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“Ah, ha, Deacon, my old cock, here you are!” The speaker smote the Deacon between his thin shoulder-blades, till the hat leapt on his startled cranium. “No, not a lengthy stay—just down for a flying visit to see my little girl. Dem’d glad to get back to town again—Barbie’s too quiet for my tastes. No life in the place, no life at all!”

The speaker was Davie Aird, draper and buck. “No life at all,” he cried, as he shot down his cuffs with a jerk, and swung up and down the barroom of the Red Lion. He was dressed in a long fawn overcoat reaching to his heels, with two big yellow buttons at the waist behind, in the most approved fashion of the horsey. He paused in his swaggering to survey the backs of his long white delicate hands, holding them side by side before him, as if to make sure they were the same size. He was letting the Deacon see his ring. Then pursing his chin down, with a fastidious and critical regard, he picked a long fair hair off his left coat-sleeve. He held it high as he had seen them do on the stage of the Theatre Royal. “Sweet souvenir!” he cried, and kissed it, “most dear remembrance!”

The Deacon fed on the sight. The richness of his satiric perception was too great to permit of speech. He could only gloat and be dumb.

“Waiting for Jack Gourlay,” Aird rattled again.

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“He’s off to College again, and we’re driving in his father’s trap to meet the express at Skeighan Station. Wonder what’s keeping the fellow. I like a man to be punctual. Business training, you see—yes, by Gad, two thousand parcels a week go out of our place, and all of ’em up to time! Ah, there he is,” he added, as the harsh grind of wheels was heard on the gravel at the door. “Thank God, we’ll soon be in civilisation.”

Young Gourlay entered great-coated and lordly, through the two halves of that easy-swinging door.

“Good!” he cried. “Just a minute, Aird, till I get my flask filled.”

“My weapon’s primed and ready,” Aird ha-ha’d, and slapped the breast pocket of his coat.

John birlled a bright sovereign on the counter, one of twenty old. Gourlay had battered his brains to get together for the boy’s expenses. The young fellow rattled the change into his trouser-pocket like a master of millions.

The Deacon, and another idler or two, gathered about the steps in the darkness, to see that royal going off. Peter Riney’s bunched-up little old figure could be seen on the front seat of the gig; Aird was already mounted behind. The mare (a worthy successor to Spanking Tam) pawed the gravel and fretted in impatience; her sharp ears, seen pricked against the gloom, worked to and fro. A widening cone of light shone out from the leftward lamp of the gig, full on a glistening laurel, which Simpson had growing by his porch. Each smooth leaf of the green bush gave back a separate gleam, vivid to the eye in that pouring yellowness. Gourlay stared at the bright evergreen, and forgot for

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a moment where he was. His lips parted, and—as they saw in the light from the door—his look grew dreamy and far-away.

The truth was that all the impressions of a last day at home were bitten in on his brain as by acid, in the very middle of his swaggering gusto. That gusto was largely real, true, for it seemed a fine thing to go splurging off to College in a gig; but it was still more largely assumed, to combat the sorrow of departure. His heart was in his boots at the thought of going back to accursed Edinburgh—to those lodgings, those dreary, damnable lodgings. Thus his nature was reduced to its real elements in the hour of leaving home; it was only for a swift moment he forgot to splurge, but for that moment the cloak of his swaggering dropped away and he was his naked self, morbidly alive to the impressions of the world, afraid of life, clinging to the familiar and the known. That was why he gazed with wistful eyes at that laurel clump, so vivid in the pouring rays. So vivid there, it stood for all the dear country round which was now hidden by the darkness; it centred his world among its leaves. It was a last picture of loved Barbie that was fastening on his mind. There would be fine gardens in Edinburgh, no doubt, but, oh, that couthie laurel by the Red Lion door! It was his friend; he had known it always.

The spell lasted but a moment, one of those moments searching a man's nature to its depths, yet flitting like a lonely shadow on the autumn wheat. But Aird was already fidgetting. "Hurry up, Jack," he cried, "we'll need to pelt if we mean to get the train."

Gourlay started. In a moment he had slipped from

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one self to another, and was the blusterer once more. "Right!" he splurged, "hover a blink till I light my cigar."

He was not in the habit of smoking cigars, but he had bought a packet on purpose, that he might light one before his admiring onlookers ere he went away. Nothing like cutting a dash.

He was seen puffing for a moment with indrawn cheeks, his head to one side, the flame of the flickering vesta lighting up his face, his hat pushed back till it rested on his collar, his fair hair hanging down his brow. Then he sprang to the driving seat and gathered up the reins. "Ta-ta, Deacon; see and behave yourself!" he flung across his shoulder, and they were off with a bound.

"Im-pidenth!" said the outraged Deacon.

Peter Riney was quite proud to have the honour of driving two such bucks to the station. It lent him a consequence; he would be able to say when he came back that he had been "awa wi' the young mester"—for Peter said "mester," and was laughed at by the Barbie wits who knew that "maister" was the proper English. The splurging twain rallied him and drew him out in talk, passed him their flasks at the Brownie's Brae, had him tee-heeing at their nonsense. It was a full-blooded night to the withered little man.

That was how young Gourlay left Barbie for what was to prove his last session at the University.

All Gourlay's swankie chaps had gone with the going of his trade; only Peter Riney, the queer little oddity, remained. There was a loyal simplicity in Peter which

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never allowed him to question the Gourlays. He had been too long in their service to be of use to any other; while there was a hand's turn to be done about the House with the Green Shutters, he was glad to have the chance of doing it. His respect for his surly tyrant was as great as ever; he took his pittance of a wage and was thankful. Above all he worshipped young Gourlay; to be in touch with a College-bred man was a reflected glory; even the escapades noised about the little town, to his gleeful ignorance, were the signs of a man of the world. Peter chuckled when he heard them talked of. "Terr'ble clever fallow, the young mester!" the bowed little man would say, sucking his pipe of an evening, "terr'ble clever fallow, the young mester—and hardy, too; infernal hardy!" Loyal Peter believed it.

But ere four months had gone, Peter was discharged. It was on the day after Gourlay sold Black Sally, the mare, to get a little money to go on with.

It was a bright spring day, of enervating softness, a foscie day, a day when the pores of everything seemed opened. People's brains felt pulpy, and they sniffed as with winter's colds. Peter Riney was opening a pit of potatoes in the big garden, shovelling aside the foot-deep mould, and tearing off the inner covering of yellow straw—which seemed strange and unnatural, somehow, when suddenly revealed in its glistening dryness, beneath the moist dark earth. Little crumbles of mould trickled down, in among the flattened shining straws. In a tree near Peter, two pigeons were gurgling and *rookety-cooing*, mating for the coming year. He fell to sorting out the potatoes, throwing the bad ones on a

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heap aside—"tattic-walin," as they call it in the north. The enervating softness was at work on Peter's head, too, and from time to time, as he waled, he wiped his nose on his sleeve.

Gourlay watched him for a long time without speaking. Once or twice he moistened his lips, and cleared his throat, and frowned—as one who would broach unpleasant news. It was not like him to hesitate. But the old man, encased in senility, was ill to disturb; he was intent on nothing but the work before him; it was mechanical and soothing and occupied his whole mind. Gourlay, so often the trampling brute without knowing it, felt it brutal to wound the faithful old creature dreaming at his toil. He would have found it much easier to discharge a younger and a keener man.

"Stop, Peter," he said at last; "I don't need you ainy more."

Peter rose stiffly from his knees and shook the mould with a pitiful gesture from his hands. His mouth was fallen slack, and showed a few yellow tusks.

"Eh?" he asked vaguely. The thought that he must leave the Gourlays could not penetrate his mind.

"I don't need you ainy more," said Gourlay again, and met his eye steadily.

"I'm gey auld," said Peter, still shaking his hands with that pitiful gesture, "but I only need a bite and a sup. Man, I'm willin' to tak onything."

"It's no that," said Gourlay sourly, "it's no that. But I'm giving up the business."

Peter said nothing, but gazed away down the garden, his sunken mouth forgetting to munch its straw, which dangled by his chin. "I'm an auld servant," he said

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at last, "and mind ye," he flashed in pride, "I'm a true ane."

"Oh, you're a' that," Gourlay grunted; "you have been a good servant."

"It'll be the poorhouse, it's like," mused Peter. "Man, have ye noathing for us to do?" he asked pleadingly.

Gourlay's jaw clamped. "Noathing, Peter," he said sullenly, "noathing"; and slipped some money into Peter's heedless palm.

Peter stared stupidly down at the coins. He seemed dazed. "Aye, weel," he said; "I'll feenish the tatties at ony rate."

"No, no, Peter," and Gourlay gripped him by the shoulder as he turned back to his work, "no, no; I have no right to keep you. Never mind about the money—you deserve something, going so suddenly after sic a long service. It's just a bit present to mind you o'—to mind you o'—" he broke off suddenly and scowled across the garden.

Some men, when a feeling touches them, express their emotion in tears; others by an angry scowl—hating themselves inwardly, perhaps, for their weakness in being moved, hating, too, the occasion that has probed their weakness. It was because he felt parting with Peter so keenly that Gourlay behaved more sullenly than usual. Peter had been with Gourlay's father in his present master's boyhood, had always been faithful and submissive; in his humble way was nearer the grain merchant than any other man in Barbie. He was the only human being Gourlay had ever deigned to joke with; and that, in itself, won him an affection. More,

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the going of Peter meant the going of everything. It cut Gourlay to the quick. Therefore he scowled.

Without a word of thanks for the money, Peter knocked the mould off his heavy boots, striking one against the other clumsily, and shuffled away across the bare soil. But when he had gone twenty yards, he stopped, and came back slowly. "Good-bye, sir," he said with a rueful smile, and held out his hand.

Gourlay gripped it. "Good-bye, Peter! good-bye; damn ye, man, good-bye!"

Peter wondered vaguely why he was sworn at. But he felt that it was not in anger. He still clung to his master's hand. "I've been fifty year wi' the Gourlays," said he. "Aye, aye; and this, it seems, is the end o't."

"Oh, gang away!" cried Gourlay, "gang away, man!" And Peter went away.

Gourlay went out to the big green gate where he had often stood in his pride, and watched his old servant going down the street. Peter was so bowed that the back of his velveteen coat was half-way up his spine, and the bulging pockets at the corners were mid-way down his thighs. Gourlay had seen the fact a thousand times, but it never gripped him before. He stared till Peter disappeared round the Bend o' the Brae.

"Aye, aye," said he "aye, aye. There goes the last o' them."

It was a final run of ill-luck that brought Gourlay to this desperate pass. When everything seemed to go against him, he tried several speculations, with a gambler's hope that they might do well, and retrieve the situation. He abandoned the sensible direction of affairs, that is, and trusted entirely to chance, as men are

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apt to do when despairing. And chance betrayed him. He found himself of a sudden at the end of his resources.

Through all his troubles his one consolation was the fact that he had sent John to the University. That was something saved from the wreck at any rate. More and more, as his other supports fell away, Gourlay attached himself to the future of his son. It became the sheet-anchor of his hopes. If he had remained a prosperous man John's success would have been merely incidental, something to disconsider in speech, at least, however pleased he might have been at heart. But now it was the whole of life to him. For one thing, the son's success would justify the father's past and prevent it being quite useless; it would have produced a minister, a successful man, one of an esteemed profession. Again, that success would be a salve to Gourlay's wounded pride; the Gourlays would show Barbie they could flourish yet, in spite of their present downcome. Thus, in the collapse of his fortunes, the son grew all-important in the father's eyes. Nor did his own poverty seem to him a just bar to his son's prosperity. "I have put him through his Arts," thought Gourlay; "surely he can do the rest himself. Lots of young chaps, when they warstle through their Arts, teach the sons of swells to get a little money to gang through Diveenity. My boy can surely do the like!" Again and again, as Gourlay felt himself slipping under in the world of Barbie, his hopes turned to John in Edinburgh. If that boy would only hurry up and get through, to make a hame for the lassie and the auld wife!