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JANET and her mother saw a quiver run through Gourlay, as he stood and glowered from the threshold. He seemed of monstrous bulk and significance, filling the doorway in his silence.

The quiver that went through him was a sign of his contending angers, his will struggling with the tumult of wrath that threatened to spoil his revenge. To fell that huddled oaf with a blow would be a poor return for all he had endured because of him. He meant to sweat punishment out of him drop by drop, with slow and vicious enjoyment. But the sudden sight of that living disgrace to the Gourlays woke a wild desire to leap on him at once, and glut his rage, a madness which only a will like his could control. He quivered with the effort to keep it in.

To bring a beaten and degraded look into a man's face, rend manhood out of him in fear, is a sight that makes decent men wince in pain; for it is an outrage on the decency of life, an offence to natural religion, a violation of the human sanctities. Yet Gourlay had done it once and again. I saw him "down" a man at the Cross once, a big man with a viking beard, dark brown, from which you would have looked for manliness. Gourlay, with stabbing eyes, threatened, and birred, and "downed" him, till he crept away with a face like chalk, and a hunted, furtive eye. Curiously

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it was his manly beard that made the look such a pain, for its contrasting colour shewed the white face of the coward—and a coward had no right to such a beard. A grim and cruel smile went after him as he slunk away. “*Ha!*” barked Gourlay, in lordly and pursuing scorn, and the fellow leapt where he walked, as the cry went through him. To break a man’s spirit so, take that from him which he will never recover while he lives, send him slinking away *animo castrato*—for that is what it comes to—is a sinister outrage of the world. It is as bad as the rape of a woman, and ranks with the sin against the Holy Ghost—derives from it, indeed. Yet it was this outrage that Gourlay meant to work upon his son. He would work him down and down, this son of his, till he was less than a man, a frightened, furtive animal. Then, perhaps, he would give a loose to his other rage, unbuckle his belt, and thrash the grown man like a wriggling urchin on the floor.

As he stood glowering from the door Mrs. Gourlay rose, with an appealing cry of “*John!*”—but Gourlay put his eye on her, and she sank into her chair, staring up at him in terror. The strings of the tawdry cap she wore seemed to choke her, and she unfastened them with nervous fingers, fumbling long beneath her lifted chin to get them loose. She did not remove the cap, but let the strings dangle by her jaw. The silly bits of cloth wagging and quivering, as she turned her head repeatedly from son to husband and from husband to son, added to her air of helplessness and inefficiency. Once she whispered with ghastly intensity, “*God have mercy!*”

For a length of time there was a loaded silence.

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Gourlay went up to the hearth, and looked down on his son from near at hand. John shrank down in his great-coat. A reek of alcohol rose from around him. Janet whimpered.

But when Gourlay spoke, it was with deadly quietude. The moan was in his voice. So great was his controlled wrath that he drew in great shivering breastfuls of air between the words, as if for strength to utter them; and they quavered forth on it again. He seemed weakened by his own rage.

"Aye man!" he breathed "Ye've won hame, I observe! Dee-ee-ar me! Im-phm!"

The contrast between the lowness of his voice and his steady breathing anger that possessed the air (they felt it coming as on waves) was demoniac, appalling.

John could not speak; he was paralysed by fear. To have this vast hostile force touch him, yet be still, struck him dumb. Why did his father not break out on him at once? What did he mean? What was he going to do? The jamb of the fireplace cut his right shoulder as he cowered into it, to get away as far as he could.

"I'm saying ye've won hame!" quivered Gourlay in a deadly slowness, and his eyes never left his son.

And still the son made no reply. In the silence, the ticking of the big clock seemed to fill their world. They were conscious of nothing else. It smote the ear.

"Aye," John gulped at last from a throat that felt closing. The answer seemed dragged out of him by the insistent silence.

"Just so-a!" breathed his father, and his eyes opened

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in wide flame. He heaved with the great breath he drew "Im-phm!" he drawled.

He went through to the scullery at the back of the kitchen to wash his hands. Through the open door Janet and her mother—looking at each other with affrighted eyes—could hear him sneering at intervals, "Aye man!" "Just that, now!" "Im-phm!" And again, "Aye, aye! Dee-ee-ar me!" in grim, falsetto irony.

When he came back to the kitchen, he turned to Janet, and left his son in a suspended agony.

"Aye woman, Jenny; ye're there!" he said, and nipped her ear as he passed over to his chair. "Were ye in Skeighan the day?"

"Aye, faither," she answered.

"And what did the Skeighan doctor say?"

She raised her large pale eyes to his with a strange look. Then her head sank low on her breast.

"Nothing!" she said at last.

"Nothing!" said he. "Nothing for nothing, then. I hope you didna pay him?"

"No, faither," she answered. "I hadna the baw-bees."

"When did ye get back?" he asked.

"Just after—just after—" her eyes flickered over to John, as if she were afraid of mentioning his name.

"Oh, just after this gentleman! But there's noathing strange in tha-at; you were always after him! You were born after him; and considered after him; he aye had the best o't!—I howp *you* are in good health?" he sneered, turning to his son. "It would never do for a man to break down at the outset o' a great career!

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. . . . For ye *are* at the outset o' a great career; are ye na?"

His speech was as soft as the foot of a tiger, and sheathed as rending a cruelty. There was no escaping the crouching stealth of it. If he had leapt with a roar, John's drunken fury might have lashed itself to rage. But the younger and weaker man was fascinated and helpless before the creeping approach of so monstrous a wrath.

"Eh?" asked Gourlay softly, when John made no reply, "I'm saying you're at the outset o' a great career, are ye not? Eh?"

Soft as his "Eh" was in utterance, it was insinuating, pursuing; it had to be answered.

"No," whimpered John.

"Well, well; you're maybe at the end o't! Have ye been studying hard?"

"Yes," lied John.

"That's right!" cried his father with great heartiness. "There's my brave fellow! Noathing like studying! . . . And no doubt"—he leaned over suavely—"and no doubt ye've brought a wheen prizes home wi' ye as usual? Eh?"

There was no answer.

"Eh?"

"No," gulped the cowerer.

"*Nae* prizes!" cried Gourlay, and his eyebrows went up in a pretended surprise. "*Nae-ae* prizes! Aye, man! Fow's that, na?"

Young Gourlay was being reduced to the condition of a beaten child, who, when his mother asks if he has been a bad boy, is made to sob "Yes," at her knee.

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“Have you been a good boy?” she asks—“No,” he pants; and “Are you sorry for being a bad boy?”—“Yes,” he sobs; and “Will you be a good boy now, then?”—“Yes,” he almost shrieks, in his desire to be at one with his mother. Young Gourlay was being equally beaten from his own nature, equally battered under by another personality. Only he was not asked to be a good boy. He might gang to hell for anything auld Gourlay cared—when once he had bye with him.

Even as he degraded his son to this state of unnatural cowardice, Gourlay felt a vast disgust swell within him that a son of his should be such a coward. “Damn him!” he thought, glowering with big-eyed contempt at the huddled creature, “he hasna the pluck o’ a pig! How can he stand talk like this without showing he’s a man? When I was a child on the brisket, if a man had used me, as I’m using him, I would have flung mysell at him. He’s a pretty-looking object to carry the name o’ John Gourla! My God, what a ke-o of *my* life I’ve made—that auld trollop for my wife, that sumph for my son, and that dying lassie for my dochter! Was it I that bred him? *That!*”

He leapt to his feet in devilish merriment.

“Set out the spirits, Jenny!” he cried; “set out the spirits! My son and I must have a drink together—to celebrate the occesion; ou aye,” he sneered, drawling out the word with sharp, unfamiliar sound, “just to celebratè the occesion!”

The wild humour that seized him was inevitable, born of a vicious effort to control a rage that was constantly increasing, fed by the sight of the offender. Every

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time he glanced across at the thing sitting there, he was swept with fresh surges of fury and disgust. But his vicious constraint curbed them under, and refused them a natural expression. They sought an unnatural. Some vent they must have, and they found it in a score of wild devilries he began to practise on his son. Wrath fed and checked, in one, brings the hell on which man is built to the surface. Gourlay was transformed. He had a fluency of speech, a power of banter, a readiness of tongue, which he had never shewn before. He was beyond himself. Have you heard the snarl with which a wild beast arrests the escaping prey which it has just let go in enjoying cruelty? Gourlay was that animal. For a moment he would cease to torture his son, feed his disgust with a glower; then the sight of him huddled there would wake a desire to stamp on him; but his will would not allow that, for it would spoil the sport he had set his mind on; and so he played with the victim which he would not kill.

“Set out the speerits, Jenny,” he birred, when she wavered in fear. “What are ye shaking for? Set out the speerits—just to shelebrate the joyful occeesion, ye know—aye, aye, just to shelebrate the joyful occeesion!”

Janet brought a tray, with glasses, from the pantry. As she walked, the rims of the glasses shivered and tinkled against each other, from her trembling. Then she set a bottle on the table.

Gourlay sent it crashing to the floor. “A bottle!” he roared. “A bottle for huz twa! To Hell wi’ bottles! The jar, Jenny, the jar; set out the jar, lass, set out the jar. For we mean to make a night of it, this gentleman

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and me. Aye," he yawned with a vicious smile, "we'll make a night o't—we two. A night that Barbie'll remember loang!"

"Have ye skill o' drink?" he asked, turning to his son.

"No," wheezed John.

"No!" cried his father. "I thought ye learned everything at College! Your education's been neglected. But I'll teach ye a lesson, or *this* nicht's bye. Aye, by God," he growled, "I'll teach ye a lesson."

Curb his temper as he might, his own behaviour was lashing it to frenzy. Through the moaning intensity peculiar to his vicious rage, there leapt at times a wild-beast snarl. Every time they heard it, it cut the veins of his listeners with a start of fear—it leapt so suddenly.

"Ha'e, Sir!" he cried.

John raised his dull, white face and looked across at the bumper which his father poured him. But he felt the limbs too weak beneath him to go and take it.

"Bide where ye are!" sneered his father, "bide where ye are! I'll wait on ye; I'll wait on ye. Man, I waited on ye the day that ye were bo-orn! The heavens were hammering the world as John Gourla rode through the storm for a doctor to bring hame his heir. The world was feared, but *he* wasna feared," he roared in Titanic pride, "*he* wasna feared; no, by God, for he never met what scaured him! . . . Aye, aye," he birred softly again, "aye, aye, ye were ushered loudly to the world, serr! Verra appropriate for a man who was destined to make such a name! . . . Eh? . . . Verra appropriate, serr; verra appropriate! And you'll be ushered just as loudly out o't. Oh, young Gourlay's death maun make

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a splurge, ye know—a splurge to attract folk's attention!"

John's shaking hand was wet with the spilled whiskey.

"Take it off," sneered his father, boring into him with a vicious eye; "take it off, serr; take off your dram!—Stop! Somebody wrote something about that—some poetry or other. Who was it?"

"I dinna ken," whimpered John.

"Don't tell lies now. You do ken. I heard you mention it to Loranogie. Come on now—who was it?"

"It was Burns," said John.

"Oh, it was Burns, was it? And what had Mr. Burns to say on the subject? Eh?"

"Freedom and whiskey gang thegither, Tak aff your dram," stammered John.

"A verra wise remark," said Gourlay gravely. "Freedom and whiskey gang thegither," he turned the quotation on his tongue, as if he were savouring a tit-bit. "That's verra good," he approved. "You're a great admirer of Burns, I hear. Eh?"

"Yes," said John.

"Do what he bids ye, then. Take off your dram! It'll show what a fine free fellow you are!"

It was a big, old-fashioned Scotch drinking glass, containing more than half-a-gill of whiskey, and John drained it to the bottom. To him it had been a deadly thing at first, coming thus from his father's hand. He had taken it into his own, with a feeling of aversion, that was strangely blended of disgust and fear. But the moment it touched his lips, desire leapt in his throat to get at it.

"Good!" roared his father in mock admiration.

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“God, ye have the thrapple! When I was your age that would have choked me. I must have a look at that throat o’ yours. Stand up! . . . *Stand up when I tall’ee!*”

John rose swaying to his feet. Months of constant tipping, culminating in a wild debauch, had shattered him. He stood in a reeling world. And the fear weakening his limbs changed his drunken stupor to a heart-heaving sickness. He swayed to and fro, with a cold sweat oozing from his chalky face.

“What’s ado wi’ the fellow?” cried Gourlay. “Oom? He’s swinging like a saugh-wand. I must wa-alk round this, and have a look!”

John’s drunken submissiveness encouraged his father to new devilries. The ease with which he tortured him provoked him to more torture; he went on more and more viciously, as if he were conducting an experiment, to see how much the creature would bear before he turned. Gourlay was enjoying the glutting of his own wrath.

He turned his son round with a finger and thumb on his shoulder, in insolent inspection, as you turn an urchin round to see him in his new suit of clothes. Then he crouched before him, his face thrust close to the other, and peered into his eyes, his mouth distent with an infernal smile. “My boy, Johnny,” he said sweetly, “my boy, Johnny,” and patted him gently on the cheek. John raised dull eyes and looked into his father’s. Far within him a great wrath was gathering through his fear. Another voice, another self, seemed to whimper, with dull iteration, “I’ll *kill* him; I’ll *kill* him; by God, I’ll *kill* him—if he doesna stop this—if he

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keeps on like this at me!" But his present and material self was paralysed with fear.

"Open your mouth!" came the snarl—"wider, damn ye! wider!"

"Im-phm!" said Gourlay, with a critical drawl, pulling John's chin about to see into him the deeper. "Im-phm! God, it's like a furnace! What's the Latin for throat?"

"Guttur," said John.

"Gutter!" said his father. "A verra appropriate name! Yours stinks like a cess-pool! What have you been doing till't? I'm afraid ye aren't in very good health, after a-all. . . . Eh? . . . Mrs. Gourla, Mrs. Gourla! He's in verra bad case, this son of yours, Mrs. Gourla! Fine I ken what he needs, though. Set out the brandy, Jenny, set out the brandy," he roared; "whiskey's not worth a damn for him! Stop; it was you gaed the last time; it's *your* turn now, auld wife, it's *your* turn now! Gang for the brandy to your twa John Gourlas. We're a pair for a woman to be proud of!"

He gazed after his wife as she tottered to the pantry.

"Your skirt's on the gape, auld wife," he sang; "your skirt's on the gape; as use-u-al," he drawled; "as use-u-al. It was always like that; and it always scunnered me, for I aye liked things tidy—though I never got them. However, I maunna compleen when ye bore sic a braw son to my name. He's a great consolation! Imphm, he is that—a great consolation!"

The brandy-bottle slipped from the quivering fingers and was smashed to pieces on the floor.

"Hurrah!" yelled Gourlay.

He seemed rapt and carried by his own devilry. The

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wreck and ruin strewn about the floor consorted with the ruin of his fortunes; let all go smash—what was the use of caring? Now in his frenzy, he, ordinarily so careful, seemed to delight in the smashings and the breakings; they suited his despair.

He saw that his spirit of destruction frightened them, too, and that was another reason to indulge it.

“To Hell with everything,” he yelled, like a mock-bacchanal. “We’re the hearty fellows! We’ll make a red night now we’re at it!” And with that he took the heel of a bottle on his toe and sent it flying, among the dishes on the dresser. A great plate fell, split in two.

“Poor fellow!” he whined, turning to his son; “poo-oor fellow! I fear he has lost his phee sic. For that was the last bottle o’ brandy in my aucht; the last John Gourlay had, the last he’ll ever buy. What am I to do wi’ ye, now? . . . Eh? . . . I must do something; it’s coming to the bit, now, Sir.”

As he stood in a heaving silence the sobbing of the two women was heard through the room. John was still swaying on the floor.

Sometimes Gourlay would run the full length of the kitchen, and stand there glowering on a stoop; then he would come crouching up to his son on a vicious little trot, pattering in rage, the broken glass crunching and grinding beneath his feet. At any moment he might spring.

“What do ye think I mean to do wi’ ye now?” he moaned. . . . “Eh? . . . What do ye think I mean to do wi’ ye now?”

As he came grinning in rage his lips ran out to their full width, and the tense slit shewed his teeth to their

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roots. The gums were white. The stricture of the lips had squeezed them bloodless.

He went back to the dresser once more and bent low beside it, glancing at his son across his left shoulder, with his head flung back sideways, his right fist clenched low and ready from a curve of the elbow. It swung heavy as a mallet by his thigh. Janet got to her knees and came shuffling across the floor on them, though her dress was tripping her, clasping her outstretched hands, and sobbing in appeal, "Faither, faither; oh, faither; for God's sake, faither!" She clung to him. He unclenched his fist and lifted her away. Then he came crouching and quivering across the floor, slowly, a gleaming devilry in the eyes that devoured his son. His hands were like outstretched claws, and shivered with each shiver of the voice that moaned, through set teeth, "What do ye think I mean to do wi' ye now? . . . What do ye think I mean to do wi' ye now? . . . Ye damned sorrow and disgrace that ye are—what do ye think I mean to do wi' ye now?"

"Run, John!" screamed Mrs. Gourlay, leaping to her feet. With a hunted cry young Gourlay sprang to the door. So great had been the fixity of Gourlay's wrath, so tense had he been in one direction, as he moved slowly on his prey, that he could not leap to prevent him. As John plunged into the cool, soft darkness, his mother's "Thank God!" rang past him on the night.

His immediate feeling was of coolness and width and spaciousness, in contrast with the hot grinding hostility, that had bored so closely in on him, for the last hour. He felt the benignness of the darkened heavens. A tag of some forgotten poem he had read came back to his

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mind, and, "Come kindly night and cover me," he muttered, with shaking lips; and felt how true it was. My God, what a relief to be free of his father's eyes! They had held him till his mother's voice broke the spell. They seemed to burn him now.

What a fool he had been to face his father when empty both of food and drink. Every man was down-hearted when he was empty. If his mother had had time to get the tea, it would have been different,—but the fire had been out when he went in. "He wouldn't have downed me so easy, if I had had anything in me," he muttered, and his anger grew, as he thought of all he had been made to suffer. For he was still the swaggerer. Now that the incubus of his father's tyranny no longer pressed on him directly, a great hate rose within him for the tyrant. He would go back and have it out when he was primed. "It's the only hame I have," he sobbed angrily to the darkness; "I have no other place to gang till! Yes, I'll go back and have it out with him when once I get something in me, so I will." It was no disgrace to suck courage from the bottle, for that encounter with his father, for nobody could stand up to black Gourlay; nobody. Young Gourlay was yielding to a peculiar fatalism of minds diseased: all that affects them seems different from all that affects everybody else; they are even proud of their separate and peculiar doom. Young Gourlay not thought, but felt it—he was different from everybody else. The heavens had cursed nobody else with such a terrible sire. It was no cowardice to fill yourself with drink before you faced him.

A drunkard will howl you an obscene chorus the mo-

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ment after he has wept about his dead child. For a mind in the delirium of drink is no longer a coherent whole, but a heap of shattered bits, which it shows one after the other to the world. Hence the many transformations of that semi-madness, and their quick variety. Young Gourlay was shewing them now. His had always been a wandering mind, deficient in application and control, and as he neared his final collapse, it became more and more variable, the prey of each momentary thought. In a short five minutes of time, he had been alive to the beauty of the darkness, cowering before the memory of his father's eyes, sobbing in self-pity and angry resolve, shaking in terror—indeed he was shaking now. But his vanity came uppermost. As he neared the Red Lion, he stopped suddenly, and the darkness seemed on fire against his cheeks. He would have to face curious eyes, he reflected. It was from the Red Lion he and Aird had started so grandly in the autumn. It would never do to come slinking back like a whipped cur; he must carry it off bravely in case the usual busybodies should be gathered round the bar. So with his coat flapping lordly on either side of him, his hands deep in his trouser-pockets, and his hat on the back of his head, he drove at the swing-doors with an outshot chest, and entered with a "breenge." But for all his swagger he must have had a face like death, for there was a cry among the idlers. A man breathed, "My God! What's the matter?" With shaking knees Gourlay advanced to the bar, and, "For God's sake, Aggie," he whispered, "give me a Kinblythmont!"

It went at a gulp.

"Another!" he gasped, like a man dying of thirst,

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whom his first sip maddens for more. "Another! Another!"

He had tossed the other down his burning throat, when Deacon Allardyce came in.

He knew his man the moment he set eyes on him, but, standing at the door, he arched his hand above his brow, as you do in gazing at a dear unexpected friend, whom you pretend not to be quite sure of, so surprised and pleased are you to see him there.

"Ith it Dyohn?" he cried. "It *ith* Dyohn!" And he toddled forward with outstretched hand. "Man Dyohn!" he said again, as if he could scarce believe the good news, and he waggled the other's hand up and down, with both his own clasped over it. "I'm proud to thee you, thir; I am that. And tho you're won hame, aye! Im-phm! And how are ye tummin on?"

"Oh, I'm all right, Deacon," said Gourlay with a silly laugh. "Have a wet?" The whiskey had begun to warm him.

"A wha-at?" said the Deacon, blinking in a puzzled fashion with his bleary old eyes.

"A dram—a drink—a drop o' the Auld Kirk," said Gourlay, with a stertorous laugh down through his nostrils.

"Hi! Hi!" laughed the Deacon in his best falsetto. "Ith that what ye call it up in Embro? A wet, aye! Ah, well, maybe I will take a little drope—theeing you're tho ready wi' your offer."

They drank together.

"Aggie, fill me a mutchkin when you're at it," said Gourlay to the pretty barmaid with the curly hair. He had spent many an hour with her last summer in the

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bar. The four big whiskies he had swallowed in the last half hour, were singing in him now, and he blinked at her drunkenly.

There was a scarlet ribbon on her dark curls, coquetish, vivid, and Gourlay stared at it dreamily, partly in a drunken daze, and partly because a striking colour always brought a musing and self-forgetting look within his eyes. All his life he used to stare at things dreamily, and come to himself with a start when spoken to. He forgot himself now.

“ Aggie,” he said, and put his hand out to hers clumsily where it rested on the counter; “ Aggie, that ribbon’s infernal bonny on your dark hair! ”

She tossed her head, and perked away from him on her little high heels. Him, indeed!—the drunkard! She wanted none of his compliments!

There were half a dozen in the place by this time, and they all stared with greedy eyes. “ That’s young Gourlay—him that was *expelled*,” was heard, the last an emphatic whisper, with round eyes of awe at the offence that must have merited such punishment. “ *Expelled*, mind ye!”—with a round shake of the head. “ Watch Allardyce. We’ll see fun.”

“ What’s this ‘ expelled ’ is, now? ” said John Toodle, with a very considering look and tone in his uplifted face—“ properly speaking, that is,” he added—implying that of course he knew the word in its ordinary sense, but was not sure of it “ properly speaking.”

“ Flung oot,” said Drucken Wabster, speaking from the fulness of his own experience.

“ Whisht!” said a third. “ Here’s Tam Brodie. Watch what *he* does.”

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The entrance of Brodie spoiled sport for the Deacon. He had nothing of that malicious *finesse* that made Allardyce a genius at flicking men on the raw. He went straight to his work, stabbing like an awl.

“Hal-lo!” he cried, pausing with contempt in the middle of the word, when he saw young Gourlay. “Hal-lo! *You* here!—Brig o’ the Mains, Miss, if *you* please.—Aye man! God, you’ve been making a name up in Embro. I hear you stood up till him gey weel”—and he winked openly to those around.

Young Gourlay’s maddened nature broke at the insult. “Damn you,” he screamed, “leave *me* alone, will you? I have done nothing to *you*, have I?”

Brodie stared at him across his suspended whiskey-glass, an easy and assured contempt curling his lip. “Don’t greet owre’t, my bairn,” said he—and even as he spoke John’s glass shivered on his grinning teeth. Brodie leapt on him, lifted him, and sent him flying.

“That’s a game of your father’s, you damned dog,” he roared. “But there’s mair than him can play the game!”

“Canny, my freendth, canny!” piped Allardyce, who was vexed at a fine chance for his peculiar craft, being spoiled by mere brutality of handling. All this was most inartistic. Brodie never had the fine stroke.

Gourlay picked himself bleeding from the floor, and holding a handkerchief to his mouth, plunged headlong from the room. He heard the derisive roar that came after him, stop—strangled by the sharp swing-to of the door. But it seemed to echo in his burning ears as he strode madly on through the darkness. He uncorked his mutchkin and drank it like water. His swollen lip

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smarted at first, but he drank till it was a mere dead lump to his tongue, and he could not feel the whiskey on the wound.

His mind at first was a burning whirl through drink and rage; with nothing determined and nothing definite. But thought began to shape itself. In a vast vague circle of consciousness his mind seemed to sit in the centre and think with preternatural clearness. Though all around was whirling and confused, drink had endowed some inner eye of the brain with unnatural swift vividness. Far within the humming circle of his mind he saw an instant and terrible revenge on Brodie, acted it and lived it now. His desires were murderers, and he let them slip, gloating in the cruelties that hot fancy wreaked upon his enemy. Then he suddenly remembered his father. A rush of fiery blood seemed to drench all his body, as he thought of what had passed between them. "But, by Heaven," he swore, as he threw away his empty bottle, "he won't use me like that another time; I have blood in me now." His maddened fancy began building a new scene, with the same actors, the same conditions, as the other, but an issue gloriously diverse. With vicious delight he heard his father use the same sneers, the same gibes, the same brutalities—then he turned suddenly and had him under foot, kicking, bludgeoning, stamping the life out. He would do it, by Heaven, he would do it! The memory of what had happened came fiercely back, and made the pressing darkness burn. His wrath was brimming on the edge, ready to burst, and he felt proudly that it would no longer ebb in fear. Whiskey had killed fear, and left a hysterical madman, all the more dangerous because he was so

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weak. Let his father try it on now! He was ready for him!

And his father was ready for him; for he knew what had happened at the inn. Mrs. Webster, on her nightly hunt for the man she had sworn to honour and obey, having drawn several public houses blank, ran him to earth at last, in the barroom of the Red Lion. "Yes, yes, Kirsty," he cried, eager to prevent her tongue, "I know I'm a blagyird—but, oh the terrible thing that has happened!" He so possessed her with his graphic tale that he was allowed to go chuckling back to his potations, while she ran hot-foot to the Green Shutters.

"Eh, poo-oor Mrs. Gourlay; and oh, your poo-oor boy, too; and eh, that brute, Tam Brodie!—" even as she came through the door the voluble clatter was shrilling out the big tidings, before she was aware of Gourlay's presence. She faltered beneath his black glower.

"Go on!" he said, and ground it out of her.

"The damned sumph!" he growled, "to let Brodie hammer him!" For a moment, it is true, his anger was divided, stood in equipoise, even dipped 'Brodie-ward.' "I've an account to saddle wi' *him!*" he thought grimly. "When *I* get my claw on his neck, I'll teach him better than to hit a Gourlay! I wonder," he mused, with a pride in which was neither doubt nor wonder, "I wonder will he fling the father as he flang the son!" But that was the instinct of his blood, not enough to make him pardon John. On the contrary here was a new offence of his offspring. On the morrow Barbie would be burning with another affront which he had put upon the name of Gourlay. He would waste no time when he

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came back, be he drunk or be he sober; he would strip the flesh off him.

“Jenny,” he said, “bring me the step-ladder.”

He would pass the time till the prodigal came back—and he was almost certain to come back, for where could he go in Barbic?—he would pass the time, by trying to improve the appearance of the House. He had spent money on his house till the last, and even now, had the instinct to embellish it. Not that it mattered to him now, still he could carry out a small improvement he had planned before. The kitchen was ceiled in dark timber, and on the rich brown rafters there were wooden pegs and bars, for the hanging of Gourlay’s sticks and fishing rods. His gun was up there, too, just above the hearth. It had occurred to him about a month ago, however, that a pair of curving steel rests, that would catch the glint from the fire, would look better beneath his gun than the dull pegs, where it now lay against a joist. He might as well pass the time by putting them up.

The bringing of the steps, light though they were, was too much for Janet’s weak frame, and she stopped in a fit of coughing, clutching the ladder for support, while it shook to her spasms.

“Tuts, Jenny, this’ll never do,” said Gourlay, not unkindly. He took the ladder away from her and laid his hand on her shoulder. “Away to your bed, lass! You maunna sit so late.”

But Janet was anxious for her brother, and wanted to sit up till he came home. She answered, “Yes,” to her father, but idled discreetly, to consume the time.

“Where’s my hammer?” snarled Gourlay.

“Is it no by the clock?” said his wife wearily. “Oh,

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I remember, I remember! I gied it to Mrs. Webster to break some brie-stone, to rub the front door-step wi'. It'll be lying in the porch!"

"Oh, aye, as usual," said Gourlay; "as usual!"

"John!" she cried in alarm, "you don't mean to take down the gun, do ye?"

"Huts, you auld fule, what are you skirling for? D'ye think I mean to shoot the dog? Set back on your creepie, and make less noise, will ye?"

Ere he had driven a nail in the rafter John came in, and sat down by the fire, taking up the great poker, as if to cover his nervousness. If Gourlay had been on the floor he would have grappled with him there and then. But the temptation to gloat over his victim from his present height was irresistible. He went up another step, and sat down on the very summit of the ladder, his feet resting on one of the lower rounds. The hammer he had been using was lying on his thigh, his hand clutched about its haft.

"Aye man, you've been taking a bit walk, I hear!"

John made no reply, but played with the poker. It was so huge, owing to Gourlay's whim, that when it slid through his fingers, it came down on the muffled hearthstone with a thud like a paviour's hammer.

"I'm told you saw the Deacon on your rounds? Did he compliment you on your return?"

At the quiet sneer a lightning-flash shewed John that Allardyce had quizzed him, too. For a moment he was conscious of a vast self-pity. "Damn them, they're all down on me," he thought. Then a vindictive rage against them all took hold of him, tense, quivering.

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"Did you see Thomas Brodie when you were out?" came the suave enquiry.

"I saw him," said John, raising fierce eyes to his father's. He was proud of the sudden firmness in his voice. There was no fear in it, no quivering. He was beyond caring what happened to the world or him.

"Oh, you saw him," roared Gourlay, as his anger leapt to meet the anger of his son. "And what did he say to you, may I spier? . . . Or may be I should spier what he did . . . Eh?" he grinned.

"By God, I'll kill ye," screamed John, springing to his feet, with the poker in his hand. The hammer went whizzing past his ear. Mrs. Gourlay screamed and tried to rise from her chair, her eyes goggling in terror. As Gourlay leapt, John brought the huge poker with a crash on the descending brow. The fiercest joy of his life was the dirl that went up his arm, as the steel thrilled to its own hard impact on the bone. Gourlay thudded on the fender, his brow crashing on the rim.

At the blow there had been a cry as of animals, from the two women. There followed an eternity of silence, it seemed, and a haze about the place, yet not a haze, for everything was intensely clear, only it belonged to another world. One terrible fact had changed the Universe. The air was different now; it was full of murder. Everything in the room had a new significance, a sinister meaning. The effect was that of an unholy spell.

As through a dream Mrs. Gourlay's voice was heard crying on her God.

John stood there, suddenly weak in his limbs, and stared, as if petrified, at the red poker in his hand. A little wisp of grizzled hair stuck to the square of it,

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severed, as by scissors, between the sharp edge and the bone. It was the sight of that bit of hair that roused him from his stupor—it seemed so monstrous and horrible, sticking all by itself to the poker. “I didna strike him so hard,” he pleaded, staring vaguely, “I didna strike him so hard.” Now that the frenzy had left him, he failed to realise the force of his own blow. Then with a horrid fear on him, “Get up, faither,” he entreated, “get up, faither; oh man, you micht get up!”

Janet, who had bent above the fallen man, raised an ashen face to her brother, and whispered hoarsely, “His heart has stopped, John; you have killed him!”

Steps were heard coming through the scullery. In the fear of discovery Mrs. Gourlay shook off the apathy that held her paralysed. She sprang up, snatched the poker from her son, and thrust it in the embers.

“Run, John; run for the doctor,” she screamed.—
“Oh, Mrs. Webster, Mrs. Webster, I’m glad to see ye. Mr. Gourlay fell from the top o’ the ladder, and smashed his brow on the muckle fender.”