirty years she had slept by Joshua's side, she felt she could not die; it was too memory haunted with all the little trials and troubles of her wedded life, and with the fear of arousing Joshua she could not give expression to the soul hunger within her. She wanted to be alone in the presence of those intangible shapes of infinite succour who had ministered to her in her hours of sore affliction, and whispered in her ear wonderful, unspeakable truths of hope and comfort. Her spirit struggled in her breast as if in a wild desire to escape, and her shattered earthly strength battled with it in a vain effort to stifle its clamourings and bar its egress. Life seemed working in the very centre of death, and rising out of death through the strait gate, her soul struggling in the last crisis was forcing

## The Portals of Love

itself out of life into heaven-born conditions once more. At length she could no more endure the agony and softly arose. She put her feet into her slippers and dragging a shawl about her shoulders she crept softly from the room and closed the door behind her. She felt her way down the well-known staircase and along the passage to the living room, supporting her steps by clinging to rails and wall, and pausing now and again to pant for breath. The room gained she shut herself in and staggered to her chair into which she sank. A deep gasp broke from her lips, more of relief than suffering. She experienced no actual pain, but the conflict of the spirit struggling to free itself from the worn-out garment of flesh rent her with violent spasmodic convulsions, which at moments shook her frail form roughly and angrily as if madly impatient of restraint. She felt none of this; the time had come when she lived no longer in the body, all her consciousness was withdrawn into the eternal nucleus of her being. Externally the horrors that haunt the dignity of death were manifest, but only eyes who could penetrate the mists of futurity were there to behold. A smile flickered over her wan lips, some great master hand was sweeping o'er the lyre of life, o'er a past built up of inherited loves, o'er her tear-stained book of life. She was wandering now o'er the lengthening track back to her girlhood. How very simple her life had been, the life of one of the many women whose wondering pity looks on paths they never trod. She had always seen the gleam of better hopes across the murkiest gloom, the seeds of good amid the howling wastes. Few incidents had coloured her years, her marriage to Joshua had been the greatest event, and then came the births of her children and the agony of their loss. She had striven to do her duty, had striven to subject herself to the laws of the Master's high decree, but she could never understand



## The Portals of Love

Heaven's fine etiquette as her husband did. It seemed to her that his learning was like moonbeams, giving light without heat. Love was the only star by which she could steer her course towards eternity, and she could discern no love in Joshua as he sat umpire over the grand court of public opinion, cased in self-confidence. Hers was never one of those little cramped hearts that cannot forgive. Then came the loss of Elizabeth and for a while she had bent stricken beneath the blow of an irreparable loss. Holding out her hands to the dumb flower-strewn mounds where her dead babies lay she desired to droop and die like a dead leaf in the brake. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God and it shall be given him." The words grew like a flower in her heart and were dewed by that well-spring amid the wilds whence the waters of blessing flow, and one day she told herself in a great uplifting, "Divinity hath surely touched my heart," and she knew at last that "Life eternal is not to live. This is life eternal—to know." A mighty hope arose like a sun in her breast, as every great hope that rises in the world has its source in the great heart of God. She no longer sought to know of her girl's fate. With the profound belief that every soul, in every stage, is sacred to God, she left her in His care, for she knew that the rejected of men are given back to God. Once more she took up her burden and began the ascent to that peak which is nearest the storm-cloud, yet nearer the stars.

In a life of love we die to self, but it is a death of transmigration not of annihilation. Many break beside the fountain the golden bowl of life, but it was not so with Janet Tytler for whom the great celestialisation soon began. Day by day the Divine alchemy went on within her, and as it grew like a mystic force she would fain have "made all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery". Already she felt in her

## The Portals of Love

being a consciousness of inflowing strength, a sublime contentment not of the world but of the soul. Her lonely hours were exquisitely restful, charmed by the innumerable hosts of the angel world. The earthly house of her mortal frame was dissolving fast to give room to the building of God, eternal in the Heavens, and with a divine patience she went about her work saying, "I will wait my appointed time till my change comes". Ever keeping her migration in view she made ready for her greater beginning. Duly she made the sole oblation of her heart to God and stood ready for departure.

When she lost her son sorrow could no longer crush her, for the love of God throbbed in the very core of her agony, and Heaven's warm river of life eternal mingled as the great ingredient in her bitter cup. As in the dark earth creep veins of silver and gold, as in the depths of the ocean's bed the pearl is born, so through the gloom of her earthly passing shone ethereal and celestial forms of exceeding great glory. So the great heart of the lone woman yielded up its simple earthly treasures, even as the beads of a told rosary, treasures which she had reverently gathered in the apron of her pure maternity and now laid down at last at the feet of God. She had fought love's battle and progress, she had known love's banishment from Paradise and love's humiliation on earth, now she knew they led on but to love's home-coming and eternal rejoicing.

The piercing song of a thrush in the apple tree without penetrated the last throbbing breaths she drew and led her for a moment back to earth. Joshua still slept, their wakings would be in different realms. Her lips framed his name in voiceless blessing, her eyes opened and turned to the pale clouded gold of the dawn awakening the East. Day had broken over a world, silent save for the first minstrelsy of feathered



## The Portals of Love

throats, but her mortal eyes saw not its light, blinded by the greater glory, and bending low spoke One with a soft bright utterance, loosing to her the golden words of life.

And her eyes, waked out of darkness into light, were opened, and she looked down with unclouded gaze from her unsheathed soul upon the abandoned house of her pilgrimage, and realising that she had been a partaker of flesh and blood, she penetrated at last the mystery of the Passover. On the banks of Time's river she had sat down and wept, in a strange country she had sojourned. The abandoned house seemed to bear no more the seal of her identity, and her soul carried her in thought far past the golden isles of memory to an earth where only names exist and things are nought. There was something pathetic in this poor, worn-out garment, so frail, so wan, which had once housed her soul, and from out the dignities of her heavenly rebirth she gazed long upon it with a wondering pity.

A cloud of witnesses, God-missioned, the children of bliss and knowledge, were about it now, and angel fingers smoothed the wrinkles from the marble brow, and kissed the cold dead lips into smiles, and folded with gentle reverence the toil-worn hands, now dropped into eternal quietude and impotence. And as they wrapped the childlike calm of the corpse in the mantle of rest they sang softly to themselves of birth not death, of life and light and immortality.

Into her soul there seemed to pour the sacred elements of universal truth which told her there was no death, but what men called the tomb was the gate of life. Like migrating bird, by divine force she was carried; the circle of life was completing itself—the going forth and the return.

Her hand in the clasp of her leader, she moved with airy freedom into space wherein was no obstacle to

## The Portals of Love

bar her progress. Her robes a web of light, she glanced down at her own shining feet and saw they touched no earth. As a feather borne on the soft breast of a summer wind she wafted to the place where in holy innocence and love she had lived her long, lone years on earth. Joshua Tytler still slept. He lay with his dark, careworn face turned up to her down-dropped gaze. His arm was thrown above his head, the hand clenched, and by his side, in sordid robes of false humility, she saw his pride-blinded soul as sceptred Monarch, hovering earth bound o'er him.

The voice of one joy-hearted spoke to her once again.

"I am blest to serve thee and give thee back to thine own who await thee, re-born from out the womb of earth we greet thee in the radiant spheres of light."

And her eyes were blinded still by the greater glory, but she saw through the shining mists her mother's face, and the innocent eyes of her lost children smiling upon her, and sun-clad forms with the seal of love upon their brows pressed around eager for heavenly escort and those "known long since yet lost awhile" were offering sweet leadership. Then she bent and gave at length the last embrace, and Joshua Tytler slept on as mid the bright bevy she made her way, in her own bright strength, to realms where footfall dropped like waves of light to the rhythm of the self-same music her ear of faith had heard in the still watches of earth. With a peace that passed not now her understanding she swept towards the bosom of the ineffable.



## CHAPTER XXII

IT was Christmas Eve and the streets of West London were strangely deserted. Very many people had left town to spend the holidays with friends in the country, the weather in the Metropolis was not such as to be enticing to those who desired to glance at the Christmas decorations of the shops. A fine rain fell, the atmosphere, saturated with moisture, was depressing and enervating, and the streets were shining with wet and clogged with slippery mud.

Without, no more dispiriting conditions could be experienced, but within the tiny flat Miss Herne called home all was warmth, comfort and brightness. Eighteen years had passed since Torquil Grant drew his last breath in the library of the Fastness, and at the age of forty Lilius was still a single woman, though her isolated condition was entirely due to her own determination. Suitors had not been lacking, but Lilius had put them all aside and would accept none of them.

In truth her reason was not far to seek. With the weight of that secret lying always at her heart, with the tragic memory of that parting from Malcolm Macleod she did not see how it would be possible for her to marry. It was too heavy a load to carry unshared by a husband, something told her she would be wise not to link her life with another from whom always she must hide the deep secret of her youth. Alone, she could bear the haunting memory, those dark hours of recollection that still sometimes visited

## The Portals of Love

her and weighed her down with an intolerable gloom, but living in the daily hourly companionship of another would make all the difference. The eyes of love would surely note the shadow lying over her, questions would certainly be asked to which she could give no answer.

It was natural to her strength of character that she should have accepted her lonely fate with a quiet resignation. She saw as the years drew on how far-reaching the consequences of that unpremeditated crime had been. Gradually she had drawn away from all her relatives who, knowing nothing, were impatient of her retirement. Her mirror showed her the advance of time, and her vanished youth was symbolised by silvering hair and the tiny lines gathering round the fine eyes and stern but still beautiful mouth. The knowledge of that crime had altered her life completely, it had thrown her youth into solitude and a deep and abiding sadness. It seemed to her on looking back across the valley of her life that the stern restrictions of her grief upon the loss of Malcolm, the terrible restraint and curb which she was compelled to put upon her natural feelings of sorrow for her blighted love, his sad fate and the horror of the tragedy which had been the ruin of his life, had lengthened out the strands of her feelings into a slow, lingering suffering—a suffering which had been afforded no sudden outburst to throw off its first full flood. Only had there been a sluggish stream of continuous restrained grief which required time to dry up its stealthy hidden flow.

Time and the inevitable had helped her in one way; the memory of Malcolm Macleod was no longer a sense of anguished loss but had faded into the gentle dream of a dead friendship. Looking back, in the light of her gathering years, she saw that her nature and Malcolm's had too much that was antagonistic for happiness to have been the result had they been wedded.



## The Portals of Love

Acquaintances she had in numbers and her life had neither been futile nor idle, and the richness of her intellect had provided her with the best antidote to ennui, yet she was well aware that there was a something lacking in her life, and that something she knew to be the absence of a kindred soul and mind upon which to concentrate and draw her out of the inevitable falling back upon the egotistical stronghold of self.

Those eighteen years had brought in their flight the inevitable changes in the threads woven through her life. Some had been snapped by death, others drawn closer to her heart, some were lost in the abyss of time. Over the Fastness had come the greatest of all changes—that of death. Macleod had lost both his sons and lived on to mourn their loss in the gloom of irreparable sorrow. At the age of twenty Roderick Macleod had met with a violent death in the South of France. Driving his motor near Cannes he had come into terrific collision with another car advancing in the opposite direction. He had been thrown out and was picked up dead, with a broken neck. Macleod had never held up his head since the hour the blow had fallen. His whole interest in life had been centred in his young son who yet on growing up had caused him the most serious anxiety. He had developed into a spoiled self-willed youth, who on throwing off the boy had taken on a wild recklessness, fatal to the man. His adoring mother he had treated with scant respect, laughing her admonitions to scorn and snapping his fingers at her obsolete beliefs.

He had spent very little of his time at the Fastness, telling her plainly he could not tolerate her restrictions, her Sabbath observances, and her Bible readings which he characterised as "all rot". He had never been taught to seek out the real beauties of literature in that much-abused book, and stigmatised the entire contents as nonsense. Kenneth Macleod was now the direct

## The Portals of Love

heir to the Fastness, and spent what time he could with its stricken owners.

More time he spent at Ulvadale Castle, where the patter of many little feet resounded up and down the long passages and roomy attics. Elizabeth had borne her husband three sons and three daughters, and the cares of a young family entirely absorbed the interests of husband and wife. Time had dealt lovingly with Elizabeth Ulvadale. She was a beautiful woman still, despite the cares of maternity. The delicacy which had formerly made her look almost ethereal had vanished to give place to the tones of health and happiness. Hers had been an ideal marriage, a true union of hearts and souls. She had put aside now all tinge of regret at her old father's attitude towards her. Strange and incomprehensible as it seemed to every one else his character was too well known to his daughter to cause surprise or hope of change. As he had lived so Joshua Tytler would die, at enmity with his children, to his last hour wrestling with the world in his hard, narrow ultra-Calvinism, in his fierce fight for the supremacy of Jehovah, the God of vengeance and blood. He still interpreted the Sabbath with a faithfulness unknown to Jewish Rabbis, and thundered from the pulpit at those who sought to drive a cart-load of grain through Sunday observances, and dared to gather ears of corn on the Sabbath day.

Keith Tytler's career, begun so auspiciously in London under the Waites' hospitable roof, had progressed by leaps and bounds. Unlike the usual man who fancies he can write, yet when he comes to try cannot string two grammatical sentences consecutively together, his first venture into the realms of literature found favour at once. He took to article writing assiduously, and owing to the versatility of his brain found no lack of subjects. It was towards the end of his second year with the Waites that his first real



## The Portals of Love

enterprise was offered to the world for acceptance, and the world, strange as it may appear, gladly took what it was offered.

His venture assumed the form of *The Pilot*, a monthly magazine devoted to the scientific aspect of psychic subjects. In short, it was a bold attempt to link the materialist with the spiritist, by proving the irrelevancy of the word supernatural, and substituting supernormal as a medium through which the so-called occult powers of certain abnormal constitutions might be studied. Gradually this work had absorbed all his energies, and the Waites had found another secretary, though their interest in the new scheme gave a certain naturalness to their desire to retain Keith under their roof, for indeed he had slipped into the position almost of a son in their hearts. Five years afterwards, to Tytler's great grief, Lady Waite died. She had been possessed of a small fortune, something over a thousand a year, and to Keith she bequeathed five hundred a year, and the request that he would continue to reside with Sir James until such time as death should sunder them, or that circumstances should make parting necessary. No such circumstances had occurred, the dream of Tytler's life, the hope of Lilius Herne becoming his wife, remained unfulfilled, though by no means abandoned.

Of Malcolm Macleod nothing had been heard by the few people who were cognisant of his physical existence. In truth, for all they knew he might have passed away long years since, in the exile to which his own deed had banished him. The very name of Torquil Grant was forgotten in Seaview, and often it occurred to Lilius Herne to wonder whether if still alive nothing could yet be done to re-establish Malcolm in his rightful position as his father's successor. It seemed to her that could such a plan be safely carried through Macleod, in the depths of his lonely grief,

## The Portals of Love

would gladly welcome back his first-born. Too terrible a punishment did it seem to her this eternal banishment for the isolated act of a moment's unpremeditated passion. There were times when she was possessed of an intense longing to take some strong, far-seeing nature into her confidence—to get an opinion upon the subject, to hear a verdict pronounced upon her share in the shielding from justice of Malcolm Macleod. Had she been right or wrong? Had her lips not been sealed by loyalty to the supposed dead, it would have been a blessed relief to have published the story to the world and disburdened herself of the horrible secret. Though he had never known it, she had played into Macleod's hands and aided him to hide the ghastly tragedy. Malcolm had offered to throw himself upon the mercy of the law and take his chance, his father had planned another course, and by his resistless will had forced his son into submission.

She sat thinking over those matters in the warm stillness of her little room. Not for the first time she felt a little lonely. Latterly the feeling had crept upon her more often, more insistently, and when she questioned its intrusion she concluded it was the flight of years bringing its inevitable warning of old age. For the first time the Christmas season spoke to her of solitude amongst those many others who were gathered together under one roof in the bonds of love and cherished family ties. There were many such that she knew of, only she was alone, a solitude in the very heart of a great town. She had generally gone to Elizabeth Ulvadale at that season, and had been merged in an atmosphere of joyous childhood which brought with it the noisy activity of many little feet and carolling voices. This year, for some reason she could not explain, she had refused this standing invitation and had elected to remain alone at home.

It was with a sensation of pure pleasure that she



## The Portals of Love

heard the bell ring and the well-known footsteps of Keith Tytler resound along the tiny passage. He never now left Sir James till the New Year had dawned, and the blank his wife's death had left had been sorrowed out with the passing anniversary.

He came in bringing with him a breath of fresh air, with his frank smile and shining eyes, and instantly the silent room seemed alive and glowing with vibrations of energy and new life.

"A happy Christmas to you, Liliás," he said as they shook hands and he drew up a chair. "I knew I would not be able to look in to-morrow so I felt I must come and see you to-night."

"You are a dear. You never forget me, Keith. I confess I was feeling just the least bit lonely when I heard your welcome ring."

He looked with a trace of surprise into the deep dark eyes which still retained the lustre of youth. He wanted to say many things but feared to offend her.

"Why, it seems curious to hear one so self-sufficing talk of loneliness. What of all those celebrities and geniuses and great personages I often find you surrounded by? Of course I never forget you, Liliás. How could I?" he ended simply.

Her lips curved in a tinge of sadness.

"Ah! It would be very easy, Keith. It is what any other man would have done long since, and what you will certainly do ere long when——"

She paused and a faint flush rose in her cheeks as she met his eyes fixed full upon her.

"There is no case of when with me," he said in a cold yet earnest voice. "It is cruel of you to say such things, they hurt and stab me. What have I done to deserve them? When has my friendship and my love for you ever wavered? Are they nothing to you that you treat me so harshly?"

## The Portals of Love

The flush deepened on her cheeks and tears rose in her eyes, tears she was powerless to hold back. She did love him, and to herself made no secret of it. She would gladly have married him had she been free to disclose all to him, but this she dared not do. He was too closely connected with Seaview, and since his sister's marriage he was often there. Many times he had spoken to her of marriage and always had she refused to contemplate it. Only she knew how faithful he could be and still was.

"Don't think me ungrateful. Indeed, I am most grateful," she faltered, "but some day you will marry, Keith, and then naturally I shall lose you. Indeed, I am quite prepared, I know it must come. I would like to see you marry some nice, pretty girl who would aid your career yet possess all the fireside virtues."

He gave vent to a short rather bitter laugh.

"My dear, don't waste time in building such air castles," he exclaimed. "Once long ago you said to me, 'build as many castles in the air as you please, but see that their foundations are rooted in earth'. I've never forgotten your words. Your castle, Liliás, has no foundation save in phantasy, and it never can have. How could I ever marry when the only woman I love in this world is yourself? I have told you this hundreds of times. You know it as well as you know your own name. Lately I have ceased to reiterate it because I don't want to be merely a bore. I wish to be of use to you as a friend as you won't think of me in the light of anything nearer and dearer."

He paused and glanced at her. She had shaded her eyes with her hands, he could not see her face, but something in her attitude suddenly touched him profoundly.

"You are lonely," he said in his grave penetrating voice, "and that I can understand, the loneliness amongst many. It is what I feel—so deeply—myself,



## The Portals of Love

Lilias. By the happiness I ought to feel in all I have, I know what I lack and it is the same with you, dear. The one thing needful is wanting; you will never be really happy alone, Lilias, any more than I shall be. But I should find myself in far worse plight than I now am in, did I marry a girl I could not love."

Her voice came to him low and infinitely sad, as he stopped speaking and dropped into gloomy silence. "Yes, I am lonely, I don't know why, but I've never realised it, Keith, till now. No man can know how terribly lonely a woman can be, for no man could be so lonely, but dear, there is a reason, a very strong reason, why I must always remain so. I cannot tell you what it is, I——" She ceased speaking suddenly, the handle of the door turned and the maid entered with a note upon a salver.

Miss Herne took it idly up. "Any answer wanted?" she asked as she glanced at the writing which was totally unknown to her.

"No answer, miss," the maid replied as she left the room. Lilias was about to throw the letter aside for perusal later when the word "immediate" scrawled on the top of the envelope caught her eye, and she broke the heavy black seal with a vague foreboding dawning at her heart. Keith, glancing towards her, saw a puzzled look give place to a ghastly pallor as she turned to the signature and a low exclamation of intense pain escaped her lips.

"Lilias, what has happened to so terribly distress you," he inquired anxiously. He had never seen her so disturbed; that she had received bad news he did not doubt, but he could form not the faintest conception from whence it might proceed. She shook her head without raising her eyes from the paper in her trembling fingers.

"Do not speak to me for a little, Keith. I must have quiet to read this," she said.

## The Portals of Love

He murmured an uneasy assent and lay back in his chair, his mind busy with all sorts of conjectures.

He could think of no incident in her life, the life he seemed to know so well, that could thus affect her. He was certain he had no rival; Elizabeth, who was her greatest friend and knew his desire, had constantly assured him of that.

Once or twice he glanced furtively at her as she sat as if turned to stone, her gaze upon the letter she held. Her eyes were full of tears by now, and he saw them roll slowly and unheeded down her cheeks. It was a long closely written letter and he saw that she slowly and deliberately read it twice. There was a look of poignant suffering in her pale face as her hands at length dropped into her lap and she turned deep dark eyes of pain to the fire, gazing into it in profound thought. The little clock struck six; she seemed to be absolutely oblivious of his presence. He rose with the intimacy of old friendship and stirred the dying fire, throwing on a block of wood which leapt up in sudden brilliance, playing hide and seek with the shadows and overpowering the electric lamp. Then he stood leaning against the mantelshelf looking down on the sad face.

A quarter of an hour of silence, twenty minutes had passed when at last she turned to him.

"Draw your chair nearer to me, Keith. I have much to say to you," she said in a low voice as she glanced behind her to see that the door was shut. Then she took up the letter and held it out to him.

"Keith, a dead man has come back to life. I want you first to read his letter," she said, "afterwards I will explain."

He looked at her scrutinisingly as he took the paper. Her manner was as strange as her words.

"You wish me to read this?" he questioned.

She nodded her head.



## The Portals of Love

"I wish you to read every word carefully and attentively," she said.

He turned over the sheet and glanced at the signature. For a moment he did not raise his eyes, a low exclamation passed his lips. The signature was "Malcolm Macleod". He suddenly felt dazed and perplexed.

"What in God's name does this mean?" he asked abruptly, staring across at her.

"Read the letter aloud, Keith, and I will explain it to you," she said, and in a low voice he began:—

"DEAR LILIAS,

"After eighteen years, during which Malcolm Macleod has been dead to the world, I am about to claim your promise given to me at our parting, that if at any time in the future you could be of service to me, most willingly would you render such aid as was in your power. Do you remember? or has time swept me out of your memory? It would be very hard for me to believe such to be the case, it would be so unlike the woman whom I knew and loved in the long ago.

"For six weeks I have been living in London at the above address. I had to come home, Lilias. A desperate longing possessed me to die in the old country and mingle my ashes with my native soil. I have only arrived in time as the verdict has gone forth—a few weeks at most. When I left Australia I knew I was dying—heart disease is killing me, but I suffer only discomfort, no pain. I married an Australian woman soon after landing. She was alone in the world as I was, one of those grand strong natures with an outlook which is cosmic in comparison to the limited horizon of others. After marriage I discovered I had married an heiress with ten thousand a year. Her dying words were an expression of the

## The Portals of Love

happiness I had brought to her. She knew all and regretted nothing. For the last five years I have been a widower, but I have not been left comfortless, as my only child, Celandine, is with me, a girl of seventeen.

"My marriage was an ideal one. No more noble woman ever lived than my wife; she gave me her name which I now bear. Under the name of Robert Shirley I am known and under that name I shall die.

"It is for my girl more than for my unworthy self that I would now implore your aid. At my death she will be left a considerable heiress without a friend this side of the equator, and my great desire is that she should make England her future home. My affairs are all settled and placed in the hands of a first-rate man of business, Mr. Arrol of Lincoln's Inn Fields, whom a friend in the Antipodes recommended. Celandine will be in good hands as far as her business affairs are concerned. What is of almost more consequence is that she should possess one true woman friend in a like position to herself, to steer her through the many quicksands which her inexperienced footsteps will encounter.

"Am I asking too much, Liliás? Had you been married I doubt if I should have dared to ask so great a service, but with more joy than I can describe I found your dear name in the *Court Guide* the day after my arrival, and from that hour I have longed intensely to see you. Will you come and see me? I cannot come to you, and there is an infinity to talk over. I see the name of Keith Tytler, Wilton Crescent, in the *Court Guide*. Can there be two Keith Tytlers? If this be my old friend I should dearly love to see him again. I feel that somehow I would like to tell him everything. You can't think, Liliás, what a longing I feel to have one reliable, true, Scotch friend to turn to in this my last hour of great need.



## The Portals of Love

"My daughter is wholly ignorant of my true name and history. All she knows of the past is that I am Scotch. Should it be possible for you to come to-night about nine o'clock you would find me quite alone, as Celandine is dining with Mrs. Arrol, the wife of the lawyer I have selected. If this be impossible to you, will you let me know when you can come, for come I feel sure you will to give, as once before in the long ago, your help and blessing to your

"Ever grateful old friend,

"MALCOLM MACLEOD

"(now ROBERT SHIRLEY)."

He ceased reading and let his hands drop between his knees; for some moments neither spoke. Lillas sat gazing into the fire, a far-away look in her troubled eyes. Keith felt an emotion he could hardly understand. He knew now some awful tragedy lay at the root of the mystery, but what it was he could not fathom. The disappearance of Grant had passed from his mind, he had not heard Elizabeth mention him since her marriage, eighteen years ago, and he would never have dreamed of associating Malcolm Macleod with the absconding factor. Something in the letter, putting aside its innate sadness, touched him profoundly.

"Lillas, what is the meaning of this incomprehensible letter?" he asked at length.

She turned to him suddenly, as if roused out of a deep dream.

"It means, Keith, that Malcolm Macleod never died, but suffered self-inflicted exile because of an unpremeditated crime. It was Malcolm Macleod who in a sudden flame of passion killed Torquil Grant."

Too staggered and amazed to speak he sat staring at her, all manner of questions and reminiscences flashing through his brain in a tangled maze of thought.

## The Portals of Love

"How do you come to know this, Liliast?" he asked.

"I saw the deed done, Keith," she answered simply. "I was outside the library window, on the terrace. Hearing angry voices I looked in and saw the blow struck. I saw Torquil Grant lying dead at Malcolm's feet and I saw his father rush forward from the inner library and confront his son with the word 'Murderer'. You will begin to understand now, Keith, why I am still a single woman. Bearing the weight of this secret tragedy on my shoulders, how could I have married you, or any man to whom I was compelled to remain silent. So far as I am aware there are but three persons in the world who know of this secret—myself and Macleod and his son. To this day Macleod is innocent of the fact that I know. He did not see me by the window, and Malcolm and I agreed that he need never be told. No words of mine can convey to you the relief it is to me to be at last allowed to tell you all. There is no greater service Malcolm could have rendered to me."

"My poor beloved Liliast"—he was looking at her now with intense comprehension and sympathy in his eyes, his voice. It rushed over him how infinitely sad, lonely and self-contained her life for the last eighteen years must have been. No wonder there were wide bands of grey mingling with the glossy dark hair. No wonder she wore the grave serious mien of a woman of fifty. Sharer of so dark a secret how gloomy must often have been her hours, and how nobly she had borne them in her desire to shield from dishonour that long gone love of the past.

With a sudden irresistible impulse he bent down and kissed her gently, for the first time in his life. Not a lover's kiss, but the love token of one faithful soul given in sympathy and reverence to another.

"If you feel able will you tell me as much as you can?" he asked gently—"before going to see him—



## The Portals of Love

as he desires it, I would like to know as much as possible."

He sat down again by her side, and she recounted the whole story, beginning from the moment when the red star of Torquil's lamp had been seen that lovely Sabbath night twinkling deep down in the Fastness glen. She described the stricken terror of that hideous sight which she had beheld—father and son—white with an awful fear, standing over the corpse—the hiding of the lamp and her return to the library for prayers—when all trace of the murder had been obliterated and the panic-stricken perpetrator of that dark deed sat by, whilst the father read prayers. Then came their interview outside her door, when Malcolm was well-nigh beside himself, and then at two o'clock when she heard him once more creep along the corridor and guessed what his errand must be. She passed on to tell Keith of the next morning when she and Malcolm had walked to the "Spindle cave" and disposed of the lantern, and he had told her all—had given her the secret of that ghastly grave where the corpse of Torquil Grant would be forever hidden under the stagnant black waters of the dungeon well. He did not interrupt her, though once or twice a suppressed exclamation of horror burst low from him, as she pursued the horrible story, passing on to that of subterfuge, fear and love, until the last day of his departure came, and Malcolm Macleod left the Fastness for ever. Once she had heard from him before sailing, and once on safe landing. After that the veil of impenetrable silence had fallen so far as he was concerned. Three months after a letter had followed the telegram announcing his death. The writer was supposed to be the doctor who had attended Malcolm in his fatal illness. Malcolm's watch and a few personal odds and ends were also supposed to have been received by Macleod. That letter no one but

## The Portals of Love

Macleod had ever seen. From that hour Malcolm had been dead to the world, and Roderick had taken his place as heir to the Fastness.

For long they sat silent after the completion of that story, both going over and over the tragic occurrences of that far-off time.

The clock struck seven, and Keith at last looked up.

"Lilias," he said earnestly, "I believe that Malcolm Macleod has done a great thing for me this night: he has given you to me. Now that the terrible shadow of his sin no more lies as a barrier between us, I believe you will at last consent to be my wife. Let us go to him together, to-night, Lilias, as future husband and wife. Let him know that he has done this great thing for us both—his two old friends."

She raised her eyes and smiled on him, then she held out her hand. "So let it be, Keith," she answered, and bent to kiss him. "I am the Christmas present that Malcolm presents to you—let us both strive in token of what he has done for us, and in token of our inability to judge others, to make his remaining days happy—and do all we can for the child he will leave desolate."



## CHAPTER XXIII

THE plighted lovers found themselves a few minutes after nine o'clock at 100 Park Lane, the address which had headed Robert Shirley's letter. It was a block of flats and a lift had conveyed them up two flight of stairs. Almost as soon as the bell had sounded a butler appeared and at once conducted them into a large, beautifully furnished drawing-room, where he left them with the remark that he would tell Mr. Shirley who he believed expected them. Almost before Lillas had completed a brief survey of her interesting surroundings the man appeared again with the announcement that his master would at once receive them.

It was with beating hearts they followed him through a silent square hall. Not a sound seemed to stir in the whole building, they might have stood miles distant in the depths of the country. The man threw open a door to the right, and passing through they found themselves in a large bed-sitting room.

Malcolm Macleod lay stretched upon a sofa near the fire, and so altered was he that, but for the circumstances both Lillas and Keith knew, they would not have recognised him again. The thick dark hair was now pure white, a short white pointed beard contrasting with the sunburnt skin and dark eyes gave him a curiously foreign look. He held out his thin hands to them in silence, and they both stood on either side of the couch, hand clasping hand in an eloquent muteness, too overcome for the moment for speech. Not until Lillas saw the living Malcolm stretched before her with

## The Portals of Love

that gaze of mingled pain and joy, did she realise what his exile had cost him. He was the first to recover his self-possession.

"Alas! I cannot rise to receive you," he said, "you must forgive me in my helplessness. Ah! At last! At last to see the old loved faces after eighteen years of banishment and exile."

His voice, though thin and weak, had in it the old happy ring, and seemed to transport them back again across those long years to the old days of youth and light-heartedness. For a second he put his pale hand over his eyes and drew a deep sigh, then again recovering himself he turned to Liliás who had sunk down in a chair by his side.

"Always faithful, always true and trustworthy. I felt you would not fail me, Liliás."

The deep dark eyes were once more glowing into hers with something of their old fire, the mask worn for years was rent away and displayed the reality beneath. She looked back at him with her quiet, steady gaze though her heart beat tumultuously.

"You could not have chosen a more opportune moment to come back to us. No, Malcolm, I will never fail you," she said gently. "Keith was with me when your letter came, and then, for the first time, I told him all. We at once determined to come to you and do all we could for you. During the past few months I have thought of you constantly. Somehow your presence seemed to haunt me, Malcolm, and I did not know what to believe. I knew nothing. What was there to tell me if you were dead or alive?"

"I am terribly sorry to see you laid so low," broke in Keith, speaking for the first time. "Have you had the best advice?"

His heart was touched to the quick by his old friend's changed aspect, the lines of suffering on the wan face with its record of trouble and sorrow.



## The Portals of Love

The sick man smiled a trifle wistfully. The gay careless expression they remembered so well had given place to a tender melancholy which altered him strangely.

"The best, old chap, that London can supply. They say I may linger on for a few weeks at most. As I look upon you two sitting there and realise that you are true and lasting friends, all the sting has gone out of that verdict. But for leaving Celandine I should not have a regret. But tell me about yourself. Are you married or single, Keith?"

"Single at present, Malcolm, but Liliás has promised to be my wife. I have never cared for any other woman," answered Keith earnestly.

Malcolm held out his hand.

"I'm so glad," he said simply. "Sometimes the dread of your possible loneliness has haunted me, Liliás. I knew no more of you than you did of me; there have been times when my deathlike aloofness from all kindred and friends has been well-nigh insupportable. It seems so perfectly appropriate that you two should be husband and wife. I know you must be happy together. My marriage was a very happy one; my wife was everything a man could desire and far more than I had any right to expect. We met, two lonely souls, and I confided my story to her. She was an orphan and a very wealthy one. She left me and my daughter all she possessed. So sure was I of you and Keith that I have made you Celandine's trustees. I have told her of you both whom I knew in my youth, and how earnestly I hoped to find you both before I departed."

He stopped for a moment with labouring breath, and drank from a glass by his side, then continued:—

"We made our home in my wife's house in Melbourne and we travelled greatly, well-nigh all over the world excepting England; it is eighteen years since

## The Portals of Love

I crossed the Channel. Fetch me that photograph, Keith. I want to show you my daughter, and you mustn't call me Malcolm. Remember I am Robert Shirley to all who know me."

Tytler brought him a large portrait which stood on a table. It depicted a very young and lovely girl with a sweet, earnest face, yet strangely un-English. The style of doing the hair and the dress were more French than British. Liliás gave voice to that impression as she looked long and closely at the girl of whom she was to see so much in future.

"I suppose she does look rather foreign," Malcolm agreed. "She is absolutely cosmopolitan by nature and bringing up. She speaks several languages as perfectly as her own, and she is a brilliant musician and something of an artist. Then she has the education of extensive travelling."

"Is she dark or fair?" asked Keith.

Before Shirley could reply the door was thrown open and a vision of loveliness stood on the threshold, surprise in the great dark eyes and fresh parted lips. Liliás had no need to wonder who she was, an inherited something, a subtle likeness lying not so much in feature or colouring as in something deeper and less describable though no less marked, proclaimed her to be Malcolm's daughter. The eyes were the same colour, only larger and more expressive; instead of Malcolm's formerly dark brown hair hers was pale shimmering gold. In place of his olive skin hers was transparently fair. It was a girl's face, not a man's, yet she was very like what he had been.

For a second she stood in her slender height, poised like a flower on its stalk, then she advanced with perfect dignity and self-possession.

"Why! father, I never expected to find you entertaining friends," she said, looking from one to the other questioningly.



## The Portals of Love

Malcolm held out his hand to her.

"And I never expected to see you home so soon, Celandine, but it is fortunate, for here are the two dear old friends I have spoken of—Lilias Herne, who will, I trust, always be your dear friend, and Keith Tytler, her future husband."

A flash of something like relief or joy came into her face. She walked up to Lilias and held out her hand. "Ah! How glad I am that you have come," she said earnestly. "We will both welcome you most gladly, and you too," she moved across to Keith. "I seem to know you so well already, but you are not in the least like what father described."

Keith smiled down into the radiantly lovely face. "It is years since your father and I met," he said. "I was a boy when we parted. I'm a sober, middle-aged man now."

She looked scrutinisingly up at him. "You are what mother would have called 'Slap up,' that means something complimentary," she said with a smile of perfect naturalness.

"I'm glad to hear that. I like to think I should have found favour in your mother's eyes," he answered.

She nodded sagaciously. "Yes; she was a clever woman. She saw through most things, didn't she, father?"

"Indeed she did, but you have not told me how it is you are home so early," he asked.

She sat down on a low stool close to Lilias and laid her head against the couch, her long slender fingers lighting on her father's white head in a loving caress.

"Mrs. Arrol's baby was ill, and she seemed so upset and anxious that I insisted on leaving soon after dinner, besides I was also anxious to be back with you. How have you been, darling? Has Clark been looking well after you?"

## The Portals of Love

"Very well, Celandine. This happens to be one of my good nights, the breathing is much easier."

Her beautiful tender eyes were fixed upon him with earnest solicitude. She was dressed in white *crêpe de chine*, a gown of perfect simplicity, one of those masterpieces which the practised eye of Liliás told her must have cost a large sum. It looked *Rue de la Paix*, and was. Round her slender throat she wore a single string of large, perfectly matched pearls. This girl from Australia was a highly finished product of advanced civilisation. The word Colonial in its old significance was simply ridiculous when applied to her.

Putting aside her personal beauty, her manners, movements and voice betokened that extreme culture which is Nature at its best.

It flashed across Liliás as she quietly watched the father and daughter that her future responsibility would be great. A large fortune added to such physical perfection might complicate matters exceedingly.

Celandine turned and met her gaze, which she returned with almost disconcerting candour.

"I hope you will like me, Miss Herne," she said gravely, "and I will try to please you and do what you wish when father goes away—I shall be quite alone then, as I daresay he has told you."

"Yes, dear, he has told me, and I have a conviction we will get on well together, and be the greatest friends. It would be strange were it otherwise considering how dear a friend of mine your father is."

The girl's eyes never left hers, she seemed to be gravely considering matters. "Thank you," she said simply. "After having troops of friends all over the world, it seems strange to have none in London. May I come and see you?"

"I hope you will come to-morrow, Celandine, and whenever you can leave your father. To-morrow is



## The Portals of Love

Christmas Day. I am spending it quite alone. Will you come in the morning and we will have a long talk."

"I will come at eleven, that is when father tries to sleep, he has such bad nights, poor dear," she replied. "I can remain away till two o'clock, when I must return to him. Ah! Here is nurse."

The door had opened and a hospital nurse entered.

"You ought not to talk any more to-night, Mr. Shirley," she said with a quiet authority, which harmonised strangely with her pleasant young face.

Lilias and Keith rose. "Nurse is right, we ought to leave you quiet now," she said holding out her hand to the sick man. He drew it to his lips with reverend gratitude; instinctively she felt what he might not then express in words—instinctively she knew that this meeting once again in the old world was more to him than wealth or indeed aught else life could ever now offer to him. "To-morrow Celandine and I will arrange for a future visit," she said with an attempt at brightness. "Good-night and peaceful sleep to you."

He did not speak, only his eyes looking into hers were filled with a glance more potent than words as she turned and left him.

Celandine came with them out into the hall—a strange radiant creature in that quiet house of death. The butler with a footman behind him was already opening the door through which the lift could be seen waiting. Lilias put her arm round the girl and kissed her. "Till to-morrow, dear," she said cheerfully; "your father has my address. I live quite close, in Sloane Street."

"Good-night, good-night, and thank you, many thousand times," cried Celandine, as she stood waving after the descending lift.

# The Portals of Love

"Can anything be stranger than human life?" asked Lilius.

"Nothing," emphatically answered Keith.

The lift-man stared and wondered. Life to him was a very humdrum affair, passed in aerial flights from the ground to the fourth floor and back again. A life that did not admit of much variety.



## CHAPTER XXIV

THAT first sad meeting over, Liliás and Keith were often present with the dying man, and sometimes, and in the few solitary interviews she had with him, Liliás understood how all was really working out for the best in his life-drama. On one occasion, when Mrs. Arrol had taken Celandine for an afternoon's shopping, and the old friends were alone together, she broached a subject which had lain for long uppermost in her mind. It seemed to her that Macleod should be told of his son's return to London and be afforded the chance of bidding him a last farewell, but to this Malcolm raised a resolute opposition. It was not, as he explained, that he had any lingering animosity towards the father who had so willingly cast him off, but he argued with some truth that to make Macleod aware of his presence would but have the effect of tearing open half-healed wounds. Restitution was wholly impossible. Had he been in good health, and with years of life to look forward to, he could not have declared himself; now, with his swiftly fading life, it was useless to revive buried sorrows, and past miseries which time must surely have robbed of much of their sharpness and poignancy. He went on to speak of the injustice his return would be to Kenneth Macleod, the heir. Though the Fastness was entailed in the male line and could never be Celandine's, yet his tardy reappearance, even in his advanced stage of physical decay, would cause endless difficulties and could only be explained by a new and very elaborate chain of falsehood. To tell

## The Portals of Love

the truth to Kenneth would be an unnecessary cruelty. Why poison his mind against his future inheritance by disclosing that ghastly secret, which no doubt the turgid waters of the dungeon well had long since obliterated. Torquil Grant could not be brought back to life. Were the depths probed, the result would be a handful of rotting bones, but the result of that disclosure would be a dark shadow of crime flung over the inheritance of an innocent man who might in unconscious ignorance live happily there and rear upon its blighted fortunes a fresh bright edifice of gladness and new youth.

With reluctance Liliás conceded that his view of the situation was clearly the wisest. The veil would never now be drawn aside, the secret would for ever remain buried in the hearts of three people, and when Macleod followed his son, Liliás and Keith would alone remain to guard it till it went to the grave with them in turn. During that interview Malcolm impressed upon her his views for his daughter's future. Long and seriously he dwelt on the hope he cherished that she might meet with some good man who would love her, and be a careful steward of her wealth. Her mother's family history and the source from which she would draw her income were open to the eyes of all who might be interested. Her father's history was perforce very meagre. She knew him as Robert Shirley, who possessed no relations, no money and no home in Scotland, the land of his birth. She believed that, early orphaned, he knew nothing of his parents, and had, young in life, sought Australia as a possible land of fortune. Outward bound he had met her mother. Such was the simple story Celandine would tell her future husband. Such the story Liliás would tell to all who might inquire into the girl's origin. There was nothing in it that would arouse suspicion, it was too bare and without incident to arouse even curiosity. Liliás had decided to postpone her marriage



## The Portals of Love

till after Macleod's death. During their brief honeymoon she would leave Celandine with Lady Ulvadale, and it was when discussing this plan with the sick man that she learned for the first time the mystery of the money transaction between Malcolm and Grant. He told her honestly of his desire to assist Elizabeth in her stage career, of his borrowing one thousand from Torquil, five hundred of which he had lent Elizabeth and expended the remainder on a pressing debt. He dwelt earnestly upon Elizabeth's fine resistance to the temptations of her life and extolled her virtue and beauty. Her marriage to Ulvadale he looked upon as a lucky thing for her husband. He had never been in love with her himself, but he had deeply respected her. With the recollections of their friendship from childhood upwards he had done his utmost to assist her. He was glad to think of his daughter going home to Elizabeth Ulvadale, going to that land where he had first seen the light, and where lay the vast gloomy old pile that was his, yet lost to him forever on earth. During those few quiet interviews the future was thoroughly discussed, Lilius feeling that in the short time at their disposal it was necessary to face facts and make clear any desire that Malcolm wished to see carried out on his child's behalf.

She walked home that dark winter afternoon feeling that now, whenever the time came—and it could not be far distant—she was prepared to meet her old lover's death with a quiet courage, and to assume the responsibilities he laid upon her with a calm hopefulness. The girl was so altogether lovable that it was quite impossible to feel any personal objection to taking her in charge, but her beauty and wealth would render her a certain responsibility, though she possessed an intellect which was naturally brilliant, and which had been polished and cultivated by a splendid education and a very varied experience of the world's great

## The Portals of Love

centres of art and literature. A clear transparent honesty of speech and sincerity of heart had displayed itself from the first. She had at once taken up a distinct line with her new friend. She had told Liliás what she wanted, and had then inquired if there were any objections to offer to her desires. In the certainty of her father's approaching death, they had entered freely into plans for the future, and both she and Malcolm had urged the advisability of buying a good west-end mansion where the newly-wedded pair and their young charge could settle down together until Celandine herself married and chaperonage was thereby rendered unnecessary. It was upon those and similar matters that Liliás still pondered as she inserted her key in the lock and opened the door of her flat, closing it mechanically behind her. Before she had taken a couple of steps her brown study was broken in on by voices and involuntarily she stopped abruptly and listened. A man and a woman were talking in the drawing-room. She could not distinguish words, but in a second came the low cooing sound she identified with Celandine's laugh. Curiosity and annoyance mingled in her feelings. She knew the man could not be Keith, and for the moment she could recollect no male acquaintance who was upon sufficiently intimate terms to walk in and await her arrival. She moved forward, and with a little frown of perplexity threw open her drawing-room door. Astonishment, mingled with a swift thrill of uneasiness, arrested her on the threshold.

Before the little tea-table sat Celandine in the act of filling a cup, and by her side, leaning forward in deep preoccupation, sat Kenneth Macleod. The sight of him sitting there alone with the girl instantly sent a cold shiver through her. She forgot his utter ignorance of Celandine's real identity. Her heart beat fast. Would he recognise her? She was his cousin; family likenesses are often so marked—the Macleod type



## The Portals of Love

especially so—her resemblance to Malcolm must surely strike him. Then the long blank of eighteen years flashed back on her and she impatiently shook off her momentary panic. As they both rose, each with a slight touch of embarrassment, she remembered the difference of sex, and without a clue to name to rekindle a long gone memory how unlikely she told herself that any dormant suspicion should be roused.

"Dear Liliias, I know you will forgive me for this seeming impertinence," the girl exclaimed, kissing her warmly, "but Mary assured me you were to be in to tea and insisted on our having some at once, and Mr. Macleod said he must wait to see you, and we have made friends, as you see."

She poured out the words in a curious breathless volubility, her eyes bright with an expression Liliias had not observed in them before.

"Yes, I see you have made friends," she replied soberly, not understanding Celandine's exuberance and turning to Kenneth—"I'm very glad you did wait to see me. I should indeed have been sorry to miss you."

Macleod was standing up, his eyes riveted on Celandine's glowing face. The whole attitude of his tall, fine form suggested interested scrutiny. The dark eyes were filled with amusement, the face soft and gentle as he shook hands with his hostess.

"I'm so glad you're not disposed to look upon my presence as an impertinent intrusion," he said with his charming courtesy; "your maid, Mary, said she expected you every minute and ushered me straight-way into the presence of Miss Shirley, who, when I explained that I was your cousin, took me at once into her good graces. I've had the most delightful half hour imaginable and have learned many things."

He shot a glance at Celandine which clearly betrayed how far the friendship had progressed in so short a time.

## The Portals of Love

Again Liliás felt a momentary uneasiness, and a desire for time to adjust her mental balance. The low ripple, so seldom now heard from the girl's lips, rang through the room.

"I never in all my life met any one so woefully ignorant," she exclaimed; "would you believe it, Liliás, when your cousin heard I was an Australian he wouldn't believe it, because he thought all Australian women were called 'Gins' and wore blankets for clothes! I've just been telling him that my island is twenty-four times bigger than Great Britain and Ireland, and what magnificent towns we have, and how really highly civilised we are in every respect."

Liliás glanced at him and shook her head, as she met his dancing eyes. "Oh, you humbug!" she said as she poured herself out some tea.

"The fact is, you'll have to travel, Mr. Macleod," the girl went on as she perched her graceful form on the arm of a chair, and looked across at him with a challenge in her eyes.

"If all Australian ladies are like you, I shall make no difficulties about going there at the earliest possible opportunity," he replied audaciously, sitting down again.

"Well, they aren't all exactly like me, for I've travelled all over the world, and that's made me cosmopolitan," she replied.

"I hardly expected such felicity as to find you exactly matched. Creation sometimes takes great trouble over some specially favoured mortal, and the result is a Miss Shirley," he answered.

Liliás looked from one to the other with a smile on her lips, but something like consternation in her heart. What on earth did this sudden intimacy betoken? The grave man of forty-five who had rather the reputation of avoiding women was now sitting in open absorption in this girl whom he had only known for half an hour. What if——! Her thoughts had run



## The Portals of Love

riot, she pulled herself up with a sharp sigh. Yet what poetic justice it would be to see Celandine mistress of the Fastness—the wild thought brought a chain of musings in its wake. She sat immersed in this new wave of possibilities and let the light froth of those two voices float by her, as they thrust and parried in a swift interchange of pleasantries. They were too engrossed in each other to notice her grave, rapt face, expressive of the chords of memory and emotion that vibrated within her. Suddenly Celandine stood up as if a sudden thought had struck her. A wave of colour flooded the transparent skin and the dancing eyes grew suddenly grave. “Oh! I must go home! How can I have been so thoughtless?” she cried; “it is just six o’clock and father will wonder what has become of me.” A sudden mist clouded her eyes, the light fell on the sparkle of a suppressed tear. Kenneth was instantly and utterly grave, he moved towards her and put her sables round her shoulders, whilst Liliás moved to the bell.

“You must have a hansom, dear; your father will be all right. I had only just left him when I came in, he was going to try to sleep. Come round in the morning and let me know how he is——”

“Yes, indeed I will, dear Liliás, and thank you a thousand times,” answered the girl. “Good-bye, Mr. Macleod——”

“I will see you safely into your hansom,” he answered as he held open the door.

“Thank you a thousand times”—Liliás echoed the words as she stirred the fire and sat down to wait for her cousin’s return. What had Celandine thanked her so warmly for? Was there any danger to be apprehended in the meeting of those two, who seemed so swiftly to form a friendship? She felt she required time and quiet to think out this new situation so suddenly thrust upon her.

## The Portals of Love

"Well!" she exclaimed interrogatively as Kenneth re-entered, and closed the door behind him.

He came forward to the fire and stood up before it, looking down on her—his face was stamped with a reminiscence of pleasure, the eyes and mouth still smiling.

"I saw her safely into the hansom," he exclaimed, "and told the cabby to drive steady! Who on earth is she, Liliass?"

His manner had undergone a swift change. He leant forward, his face suddenly grave and intensely earnest. His words gave her a certain shock, and she met his eyes waveringly.

"You seem to be extraordinarily interested in her," she said to gain time.

He drew himself together again with a conscious little laugh, and looked away across the room.

"I think she's the most beautiful person I've ever seen," he said, in half-dreamy recollection.

Liliass laughed outright. "That is certainly a sufficient reason for your curiosity," she exclaimed. "I agree she is perfectly lovely, and as charming and good as she is beautiful."

He was looking again at her, his whole form alert and expectant.

"I'm sure of it. What a pure child of Nature she is to be sure. No rot about her," he burst out. "What a relief to meet a girl who doesn't behave as if every moment she was afraid you'd kiss her, though it happens to be the last thing you desire, or else throws herself headlong into your arms before you've said, how are you? Perfectly delightful, perfectly delightful! Well! who is she, Liliass? Don't keep me dangling on the hook any longer."

"She is an only child and was born in Melbourne," replied Liliass quietly. "Her father—Shirley—is Scotch, no one in particular; her mother was Australian—she



## The Portals of Love

died five years ago. I had known Shirley years ago, and when he arrived in London he beat up his old acquaintances, me amongst the number. I don't know if Celandine told you that he is dying."

"Celandine? Is that her name? What a curious and pretty one. I never heard it before."

"It is the name of a small yellow wild flower which blooms early in spring. Certainly it is an uncommon name," answered Liliás.

"Yes, she told me about her father," went on Kenneth. "I asked her just before she got into the cab if I might call, and she said that at present she could receive no one, her father being so ill, but she added she hoped to meet me here again, and by Jove, I believe she meant it."

Liliás stared at him in mingled surprise and amusement. She didn't know the grave diplomat in this new disguise—had the girl bewitched him?

He suddenly looked down on her and smiled broadly. "I believe you think I'm an awful ass, Liliás?"

She laughed outright. "On the contrary," she assured him. "I'm so relieved to find you are *au fond* so human as to admire a pretty woman."

"Oh! come," he exclaimed. "I really must expostulate. You know perfectly well I always admired you."

"So you said," she answered drily.

"And I've always meant it," he insisted. "I can quite understand Keith's feelings, and, as I've told him, he's an uncommonly lucky beggar. Don't you think it's time I also thought of settling down? You know I'm getting on."

"You are," she admitted candidly. "So am I."

"Oh! You are the sort of woman time makes little or no impression upon," he exclaimed seriously. "You'll always be handsome, but the man who loves you does not love you for looks alone! You've got

## The Portals of Love

that *je ne sais quoi* we've never got hold of a name for, and therefore dub magnetism. A magnetic influence that can't help being attractive; but now, with me the case is different. I've got to rely on my personal exertions."

"Which you have not yet troubled to put forth," she said quietly.

He laughed again a trifle consciously. "I never was what is called a flirt, Liliás. I'm too sincere. If I don't fancy a woman, I can't, for the life of me, pretend I do; but when I do really like a woman, well! I'm as keen as mustard. I like Celandine Shirley. Celandine Shirley! It sounds antipodean, doesn't it?"

"I can assure you she is a very highly finished product," remarked Liliás, looking up at him. "She speaks French, German and Spanish as well as English. She plays brilliantly and paints quite curiously well. Don't, whatever you do, classify her with the ignorant Englishman's definition of a Colonial. There is nothing so childishly false and ignorant as the Anglicised conception of our dependencies."

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "your right. Of course I was only chaffing her about my ignorance. I've travelled too much myself not to know better. I've travelled so much, Liliás, that I sometimes think I've done enough. The events of the last few years have changed my future to a great extent. As you know, poor Roddie's death made all the difference to me. Ah! what a strange turn over. First Malcolm goes off. By the way, he died in Melbourne——" He paused, pulled up short by the recollection, and looked down at her with dark serious eyes.

"Melbourne is a very big city," she remarked quietly, realising his chain of thought.

"Oh! yes, of course, it is, and he died almost immediately he landed, didn't he?" Kenneth exclaimed,



## The Portals of Love

once more relapsing into dream retrospection as he stared out over the room. "Then came Roderick's tragic end, and now they tell me—I only heard this morning from Ulvadale—that Uncle John is in a very bad way. Old Dr. Bright can't do anything to rouse him. I may be master of the Fastness any day, Liliias."

Her face had paled with memory. She stooped over the fire and stirred the smouldering embers. "Yes, you may own the Fastness any day," she agreed.

He took out a cigarette and asked her permission to smoke, whilst for a few moments they both maintained the silence of deep thought.

"I ought to marry, Liliias. Don't you think so?" he inquired at last, and his face was dark with earnestness.

"Certainly," she replied, rousing herself out of her abstraction, "for every reason. The Fastness will need a mistress, and your character, like that of all others, requires it."

"You believe marriage to be a good thing for character?"

"The best discipline, Kenneth, that there is. It checks selfishness and develops unselfishness. It is an enormous stimulant to all the finer virtues and enlarges the outlook on life as nothing else does. For one reason alone, the thrusting of the self out of absorption in self, it is invaluable."

"I'm glad to hear your views upon the subject," he said thoughtfully. "I'm luckily in a position to marry for love. I don't want money with my wife. Well! now I must be going. I've bored you too long as it is. I'm going to be in town for some weeks, we must meet again shortly. Have you and Keith fixed up your wedding day yet?"

"No," she answered constrainedly. "There is no

# The Portals of Love

particular hurry. Come in again and see me whenever you're in my neighbourhood."

They parted cordially and Liliás went back to her fire. She had much to think over. Absurd as it might appear that a man of Kenneth's type should fall headlong in love with a girl at first sight, the bare possibilities of such being the case had to be reckoned with. Such cases of impulse had been known to occur before, and certainly might occur again. Malcolm would hear from his daughter whom she had met that afternoon, and would probably conclude that Kenneth had been the particular cousin in question, even if Celandine had dropped from her memory the Christian name she had heard Liliás call him by. Something told her that the meeting of to-day would lead to others, and as she went to her room to dress for dinner she congratulated herself upon that sudden instinct which had prompted her to conceal from him the fact of Celandine's wealth and future prospects.



## CHAPTER XXV

THERE is still in this material and prosy world a trace left of the old enthusiastic love dramas of ancient history. With all our concentration upon the prose of life and our cheap sarcasms and witticisms against the poetry, the sentiment lingers still, and in many cases survives, in all its old intensity and purity. Kenneth Macleod acknowledged frankly to himself that a most unexpected thing had befallen him. He had fallen prone in love at first sight with a girl of whom he had never before heard, and of whom he knew nothing beyond the little that Liliás had told him.

Thinking the matter over until early morning hours, and again on opening his eyes upon his valet and his early tea, he could perceive no earthly reason why this surpassing event should in any way perturb him. Ought he not rather to welcome it as the kindest gift the gods could bestow? He desired to marry, and the only obstacle to his doing so was his difficulty in finding the woman he could love. Lo and behold! here she was, cast down as it were from heaven before his worshipping eyes, and the divine afflatus had been implanted in him from the first instant he had beheld her.

All the circumstances seemed at the moment propitious. So sweet and gracious a lady was rare to find in the society of rapid raciness into which he had always been thrown. Thoroughbred absolutely summed her up, from one point of view. Then her rare delicate beauty, English, yet un-English, with just

## The Portals of Love

that indescribable touch of cosmopolitanism which adds such a piquancy to a pretty woman and singles her out from her fellows as a rarified edition of her sex. The fact that Liliás had taken her under her wing vouched for her immaculate respectability. The Honourable Liliás Herne was by way of being something of a Bohemian, but she always drew a sharp line where her personal feelings and sensations clashed with a too broad interpretation of what is morality. Liliás, as Kenneth knew well, drew no narrow latitude, yet had very decided and sensible views upon the subject. When an acquaintance was found lacking on the side of virtue she never judged or condemned, but she resolutely dropped her on the simple plea of incompatibility of temper. Shirley must be a gentleman, or he would not hold the position of Miss Herne's old acquaintance. Poor Shirley, and he was dying! No chance of seeing him evidently, thought Kenneth, puffing contentedly at his first cigarette. After his death the girl would probably go back to Australia where she most likely had relations. Not if he could help it, he decided abruptly. If he meant to win her there was no time to be lost, and as if every second was of consequence, he leapt out of bed and began to shave.

He had no illusions as to his own feelings, but very serious misgivings, not to say grave doubts about hers. He possessed no vanity beyond a scrupulous cleanliness, and the carried-out intention of always being well dressed; but he scanned his face for the first time with a keen observation and a disheartening trepidation. He looked his forty-five years—no doubt as to that. His thick hair was undisguisedly powdered with grey—he decided to stroll round to Douglas's and have it cut at once; there were lines round the fine dark eyes. The heavy moustache maintained its dark brown, and his teeth were as sound and even as



## The Portals of Love

of yore. Obesity had not begun to hint at rotundity, probably never would—fat wasn't in the family, and his six feet two was as slim and well proportioned as at twenty. The regularity of his features was certainly another asset. After all he had something remaining to his credit, putting aside his undoubted capacity to maintain a wife in comfort on three thousand a year and the Fastness one day to be added to his present possessions.

He was an active man by nature, more so than ever now with the power of love to prick the sides of his intent, and at an unusually early hour, even for him, he entered the Bachelors' Club as the clocks were striking eleven. He picked up a paper and stationed himself at a window facing Piccadilly. He remembered the words of Lilius, "Come in to-morrow morning and tell me how your father is". He remembered Celandine's reply, "Indeed I will!" It was on the cards that she might drive down to Sloane Street, but the heavens disclosed an almost spring-like blue. A struggling pale sun lit up the wintry boughs of St. James's Park, and the air had a warm caress which made the winter temperature of the Club somewhat oppressive to all but its elderly and infirm members—weather which would surely tempt the young and vigorous to sally forth on foot for morning exercise. For not one second did Kenneth's keen scrutiny waver from the stream of pedestrians moving up and down the fairly dry broad pavement. He was fully prepared to sit there till two o'clock, at which hour he might safely give up his hopes for the morning at least. It seemed so likely that she would walk the short distance from Park Lane to Sloane Street that his hopes ran high as he patiently sat entrenched by a newspaper on his left side, whilst he turned his face to the right full on Piccadilly.

Half-past eleven had just struck when his heart

## The Portals of Love

gave a great leap, and in a second he had thrown down the paper and dashed to the door. In a couple of seconds more he found himself on the Club steps. It is wonderful how love can reduce the compass of so gigantic a City as London ; it can really be made into a very small place by the use of a little perspicacity. By what Kenneth gratefully recognised as a kindly intervention of Providence, a policeman was permitting the traffic down Hamilton Place to pass through to Piccadilly. A little group of persons stood on the pavement waiting for a gap in the moving stream of 'buses, motors and carts. Amongst them, conspicuous in her tall slenderness and bright fairness, stood Celandine Shirley attended by a middle-aged maid.

Kenneth ducked under the nose of the horse passing immediately in front of the Club steps, and gained the other side of the street somewhat higher up. There he looked round. She was crossing at last. He timed himself accurately, and faced her as she gained the pavement. To all appearances he was leisurely strolling towards the Club, not away from it. He raised his hat and held out his hand, and was rewarded by a flash of recognition in the dark eyes, and a vivid colour mantling the delicate cheeks.

"Miss Shirley! What a charming surprise to meet you here!" he exclaimed mendaciously. "Another second and the Club would have swallowed me up, and hidden you from my vision."

He looked down on the sunlit image of youth, on the frankly smiling mouth and blushing face, and met her upward gaze. There was a welcome, but there was mischief also in those liquid depths.

"Don't you often meet people you know in Piccadilly?" she asked innocently. "It seems to me such a likely place for friends to forgather; and the men who sit in the Club windows must have such an amusing time, I often think."



## The Portals of Love

For a second he believed she had found him out in his innocent deception, but the tranquil unconsciousness of her face once more disarmed him—surely he had been too quick, even should her glance have strayed towards the window. He smiled down at her with renewed confidence.

"Clubs are capital institutions for the unemployed, Miss Shirley. They keep them out of the streets and leaves more room for the busy."

She laughed.

"After Melbourne, London, at least the London I have seen here in the West, is a very idle community. We have no leisured classes out there."

"Well! we've lots here; but they are the busiest of all, I can assure you," he answered. "But may I not turn and walk with you for a little way? Are you by any chance going down to see Liliás, for I was thinking of looking in on her for a few moments."

She moved on by his side with neither assent nor dissent, and the maid fell back behind them. She saw through his little ruse perfectly, but it pleased as well as amused her.

"I am going straight there," she said. "My poor father has had a bad night and wished to see Liliás this afternoon. They are old friends, as perhaps you know, and when father is gone I am to make my future home with Liliás and her husband."

For a moment he was speechless from surprise. He looked down on the pure, flower-like face from which all the gaiety had fled. He hardly knew what to reply. It flashed across him at once that the girl was going to be left practically penniless and Liliás was coming to her aid. It was just like his cousin, just the sort of thing she would do. He rather welcomed the idea of Celandine's poverty. Then the tact which formed so large an asset in his profession asserted itself.

## The Portals of Love

"I am most deeply sorry to realise how ill your father is, Miss Shirley. It is intensely sad that your young life should so early be overshadowed by so great a sorrow."

His deep grave voice vibrating with genuine feeling touched the sensitive chords of her own heart. She raised her eyes, dim with tears to his, but her voice was firm and controlled as she answered :—

"I do not look upon it in that light. I am old enough to bear sorrow—I shall be eighteen in March ; but father is all I have left in the world, and after he leaves me I shall only have memories left to me. However, I am grateful the shock has not come suddenly. I have been given time to accustom myself to my future solitude and to gain the great mitigation of your cousin's friendship. I feel now I shall not be utterly alone."

In her voice was no tinge of self-pity, only a deep earnestness ; he wondered at and admired her fortitude and repression. He suspected the truth that it had only been arrived at after hard fighting against the apparent cruelty of fate. In the face of the coming irreparable calamity she maintained a sweet patience, evidently the result of a fought-out battle with sorrow and despair.

"So far as friendship goes you will have it in its fullest, richest perfection. Liliás is a woman in a thousand," he exclaimed earnestly. "A fine sterling character. Keith also you may thoroughly depend upon. Perhaps, Miss Shirley, you may be persuaded to extend your friendship to me. As the cousin of Liliás, may I claim a small share in making your life less sad ? May I offer you my willing service in every possible way it may seem good to you to employ me ?"

"You are very kind," she answered simply. "I will gladly take you at your word, because I feel convinced your offer is made in all sincerity."



## The Portals of Love

"I am absolutely sincere. I would give a great deal to serve you, more than you can conceive possible after so short a time as we have known each other," he exclaimed impressively.

She did not seem astonished either at the words or the infinitely deeper meaning he threw into them, as he glanced down with a twinge of anxiety over his own rash impulse, fearing to startle her with his abruptness. He could detect no change in her expression, which was one of sad sweet composure. For a second he wondered if that calmness arose from surfeit of adulation, or childlike innocence of what his words really inferred. He could not decide. A slight smile suddenly curved her lips and she glanced up at him in brighter vein.

"I don't feel somehow as if we were new acquaintances. I told father last night that I felt as if I had met an old friend whom I had not seen for years, but whom I once knew intimately."

"And what did he say?" inquired Kenneth.

She gave a little low laugh, almost of embarrassment.

"I don't know if you will understand," she said, her colour suddenly deepening. "He put it down to the belief he adopted from mother, a belief she firmly held. It is called reincarnation. We people of the newer, younger worlds hold it very generally—it means that you and I have lived and met before, probably on this very planet, and our meeting again now is but the renewal of some old, long ago friendship. Mother always believed that she and father had met before, and that a good angel had brought them once more together. Do you understand anything of what I mean?"

"I understand everything. We English are not so out of touch with modern thought as perhaps you suppose," he answered. "Many of us now hold that belief as the only logical explanation of the otherwise

## The Portals of Love

unanswerable problems of life. I myself amongst the number have long since adopted reincarnation as not only possible but highly probable. As in this we are in perfect accord, and as I am absolutely certain the kindest angel in heaven has permitted me once more to meet you, let us act upon the supposition that we are reunited old friends. You can't think what pleasure it has given me to see you again, Miss Shirley."

She took his words with perfect seriousness. The faint smile still hovered about her mouth. "I am glad to have again met you," she said quietly. "I expect I always liked you."

Though he did not attach much weight to the words, they caused him intense elation. He wished Sloane Street had been farther off, they had reached it already, and were nearing Miss Herne's door.

"I am going to ask Lilius and Keith to dine with me quietly at the Club one night soon," he said gently. "London is still very empty, and we will probably have the dining-room almost to ourselves. Do you think your father would spare you for an hour or so—you know the Bachelors' Club, just a few steps from your own door."

For a minute he awaited her answer in the deepest trepidation, then it came and brought to him a thrill of joy.

"Yes! I should like to come. Father insists on my going out to quiet dinners, and even to theatres. I tried not to at first, but I found out that my staying at home made him miserable. It worried him so much that I gave in. So the hours when I may not be with him I give to the few friends I possess."

"Your father must be a very sensible and unselfish man," he said, feeling deeply what he said, not only on his own account but because of the manifest love and wisdom displayed. "Let us go in and settle it up with Lilius. Shall we say to-morrow if she can come?"



## The Portals of Love

"To-morrow will do perfectly," she replied. "I shall love to come."

Lilias was finishing a letter as the pair entered. She was dressed for walking and looked up with a bright welcome, but without much surprise. Somehow it was almost what she had expected. During the long watches of an early morning wakefulness there had come to her an instinctive feeling that the hand of power, greater by far than that wielded by any on earth, was moulding their several destinies. The feelings of alarm with which she had viewed that first meeting had given place to a calm confidence in a Divine guidance, which must be trusted to bring all things to pass as Heaven's will ordained.

Celandine delivered her father's message, that he hoped to see Lilias that afternoon. She knew at once what it meant. He had heard from his daughter of her meeting with Kenneth, and before committing herself to the dinner and theatre plan she decided to see Malcolm first, promising to send Kenneth her reply that evening after finding out if Keith was disengaged.

"And now let us go to the Park," said Kenneth, in the most masterful manner possible. "I can't allow you two to waste this fine morning indoors."

Lilias smiled her quiet smile. "We had not the smallest intention of wasting it indoors," she remarked briefly. She had much shopping to do in view of her approaching marriage. She said nothing of that, but turned to Celandine. "I suppose you have brought Saunders with you. Wouldn't it be better to send her home? You won't need her this morning. We will see you safe back to Park Lane."

The girl jumped up. "Of course, I forgot her very existence," she exclaimed, with a rather conscious look. "I'll run into the kitchen and tell her, and she can give father your message, that you will be with him at

## The Portals of Love

four this afternoon. The thought of seeing you will help to cheer him up."

She ran off without another word and Liliás turned round and shook her head gravely at the smiling face of Kenneth Macleod.

"Oh! Kenneth, what am I to say to all this?" she asked plaintively.

There was nothing of the penitent about him as he leaned with folded arms against a cabinet, his handsome face wreathed in smiles, his bright eyes looking down on her perturbed countenance with triumph sparkling in their dark depths.

"What are you to say?" he answered deliberately, "that you mean to help me for all you are worth, Liliás. I mean to marry Celandine Shirley if it be humanly possible. What can you have to say against it?"

She shook her head a trifle impatiently.

"Nothing, Kenneth, nothing; but you forget—she has a father. Has it yet occurred to you to question what Robert Shirley will say?"

He leaned suddenly forward, one hand on her shoulder, forcing her to face him.

"That's what you are going to find out this very afternoon, Liliás. Will you be my emissary? Will you ask him to give me permission to woo his daughter? Will you speak up for me, say something in my favour? I cannot gain access to him myself, will you be my substitute, Liliás? I can't help thinking that a dying man will welcome, or at least listen to a suggestion which will settle the future of his only child. It must be a terrible anxiety to him to leave her alone in the world. He will listen to you, his old friend, and am I not your cousin? You don't know anything very deadly to bring up against me, do you, Liliás? I'd make a very good husband, and I'm simply madly in love with her. Will you do this inestimable service for me, Liliás?"



## The Portals of Love

"You really mean this seriously?" Her dark eyes held his with their deep earnestness, there was a quiver of anxiety in her vibrating voice.

"Before God I mean every word I say," he replied, with profound emphasis.

"Then, Kenneth, I will do what you ask," she answered simply.

For a second he clasped her hand in a wordless gratitude, and the two pairs of eyes met and registered a vow of trust and mutual confidence, then he turned aside as a light footfall sounded without.

## CHAPTER XXVI

ROBERT SHIRLEY had been laid to rest. The short but troubled life was over, passing away at last in peace and perfect confidence in the ultimate happiness and safety of that one link which bound him to earth—his daughter. During the fortnight through which he lingered on, Liliás had been his constant companion, having removed herself to the flat in Park Lane in order to be absolutely at his service. He had accepted the possibility of Celandine's becoming Kenneth's wife, not only with pleasure but enthusiasm. His love for the old home, the patrimony which he had so rashly forfeited, was undiminished. The roots of his very being seemed deep struck in his native soil. Ever dwelling with him had been the memory of that inheritance which lawfully should be his in the future, yet which he was powerless to claim. He might not be master of the old roof tree, the home of many generations of his kindred, but his daughter might still reign as mistress of the ancient fortress by the sea, and her children might yet inherit its broad acres of forest, mountain and moors.

Even as Liliás had done he fancied he saw a Divine dispensation in the meeting of those two. It appeared to him as the hand of God writing on the wall, and the words he deciphered were the great forgiveness. The idea enthralled and possessed him powerfully from the very first, and so invaded his entire being that not for a moment did he doubt his daughter's acceptance of Kenneth Macleod.



## The Portals of Love<sup>i</sup>

He sent his cousin, the cousin with whom he dared not claim kinship, a touching message through Liliás. With his own trembling hand he wrote the words which gave full permission to Macleod to pursue his determination to win Celandine.

"Though I am on the brink of the grave, and it is denied that on earth we shall ever meet, Liliás has spoken to me on your behalf. From what she tells me I give you permission to win my girl for your wife, and with my dying breath I commend you both to Almighty God, believing that your meeting is the work of His hand, and that I may rely with perfect confidence on His guardianship of the child who is so dear to me." Those lines he signed for the last time with the name of "Robert Shirley".

It was with an excitement and emotion, almost more than in his dying state he could bear, that he received in the course of a few hours Kenneth's grateful reply. It was a letter couched in a dignified humility which touched him keenly. Kenneth spoke of his love with a frank openness, and an earnest assurance that should he succeed in the desire of his life he should consecrate his future in a strenuous endeavour to render Celandine happy. He ended with a perfectly frank and business-like exposition of his financial prosperity, in which he proved his ability to support a wife as a lady of position in the land. With a modest delicacy he stated the fact that he was his uncle's successor and heir to the Fastness.

The dying man let the letter drop from his nerveless grasp, and tears stood in his eyes, whilst a profound gratitude welled in his heart. The bitterness of the past was wiped out, the certainty of his loss was merged in the conviction that his daughter would after all succeed him. It took all sting from death and robbed the grave of its victory. He felt he could ask of Heaven no better fate for her.

## The Portals of Love

During the intervening days Keith spent long hours with him. His unchanged friendship with Kenneth, which had existed for twenty-four years, forming a constant theme of conversation between them. As man to man he was enabled to give the conviction of perfect tranquillity to Malcolm's heart. For the last eighteen years, since his supposed death, Kenneth, as heir-presumptive to the Fastness, had been much more *en evidence* than formerly. He and Tytler had seen a great deal of one another, and the diplomat's life was in a manner an open book which all might read—the life of an honourable gentleman, a favourite with all who knew him, and an excellent *parti* from both a moral and social point of view. To Keith he had stated his intention of not actually proposing to the girl till her father was laid in the grave, and Malcolm recognised the delicacy of his decision when Tytler gently told him of this. By Robert Shirley's desire the girl was encouraged to see as much as possible of her lover. He was admitted to the house in a perfectly natural manner, and often lying quivering on his bed, in the throes of a great exhaustion, Malcolm would strain his ears to listen to the low, grave tones of his cousin as he passed through the hall in going or coming. To Keith and Liliass, the two partakers of the secret of Shirley's identity, it seemed the strangest and most unreal situation. As they stood beside the death-bed and realised that the cousin, the man who all unconsciously was so soon to supplant the real heir as master of the Fastness, was within earshot, yet totally unaware of the true identity of the man whose house he stood in, seemed the wildest piece of fiction imagination could conceive. No stirring of memory had taken place in Kenneth's brain; the girl he loved was a beautiful stranger from the other side of the globe, a wholly new and unexpected creation of loveliness, which had, by the grace of God,



## The Portals of Love

crossed his path and whom he hoped to make his wife. Nothing now was ever likely to arise which would disclose to him his relationship to the woman he loved. The hearts that knew would live and die with locked lips, and the shadow of crime which flung its pall over the Fastness would never be revealed to blight the joy and dim the happiness of those who perforce must come after.

One last request did Malcolm make to Lilius Herne. It was a concession which he felt forced to make, in view of the new issues which he saw with joy evolving about his death-bed—that joy he now desired to pass on to another. He asked Lilius on the day of his burial to write to his father and tell him all. Macleod of the Fastness, in his own stricken years, was to be given the secret of his granddaughter's existence, and the fact of her probable marriage with the heir was to be made known to him. For his own honour it was a secret he would jealously guard; for the honour of his house it was a secret which, whilst it nourished the dryness and barrenness of his own heart, he would disclose to no one—a secret he would carry with him to the grave.

“Let him if possible feast his eyes but once on her beauty, in the full knowledge that she is the daughter of his dead son, and he will die at peace with God and man,” Malcolm had said. “It will bring to his heart the knowledge that it has brought to mine, that God is slower to anger than man, and that His full and plenteous pity and forgiveness is for all who humbly seek it. Give him my dear love and goodwill, and tell him I die with kindness towards him in my heart. For our early differences I have neither bitterness nor memory; by the mercy and love of God I have been shown how to feel the same for others. Later on, you and Keith will be going to Ulvadale; seek an opportunity to see my father and talk freely to him. Let

## The Portals of Love

there be no shadow between you at the last, and prove to him in your love for your husband that the Almighty has brought forth good out of evil and fashioned our rash purposes to His own greater design and glory."

Though Kenneth pursued his wooing enthusiastically he contrived to infuse a considerable amount of discretion into his ardour. The words which he might have spoken, and which would have set all his doubts at rest had not yet been uttered. He felt strongly that on the eve of her father's death it would be unseemly to obtrude his own hopes and desires upon her, and he studiously avoided an actual avowal, though his intentions were transparently clear and unmistakable. He surrounded her in an atmosphere of such delicate love that the most shrinking heart could not have turned aside from its tender ministrations. He let her see the strong side of his character, the protective, the helpful and foreseeing—anticipating the duties and unpleasant little tasks inseparable from extreme illness and death. He so arranged that when they obtruded themselves upon her they should already be shouldered by himself.

But two nights before he passed away Malcolm was alone with his daughter and broached for the first time the subject lying so near his heart. He told her candidly that Macleod had asked for his permission to woo her, and that he had given his consent. All that now remained was to ascertain the true state of her feelings towards the man who desired to be her husband. She said but little, the moment was fraught with too much bitterness. She knew that her lover's presence had helped her to bear the last sad weeks, but standing as she was by the death-bed of a dearly loved father it was impossible to throw herself into the bright glad state of consciousness her love for Kenneth would under other circumstances have unfolded her in. "I cannot talk or think of any other



## The Portals of Love

love but one—my love for you,” she said brokenly; “but if it will be any comfort to you, dear father, if under brighter, happier auspices Kenneth Macleod asks me to be his wife, I shall say yes without hesitation.”

So it came about that the exile passed peacefully away in the deep thankfulness that succeeds the consummation of a great desire. It had been a wild windy morning, a typical February day, in which he had been laid away to rest followed by a little band of three mourners, Kenneth Macleod, Keith Tytler and the lawyer, Mr. Arrol. Only one of those three knew the real name and identity of the dead man; and again, as he stood above the grave and heard the earth rattle down upon the coffin lid, Keith felt that strange unreality, as if the last weeks had been a plunge into a strange and impossible dream. He glanced across at the unemotional face of Kenneth Macleod, as he stood dreamily gazing down at the trodden grass beneath his feet. How little he knew that he was really playing the part of chief mourner at the burial of his own first cousin, that until four days ago two lives had really stood betwixt him and his future inheritance. The heir of the Fastness had not died, as he had believed—only four days ago he had still been a living, breathing man, standing next his father in succession. The absolute impotence of the human mind to seize upon any facts not brought immediately under its notice struck Keith most poignantly at that moment. Quite irrationally he told himself that somehow Kenneth ought to have known, that his serene unconsciousness was absolutely incredible. Yet again, as they turned away side by side after a mute farewell to the dead, there came to Keith Tytler some faint conception, some dim understanding of the majestic and farseeing mercy and magnanimity of God—the imminence of the Deity was disclosed

## The Portals of Love

to him. In that lingering flash he understood how not a sparrow may fall to the ground without the cognisance of that vast all-embracing consciousness, to which the infinitely small and the infinitely great are as one. For the first time he saw and clearly followed the tracings of Divine intervention in the little affairs of man. The blindness of Kenneth was a Divine mercy which would shield his wife and himself from the discovery of a ghastly tragedy, for which they were in nowise to blame. In place of shrinking with repellent horror from their future home as the place of murder, the secret grave of a rotting, unshriven corpse, they would live there in happy unconsciousness, and brighten the lives of all around them by their own bright example. Yes! the high Gods had intervened and had written *Finis* over that unholy act. And Malcolm had been shielded, his memory not execrated but held in kindly remembrance. The powers which watch over humanity had restored to him at last the knowledge that though he was for ever shut out, his own flesh and blood would follow after and link the unbroken line of the Macleods of the Fastness with future generations to come.

Kenneth had been too constantly of late with Celandine to feel any hesitation about going to see her on the eve of that sad day, indeed he felt that at this time more than any other could he be of use as a comforter. About five o'clock he rang the bell and was ushered at once into the drawing-room. He found her writing a letter, and she rose and came forward with perfect composure, even there was a smile of welcome on the sad lips. There were no traces of tears on the pale face; grief had been given its way so long that its outward manifestations had expended themselves.

He looked down on the slender black-robed figure with eyes in which love shone undisguised.

"How good you were to send me all those flowers,



## The Portals of Love

the bright spring flowers I love," she said. "It was like you to think that to-day above all other days I needed brighter surroundings; and my own name flower, the Celandine, where did you find it?"

His heart was too full for speech, for answer he drew her to him and folded her close in his arms.

"The Celandine is the flower I love best, and, God willing, I will always worship her in my heart," he whispered. He bent his head above her upraised face and their lips met. "It is what your father wished, Celandine, that we should be husband and wife," he said at last, as he drew her down beside him on the sofa.

She looked at him, her soft eyes dimmed by unshed tears. "He knew that it was what I wished," she said. "I told him so."

He kept her hand in his, the self-restraint of a great solemnity was upon him. There would be time enough in future, when the shadow of death had lifted, to give her all the demonstrations of love it was natural he should long to bestow upon her. Now he merely pressed closer the hand he held.

"I want you to come to me very soon, dearest. I know that is what he would have wished, that your husband and natural protector should at once be given the joy of taking care of you," he said gently. "You have allowed me to be constantly with you in these last sorrowful weeks, so it must surely seem natural to you to come to me at once, and let me be with you still in even closer fellowship in the inevitable sadness of the near future."

He paused a moment but she made no answer; her eyes were dreamily fixed on the fire as if in profound thought.

"You have only Lilius and Keith to look to now," he continued. "They will be married directly. In place of beginning another life with them, which, as you have

## The Portals of Love

given yourself to me must soon in any case be broken off again, let us be married at once very quietly in the nearest church. As my wife you will then be absolutely independent of all chaperonage."

"Yes! I think that plan would be best," she answered, as if suddenly waking up to life again. "Mr. Arrol comes to see me to-morrow morning, and I will tell him that you have asked me to marry you and I have consented. It will surprise him very much."

"I'm not so sure of that," Kenneth answered with a smile. "I've reason to know he had a very strong suspicion that I meant to marry you or die in the attempt. We'll get him to fix up the licence and all those little details, and you must tell me to-morrow the very earliest date you will give yourself to me. Will that be hard for you, dearest?"

She smiled into his eyes and shook her head.

"I don't want to lose you for one minute more than I can help," she said, with a little catch in her voice. "You are everything on earth to me now, Kenneth. I couldn't go on living long without you, but I know Mr. Arrol will hate being fussed about my affairs."

Kenneth smiled again; he felt giddy with pure unadulterated happiness, against which no obstacles could stand up for very long. He drew her gently to him.

"We will let him fuss as long as he likes," he said contentedly. "Only we must be married before he begins fussing. Of course I know, darling, he will have your father's affairs to arrange, but that need not affect our plans. You know, Celandine, you aren't going to marry a pauper. Any little thing that may be yours, you can safely wait for till the slow arm of the law deems fit to restore it. Meanwhile, and for always, what is mine is yours, but I'll tell Arrol all about that to-morrow. I'll easily manage him."

She was looking at him now with a new expression on her face, one of surprised interest.



## The Portals of Love

"But, Kenneth, I'm not a pauper either," she exclaimed, with a little laugh.

"No woman so lovely as you could be, even given the fact that she didn't possess one red cent in the world," he answered happily.

She bent forward, her elbow on her knee, her chin in the palm of her slender hand. Her eyes were gravely fixed once more on the fire.

"I have got ten thousand a year of my own, free of all income tax," she said unemotionally.

There was absolute silence, save for the ticking of a clock and the spasmodic cracking of the old ship wood burning blue and green and scarlet in the grate. He was staring at her in blank amazement. Had the occasion been any other, had the day been one of less deep solemnity, he would have treated the remark as a joke. Once or twice before he had detected in her a penchant for mischief.

She turned round and looked at him at last. There was a pathetic look in her eyes, and her sensitive lips were quivering; something in his face frightened her.

"Do you mind very much?" she asked, in a rapid whisper. "I thought perhaps you knew. It won't make any difference to me. You must see that it doesn't, it never has. I'm not like a *nouveau riche*. I've had money all my life, Kenneth. My mother was an heiress. She left father five thousand a year for his life, and to come to me at his death. She left me five thousand a year from the hour she died. Father and I mixed it all up. I mean, what was his was mine and mine was his; we never bothered about divisions. He never spent his income, he had no expensive tastes."

She had slipped her hand again into his; her face was raised with something of entreaty as she rapidly poured out her words, and his eyes at last turned and met hers. Then he gave himself a queer little shake and bent and kissed her.

## The Portals of Love

"No, my darling, it will make no difference to you, the woman I loved and believed would be dependent upon me, the woman I adore and now know to be independent of anything I can do for her."

The words were arrested by a soft finger on his lips. She threw her other arm suddenly round his neck, and drew his face to hers. "I must always be absolutely dependent upon you, Kenneth; for all I depend upon in my life is your love," she whispered. "Don't let us talk any more about mundane things; it is good to be well dowered with this world's goods, but it is still better to be given love, the dower of Heaven."

That night Kenneth Macleod sat down and wrote a long letter to his uncle, telling him of the extraordinary good fortune which had befallen him. Whilst he had been seated with Celandine, Liliast had been busily engaged in writing to the same man that long difficult letter which she had promised Robert Shirley to despatch directly he was buried.

Both letters left London the next day by the same mail and were received the following morning by the laird of the Fastness, as he sat by his bedroom fire in the enforced inactivity of swiftly failing health.



## CHAPTER XXVII

IT had been a snowy winter in the North. A real old-fashioned winter, with skating at Christmas for the young people, and long weeks of frozen snow to try the strength and endurance of the aged.

Now in April days of early spring the terrors of Boreas had vanished as if by magic, and though often as the day lengthens the cold strengthens in that northern latitude, a genial feeling was in the air. The rooks were extremely busy over their domestic arrangements in the tall swinging elms, and the snowdrops, jonquils and golden celandines starred the woods and fringed the full, merrily running brooks of Ulvadale. It was Easter time and the children were at home for their holidays. A couple of boys from Eton, a couple of girls from a school in Brighton, all four lording it, more or less, over the two youngest, a boy and girl, who were of too tender an age to leave the nest, and who were under the charge of a German governess and a French nurse.

Great excitement reigned amongst the children, for two brides and two bridegrooms were expected that day in time for lunch, and in the erratic imagination of youth to be newly wed marked a couple out as something strange and abnormal and especially designed for show purposes. Towards half-past twelve a noise, as of an artillery charge descending the stairs, warned Elizabeth Ulvadale that her guests were approaching, and she left her writing table and moved to the door in

## The Portals of Love

time to see her whole family descending *en bloc*. With shrieks and shouts and deaf to remonstrance they swept by in a compact body, until pulled up short at the bottom by the figure of their father, standing fair and square prepared to receive the charge of infantry. The effect was a rout, the charge melted, and wheeled round and scattered in all directions.

"Young beggars," muttered Ulvadale, "they're playing the very deuce with the old stone stairs—half a dozen chips out of 'em every day. Here! Jock, Harry! I say!" he shouted to the vanishing backs. "You may all come to the door if you behave properly. No nonsense now—chuck that beastly muck away at once."

Ulvadale's heir, a tall handsome boy of seventeen, guiltily dropped a bag of rice and two old shoes into the depths of a stone vase, as he and his brother advanced, four other bobbing, dancing little heads and feet following in the rear.

The omnibus with its freight of four was drawing up to the door with a clatter of hoofs, and hands already waving from its window, and Elizabeth pushed her tall, slim form through the group of eager children's faces. Kenneth Macleod descended first and handed out his wife, the slender black-robed figure of Celandine, whom Elizabeth at once took in her arms and kissed warmly. Then out tumbled Uncle Keith leading the new Aunt Liliás, and the whole family swarmed forward and fell upon them in the wild exuberance of old friendship, their shyness of Celandine, the stranger, giving an added zest to their welcome of the old and tried. There was a move now into the house, every one talking at once. Elizabeth was escorting Mrs. Kenneth and he and Ulvadale followed. Behind came Liliás and Keith each closely clung to by six pairs of insistent little hands, and striving to answer a dozen questions at once.



## The Portals of Love

"Why is she in a black dress? Brides wear white satin," asked Janet of twelve.

"She's got brown eyes like Mr. Macleod of the Fastness," observed Harry of fourteen.

"Yes! but she's got straw-coloured hair and he hasn't," corrected Jock of seventeen. "Her hair isn't so pretty as mother's."

"Her face is just the colour of the doll you sent me at Christmas," observed Betty of six, as she danced by the side of Liliás.

"Mother's hair is the colour of marmalade. Beautiful!" put in Jock.

"I feel quite hurt. You're all so interested in Kenneth's bride that you're taking no notice of mine," observed Keith, who thought it wise to stop those awkward remarks.

"Oh! Uncle Keith, you're old. We know all about what you and Aunt Liliás are like," cheerfully rejoined Harry. "Have you got a wedding ring?"

"Your aunt has somewhere about her, I suppose," he answered laughing.

"Is it good for 'styes'?" inquired the baby, aged six.

"She means styes in your eyes," explained Harry, catching Keith's puzzled look. "Whenever she gets a sty in her eye mother rubs it with her wedding ring."

"That's an old Scotch dodge mother's learned in the cottages," remarked Jock, in his superior way.

Escorted by the whole family Liliás reached her room, and began to make her toilette aided by two or three interested and willing little nieces, and then they all descended to lunch as the gong rang out.

It was a new experience for Celandine, as seated by her host's side she looked down the long table at the happy family party of fourteen, the six children staring at her in the most unabashed and interested manner, the governess and holiday tutor, and Keith and Liliás very

## The Portals of Love

much at home with nephews and nieces. Last of all the beautiful mother of those six sturdy young souls—presiding at their head—beautiful still with her curly, tawny hair clustering about the delicate loveliness of her face, and above the broad white brow and great onyx eyes. “She is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen, and surrounded by the most perfect setting. I should like to paint her,” Celandine told herself, as she glanced from Elizabeth up at the tapestry hung walls, the great vaulted stone ceiling with its carving of heraldic devices, each petal of rose and fleur-de-lis exquisitely graven and sharp chiselled as in the days when executed, the deep eight-foot embrasure of window cut in the thickness of the masonry, and the peep of sunny woodlands beyond. The sun was in the room and touched Elizabeth’s hair to gorgeousness, and strayed over the tumbled curls of her children, three little heads the colour of marmalade—for the sons were dark and stalwart like their father, whilst the girls were fair and delicately featured like their beautiful mother.

“I hope you don’t think our old Scotch castles very rude and barbaric,” said Ulvadale, noting her wandering glances round.

“But I do think they are,” Celandine replied, “and that charms me. You must remember how new a sight it is to me. I have seen nothing like it before; it reminds me of Macbeth, he must have lived in just such a place.”

“Cawdor! Yes, that is farther south, a very fine old place; but if you like Ulvadale you will be delighted with the Fastness, it is really a grand old pile. You must go over there—I promised Macleod I’d bring you and Kenneth to-morrow afternoon. Naturally he’s longing to see you.”

“Is he very ill?” asked Celandine.

Ulvadale looked grave. “Yes, very ill, but still not confined to bed. I should say he’d die in his chair.



## The Portals of Love

There's something obscure about his malady, but I fear it's killing him."

"In his letter to Kenneth he spoke very despondently," she said, "and for that reason we cut short our foreign tour and came north as soon as we could. Mrs. Macleod wrote to say that he was in a serious condition and could not last long."

"He never really recovered his son's death," continued Ulvadale. "I go over constantly and do what I can to cheer him up, but the loss of both his sons quite knocked him over—the eldest, as I daresay Kenneth has told you, died directly he set foot in Australia and the youngest some years after. Poor Mrs. Macleod has suffered terribly. She adored Roderick, though he turned out a wild young beggar. Keith used to be his tutor."

"Yes, I know. Kenneth has told me all the family history," she said, lapsing into thoughtful silence till roused by her tiny neighbour on her left. "Have you got a grandmother?" asked Betty of six.

"No, I don't possess such a thing," Celandine assured her, with a smile.

"We have two—one lives in heaven," the child told her gravely; "but we keep her grave nice and tidy and plant flowers on it. Jock and Harry used to do it before they went to school. We've got a grandpapa that lives in a Manse, he's very old, but he won't speak to us," ended the child very seriously.

"That seems rather unkind," remarked Celandine, feeling the speech a little awkward.

"Not much use having a dumb grandpapa, is it?" said Ulvadale, smiling whimsically at his little daughter.

"But he's not dumb, father, for he scolds every Sunday in church. Mary goes and listens and calls it rantin' and ravin', and Martha says he's fair daft."

Ulvadale shook his head at her. "Don't tell tales," he said. "He's never forgiven Elizabeth for earning

## The Portals of Love

her living on the stage, Mrs. Macleod," he said, turning to Celandine. "Martha is his old servant and spoils the children dreadfully. Poor old Tytler, he's over seventy, but still strong in his rabid ultra-Calvinism. His is a very sad and lonely old age. One can't help honouring him for sticking to his principles; but on the other hand, one feels how much happier he would have been here in the midst of his grandchildren."

"No one could be dull or lonely in this house," she answered, with a bright smile. "I've never been amongst children before. I love them."

"Well! you mustn't let them bore you too much, Mrs. Macleod; they're sometimes very overpowering, I can assure you," he answered. "The only quiet time is after eight, when they're all in bed or keeping very still because they ought to be in bed. I sometimes raid their quarters after dinner just to see lights out, and I have heard very suspicious scuttlings behind doors."

"It's the ghosts," suggested Betty innocently.

"Rats," retorted Ulvadale shortly.

"There's no ghost in your room, are you sorry?" asked Betty, gazing into Celandine's face.

"Not particularly, Betty; but I'm not afraid."

"We're not neither. Janet's seen the grey lady twice, and Jock's tried to see her but she wouldn't come out for him; she's very shy and lives in a cupboard."

"Rather close quarters, isn't it, Betty?"

"Mother says she doesn't need much room, 'cause she's made of air. Our nurse puts her head under the bedclothes, but we don't, we watch. Mother says air can't hurt, no more than wind can, and God's always here beside us."

"Quite true, Betty; you're a sensible child, I see," replied Celandine, smiling approvingly down on the earnest little face.

Ulvadale laughed. "They've all been brought up



## The Portals of Love

on ghosts," he said. "In an old house like this where there are all sorts of old traditions which are sure to be repeated, and any amount of unaccountable sounds and stirrings, it's necessary to rear them not to be afraid. Only begin early enough and it's easy enough to do."

"It's very refreshing to find how well you've succeeded," said Celandine, smiling at his matter-of-fact tone. She was passionately fond of children, and with a vague yearning she watched one of the most beautiful sights in the world—a beautiful young mother surrounded by her beautiful children. Elizabeth was always unconsciously putting herself into one of those exquisite groups which the old masters loved to portray, whether sitting on the sofa with the children clustering about her, or standing up straight and tall on the old stone terrace, with so many little heads playing hide and seek about her skirts, or hugging a little ruddy-haired soul to her white breast.

After travelling all night both Celandine and Lilius retired early to bed. The latter had driven over to tea at the Fastness, and had seen her uncle and aunt. For an hour she had been closeted with the sick man, whom she found in a fever of anxiety to hear further details of the great disclosures her letter had brought to him. At times his mind seemed to wander, to be lost in the mists of bygone times, then again it would grow clearer and display something of its old sagacity and strength. As Malcolm had anticipated, the knowledge of his granddaughter's existence had brought a great comfort, an immeasurable thanksgiving to his heart. Tortured, as for long he had been, with the haunting memories of his early harshness to his son, it came to him as the hand of forgiveness stretched forth from the grave. The great wing of God's mercy was extended above him in shielding care, sending him a granddaughter to

## The Portals of Love

inherit her father's lost inheritance. Though he might never claim of her blood relationship, the knowledge that his heir's wife was none other than his son's child seemed to him in truth a God-given proof of forgiveness, a promise bright and hopeful of a renewal of the old peaceful, happy lives the Fastness had once sheltered beneath its aged roof. The shadow of a great sin would be dispersed by the incoming of those new lives ; the curse that seemed now to hang over it would be exorcised by the innocent hearts of those who would come after.

At the close of a touching interview, fraught with much pain to both, uncle and niece parted, and Liliás left behind her the promise that Kenneth would bring Celandine to see him on the morrow without fail. After seeing Celandine safely to her room Elizabeth followed Liliás to hers. It was the first time since their arrival that the two friends, now near relations, found themselves alone together, and Liliás at once put the question she had been longing to ask.

"Well! Elizabeth," she said, "confess I didn't describe Celandine to you as one bit more lovely than she really is, did I?"

Elizabeth was standing before the fire gazing into it, one hand raising the heavy satin of her white gown above the small foot she held out to the blaze. For a moment she answered nothing, and Liliás turned round in some surprise.

"You can't fail to admire her as much as I do?" she exclaimed.

Lady Ulvadale turned and walked over to her, her face was very grave and pale ; she placed both her hands on her sister-in-law's shoulder.

"Liliás, who is she?" she asked, in a low whisper.

The question fell like a sudden thunder-clap. For a second Liliás met the stern eyes steadily, but her heart had begun to beat thickly, and she knew that



## The Portals of Love

the abrupt question had taken her so terribly by surprise that she could not immediately rally her forces.

"Who is she? What can you mean?" she faltered, struggling to speak naturally and quietly.

Elizabeth's fingers held her fast; the great dark eyes seemed to search down into her very soul. "Lilias," she said, "I know all you know. Let us tear down the veil that so long has been between us—the veil we have both drawn over the tragedy of the Fastness. We are alone here in this room, there is no one to hear us. What relation is Kenneth's wife to Malcolm Macleod?"

Lilias sank into the chair by her side, Elizabeth standing over her. The two women searched each other's faces for one long minute before either spoke. Lilias was trying to gather up her thoughts into orderly sequence. Who could have told her? Only Macleod of the Fastness, there was no one else who knew. Catching sight of her face in a mirror opposite as she dragged her eyes away from her questioner, she saw that her cheeks had turned pale as death.

"How did you find out?" she questioned abruptly, and her voice was scarce audible through the loud beating of her heart.

Elizabeth made an eloquent gesture with her hands. "Never mind that at present; let it suffice that I do know, have known the whole story for eighteen years. Ulvadale knows also; but remember, Lilias, before we go further, that we have also known how to keep silence, that we will keep silence ever and always."

Ulvadale knew—the intelligence staggered Lilias; she could scarce believe it possible. Macleod must have been raving mad to hand on the story of that tragedy to his nearest neighbours.

"Celandine is Malcolm's daughter—you cannot deny it," said Elizabeth earnestly.

Lilias shook herself free from her wonderment and

## The Portals of Love

horror—disguise was useless now. "I will not attempt to deny it, Elizabeth," she said.

Lady Ulvadale seated herself and leant forward towards her companion, her dark eyes glowing with some hidden fire. "I seem always to have known it," she said whisperingly, "but suddenly it came to me in a flash. All day since your arrival Malcolm has been constantly in my mind. I couldn't think why. I hardly ever think of him, though he was a good friend to me, and I knew he wasn't dead; but time passes and fades one's memories as the sun fades one's curtains, they gradually become paler. Then something in her face puzzled me. I felt as if I had seen her somewhere before, yet I knew that it was not possible we could ever have met until to-day. In her bedroom just now I asked her, I can't think why, to show me a photograph of her father, and she told me that such a thing did not exist, that he had always shown an unconquerable aversion to being photographed. As I stood with her before the dressing-table bidding her good-night, I saw, as I looked over her shoulders, her profile in the mirror—it was Malcolm's profile in miniature. She thought I was ill, and I had to pretend a sudden faintness. I really felt shaken to the core, Liliás, and then came to me the certain conviction that she was his child. Before I sleep you must tell me how she comes to be the wife of Kenneth Macleod."

"Kenneth Macleod knows her only as Celandine Shirley. He has not the faintest conception that his wife is really his cousin, and Elizabeth, it was Malcolm's dying wish that he never should know."

The voice of Liliás fell upon her listener's ear with something of the sacredness and solemnity of a vow, and Elizabeth's eyes deepened into awe. She shivered slightly. "No, he must never know, nor must she. Oh! Liliás, how hideous for both it would be did they discover what lay at the bottom of the dungeon well."



## The Portals of Love

"Macleod of the Fastness was mad, mad to tell you," exclaimed Lillas suddenly. She could not understand it. Her whole soul rose up in angry antagonism against her uncle who had betrayed the gruesome tragedy which she herself had so faithfully kept.

"Macleod of the Fastness did not tell me. He has no conception that Ulvadale and I know," said Elizabeth quietly.

Lillas gave vent to an expression almost of exasperation, and as she was about to put another and obvious question Keith's footsteps sounded in the dressing-room beyond. Lillas ran to the door and opened it, she felt in need of his help. He was winding his watch in front of the fire and looked at her pale face with consternation.

"Lillas, what is the matter?" he asked.

She ran up to him and took his hand. "Elizabeth is in my room, Keith. Do come in, she knows who Celandine is," she whispered.

Keith took the intelligence with perfect composure, and walked into the bedroom.

"Well, Lizzie," he said to his sister with rather a grim smile, "how have you got to the root of this miserable business? I know everything, therefore do not hesitate to speak."

"Sit down a moment, Keith, and I will tell you both," she said, with a quiet earnestness. "It is a curious story, but it is a true one as I shall prove to you.

"I married Ulvadale for love, but I never forgot for one moment all I owed to Torquil Grant, and the love he owned for me. I vowed solemnly, before God, that I would discover who his murderer was, as I knew that only death could have parted us. As time went on, in place of fading out the determination grew stronger and stronger. Something always kept urging me on, and

## The Portals of Love

would give me no rest. Gradually it came to me that this force was the direct result of Torquil's constant presence by my side. Always it seemed as if he was with me. There were times when I knew he was in the room standing over me, urging me on to discovery, and I used to say out aloud, 'Yes, Torquil, never fear, I will find out and you will help me'. I began to understand that he was determined I should discover the full facts in order to vindicate his memory; to prove that he was no absconding traitor, who had robbed his master and abandoned the woman he meant to wed, but the hapless victim of some terrible tragedy as yet undiscovered by man.

"When I came here, a newly married woman, I set to work at once very cautiously and carefully. There were no new facts to be elicited. I found that every one accepted the belief that he had absconded, and already his memory was fading. To me it was still vividly alive, and I was still haunted by his presence. Then I set to work to get into touch with Kirsty Hislop, the spae-wife. For a time I failed, but at last we had a meeting in the "Muckle Cave," and she told me the whole story as it had been disclosed to her in a trance."

She paused a moment and glanced towards Keith's absorbed face, her own pale, agitated with painful memories.

"You remember when I came that day secretly to the Manse and we met in the garden, and I urged you to go to Kirsty, the woman who knew where the drowned Macrae lay?"

Keith nodded. "I remember that I went, Lizzie, and I remember the words she spoke. I see it all now. The woman knew then, though she would not tell me. She was waiting for that certain time when she knew she would be enabled to tell you."

In a few words Elizabeth described the interview in



## The Portals of Love

the cave and her horror on learning the tragedy. Only the sharing of that secret with Ulvadale had helped her to bear with calmness the terrible knowledge, to face Macleod of the Fastness with unruffled bearing and a simulated unconsciousness of the crime and his son's banishment into life-long exile.

Ulvadale's sterling common-sense had instantly perceived the only course for them to pursue—that of feigned ignorance, whilst doing all they could to lighten the burden of guilt which both husband and wife felt would press more heavily upon the old laird as time pursued its course. Ulvadale himself, strong in that sense of pride of birth which Macleod held so dear, could in a measure put himself in the father's place, and realise how strong and overpowering must have been the temptation to hide away from the world's eyes his son's disgrace. A disgrace that, did it become public property, would blight the fortunes and overshadow the lives of many succeeding generations.

Year by year they had traced the secret workings of remorse and grief that gnawed like a cancer at John Macleod's heart. The grey head had silvered rapidly; the stalwart, proudly held form, so grand in its strength and virility, had slowly bowed beneath the insidious undermining grief. The dark falcon eye, full of courage and rough daring, had lost its lustre and much of its sight; the dominating voice had sunk to a subdued cadence, which told its own tale to those who could mark and read by the light of a secret vision. Then had come Roderick's death, and the last proud stay which had upheld the tottering ruin snapped, and Macleod of the Fastness sank down under the weight of an insupportable desolation.

Far into the night Elizabeth sat with Liliás and her brother, for the first and last time straightening out the knotted threads of Macleod's destiny. The wonderful and poetic justice of Celandine's advent upon that

## The Portals of Love

closing scene appealed to Elizabeth Ulvadale with the same force and intensity it had done to Keith and to his wife. She saw instantly how jealously the secret of the Fastness must for ever more be guarded, for the sake of those wedded lovers whose home in the future would be amidst those scenes which, for those who knew, brought so shrinking a horror and repulsion. All that loving friendship and devotion could offer must be poured out on those two wedded lovers to make their future home an abode of happiness and peace, so that in time to come the shadows might be dispelled and flee away before the fairer forces of purity and love.

The days of Macleod of the Fastness were numbered the hour-glass of life was running low ; but a brief time now and his heir would be called upon to take up the duties, to rule over that grand old kingdom by the sea ; and in dying, the stricken laird would lay himself down to rest with his forefathers, in the sure and certain hope that his son's daughter would succeed him, that the old virile blood of the Macleods would still course in unbroken flood through the veins of succeeding generations, and a new and enduring and more vigorous race would spring up from out the crumbling ruins of the old and the gone before.



## CHAPTER XXVIII

A VAST wine-coloured ocean, the waters lay breathing beneath a sunset which was dyeing the ragged cliffs with gorgeous purple and rose. It touched the tumbling surf-line with blood-red flecks as the rounded billows reared and fell upon the edge of the broad plain of yellow sand with gentle rhythm. In their evening repose and the still, windless atmosphere the waves were tranquil save where they broke at intervals against the jagged teeth of the rocks and were scattered high in softly flying wreaths of snowy foam.

On the molten glory of the horizon a three-masted schooner sped on, as if to the verge of the world, its hull gradually vanishing beneath the brink of waters, its sails of Tyrian red flaming as they caught the setting rays on their bellying sides.

Beneath the old stone terrace the vast woods of the Fastness were beginning to assume the first delicate flush of green; the stems, as the sap rose, flushed to palest pink. Sea-gulls were sailing homewards from the ploughed lands in exquisite volition, without strain or effort of their tireless pinions, like floating silver cloudlets, poised motionless for a moment, wheeling in airy circles or darting like snowy arrows straight towards the horizon. At the sunset hour came the drowsy murmur of wood-pigeons from the sheltering oaks, the rooks were noisily preparing to rest, and the celestial evening hymn of a myriad flute-like voices intoxicated with spring pealed up from the

## The Portals of Love

bosky recesses of the glen where the burn sang low in its decreasing volume.

The delicious scent of reviving life was in the soft air. Mingled with the breath of the sea came the perfume of primroses, wild hyacinths, jonquils, springing turf and unfolding leaf. The year was slowly evolving into its fullest splendour and beauty, and touched Kenneth Macleod with its magic as he stood upon the terrace drinking in the scene. He was waiting for his wife who had gone in to see the dying laird, and the sharp contrast between life and death struck him poignantly as he thought of his uncle slowly relaxing his tenacious hold upon earth as slowly the season waxed strong with reviving fulness. There came to him then a sense of life's richest, greatest possibilities and responsibilities, a scorn of idle, squandered hours, of material absorption, of that continuous dwelling of the mind midst the perishable things of the world in place of opening the doors of the soul to the greater glory. Something in his own nature responded and arose to mingle with the unfoldment without. A passion of poetic emotion enveloped him with that mystic sense of oneness, of universal being which has its source in the soul, a whisper of life illimitable disclosing to him the universe in all its beauty which was really a part of himself as it was also a manifestation of the Creator. Though he had been shocked and grieved by the sudden death of the two young cousins, with whom all his life he had been on the best of terms, he professed no hypocritical grief at the unalterable fact of his succeeding to the Fastness. By the law of entail he stood next in succession, and the place had always been dear to him as the birthplace and early home of his own father and his forebears. It was not without a natural pride that he brought the woman who for two months had been his wife to see for the first time the home that would be hers in the



## The Portals of Love

future, and the heavens had smiled upon them and given birth to a day of ethereal beauty as if to enwrap with a silver lining the cloud of death that hovered over the old fortress by the sea.

Upstairs, in his own special wing of the Castle, Macleod of the Fastness sat alone in his room awaiting his granddaughter. Though far spent he was master still in his own house, and had decreed that no other eyes should witness that longed-for interview, that olive branch of futurity and hope that was being held out to him from the grave by the hand of his dead son.

There was something patriarchal now in his broken-down and strangely altered appearance. In the wild dark eye the light of reason but rarely shone; the weakened mind dwelt ever broodingly in the past, and for long intervals he would sit muttering to himself, reviving long-forgotten memories of his own boyhood, his first wife and the childhood of his dead sons. Strangely enough it was more often of those early days than of more recent events that he thought. Only on rare occasions a sudden flash of light illumined the dark secret buried in his breast, and for a brief space reason asserted itself and held pitiless sway in his tortured being. With the strange cunning of a mind diseased he had burnt the letter Liliast had written to him after mastering its contents. It was as if there were two minds at work within him—one which acted automatically and was his guardian of the present, alert and vigilant, suspicious, cunning; the other a milder, gentler mind, which had in it all the love, pity and tenderness his nature in health and strength had so cruelly lacked. In that softer mind he nearly always now dwelt, save on those rare occasions when danger approached, and the strong, virile, masterful mind claimed supremacy over him once more, and stepped in as if to save him from detection.

## The Portals of Love

His long white locks were allowed to stray at will over the collar of the red dressing-gown in which his wasted, gaunt frame was enveloped. The high cheek bones protruded under the wan cheeks; the handsome features were refined and worn down to an extreme clearness of outline which was beautiful yet awful. From out the tragic face, which was as the mask of death, only the dark wild eyes in transparent brilliancy gleamed sombrely, as if fed by some internal fires.

A great Bible lay on a table by his side, out of which his servant constantly read to him. In his wild, restless moods he listened with leaping eye to the fierce, warlike lives of the old Patriarchs. The rapine, bloodshed and dark stormy history of those times seemed to find an echo in his own heart and bring home to him a flash of pride in his own old prowess. The ancient blood of his barbarous, fighting, foraging ancestors seemed to mingle in common cause with those old Jewish records of conflict and crime. In his softer moods he turned always to the forty-eighth chapter of Genesis. Though he knew it by heart yet he never wearied of having it read. It seemed to him as if it was his own story.

In the spent, worn figure of the aged Jacob, lying in the quiet shadow of approaching death, dreaming dreams of his bygone years, he fancied he saw himself depicted. The death of Rachel and of his own first wife, the mother of Malcolm, were strangely interwoven in his feeble mind, the pathetic words were always on his lips. "Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan in the way, when yet there was but a little way to come into Ephrath: and I buried her there in the way of Ephrath; the same is Bethlehem." Those were the words he would mutter to himself, his mind intent on the woman who was the mother of his first-born.

As he sat waiting for Kenneth's wife to come to him, his withered lips kept moving with the old words, and



## The Portals of Love

his haggard eyes turned eagerly to the door as she softly entered and closed it behind her.

The sunset rays were in the room as if symbolical of the near setting of that worn, storm-tossed heart, and they fell in golden, slanting glory athwart the old room with its dark portraits and faded hangings, and laid a beam of light upon the tall, slim, black-robed figure which paused a moment on the threshold, her breath coming a little quickly from her parted lips, her eyes, Malcolm's eyes, gazing out with something childlike in their shy timidity.

He held out his withered hand to her in a mute welcome, and she softly crossed the room and knelt down by his side, looking up to him with questioning gaze, which strove to read the weird, chasing thoughts which swept across his face, in flashes of light and clouds of sombre darkness.

"I am Celandine. I am Kenneth's wife," she whispered, in a swift desire to put him at ease, to infuse something natural and peaceful into their first meeting. For a moment he did not answer, but gazed long and intently into her eyes as if searching for something.

"Aye! I know," he whispered. "You are Kenneth's wife. I had not thought to see thy face."

She gazed into his eyes striving to pierce the veil; faint unrealised affections, dim unawakened instincts throbbed in her breast. At her heart lay a mystic hope as old as life, bearing in its essence all the secrets of eternity—a hope that only a woman can know. Her eyes dilated and a shiver ran through her. He was speaking again.

"Lo! God hath showed me also thy seed," he cried aloud with a great ring of gladness in his voice.

She did not understand what he meant, her secret hope was still her own. She thought his mind wandered, and though she shrank back with something of timidity she felt no fear. She could not know that the wild

## The Portals of Love

cry went forth to the dead son. His memory was back to Malcolm once more, with her own father. In the tossing dreams of his disordered brain, blended with the presence was that of the aged Jacob, with the son's sons standing before his dim, dying eyes.

She began to talk softly to him of her marriage, of their travels and of their coming to Ulvadale, and lastly of her impressions of the Fastness, that stately, solitary grandeur which had so deeply set its impress upon her from the instant her eyes had beheld it. Strong life surged in her veins, the venerable pile seemed to call her to its heart. She could not have told why, but now, as in the future, the Fastness meant to her—home.

He listened to her with a curious wavering earnestness, as if every now and again some other mental picture flashed across the screen of his mind, obliterating the present. Once, as she paused for a moment, she saw him raise his eyes from her face as if in prayer and heard the words he uttered:—

“The angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads.”

She spoke to him of her father, of the love she had borne him, of the early happy days of her youth in a far-away home which had been one of perfect peace and harmony. She could not have explained why she so spoke. A desire to interest him urged her on. She felt as if he was no stranger, as if she had always known him, and as if her joys and sorrows in life must ever have been his. Tears dimmed her eyes as she spoke of that father, and her voice quivered as she told him how tender and kind a husband he had been to her dead mother, how fond and devoted a parent he had been to her. Then he spoke after a long, long silence. For a brief interval there was perfect lucidity. He spoke of her husband's coming inheritance, of his worthiness to be master in the lands



## The Portals of Love

of his own people, of the improvements he himself would fain have carried out but for the loss of children and hope. He spoke of the old traditions and ancient usages which he had cherished with such pride, and converted to modern convenience and adapted to civilisation's advance.

Then gradually, as the words fell from his lips, his voice seemed to falter and weakness warned her the interview must close.

She bent forward and kissed his cheek, and his eyes glittering with tears fell upon her with a profound meaning. For a moment his pale hands fluttered over her hair in benediction.

"God shall be with you," he cried, "and bring you again into the land of your fathers."

So she went out and left him, bearing with her his dying words, the blessing that the blind old Israel gave to Joseph his son.

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