O. DOUGLAS

THE SETONS

HISTORICAL NOVEL

O. Douglas

The Setons (Historical Novel)

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EAN 4064066396350

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CHAPTER I

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"Look to the bakemeats, good Angelica,
Spare not for cost."
Romeo and Juliet.

A November night in Glasgow.

Mr. Thomson got out of the electric tram which every evening brought him from business, walked briskly down the road until he came to a neat villa with *Jeanieville* cut in the pillar, almost trotted up the gravelled path, let himself in with his latchkey, shut the door behind him, and cried, "Are ye there, Mamma? Mamma, are ye there?"

After four-and-twenty years of matrimony John Thomson still cried for Jeanie his wife the moment he entered the house.

Mrs. Thomson came out of the dining-room and helped her husband to take off his coat.

"You're home, Papa," she said, "and in nice time, too. Now we'll all get our tea comfortable in the parlour before we change our clothes. (Jessie tell Annie Papa's in.) Your things are all laid out on the bed, John, and I've put your gold studs in a dress shirt—but whit's that you're carrying, John?"

John Thomson regarded his parcel rather shame-facedly. "It's a pine-apple for your party, Mamma. I was lookin' in a fruit-shop when I was waitin' for ma car and I just took a

notion to get it. Not," he added, "but what I prefer tinned ones maself."

Mrs. Thomson patted her husband's arm approvingly. "Well, that was real mindful of you, Papa. It'll look well on the table. Jessie," to her daughter, who at that moment came into the lobby from the kitchen, "get down another fruit dish. Here's Papa brought home a pine-apple for your party."

"Tea's in, Mamma," said Jessie; then she took the parcel from her father, and holding his arm drew him into the dining-room, talking all the time. "Come on, Papa, and see the table. It looks fine, and the pine-apple'll give it a finish. We've got a trifle from Skinner's, and we're having meringues and an apricot souffle and——"

"Now, Jessie," Mrs. Thomson broke in, "don't keep Papa, or the sausages'll get cold. Where's Rubbert and Alick? We'll niver be ready at eight o'clock at this rate."

As she spoke, Alick, her younger son, pranced into the room, and pretended to stand awestruck at the display.

"We're not half doing it in style, eh?" he said, and made a playful dive at a silver dish of chocolates. Jessie caught him by his coat, and in the scuffle the dish was upset and the chocolates emptied on the cloth.

"Oh, Mamma!" cried the outraged Jessie, "Look what he's done. He's nothing but a torment." Picking up the chocolates, she glared over her shoulder at her brother with great disapproval. "Such a sight as you are, too. If you can't get your hair to lie straight you're not coming to the party. Mind that."

Alick ruffled up his mouse-coloured locks and looked in no way dejected. "It's your own fault anyway," he said; "I didn't mean to spill your old sweeties. Come on, Mamma, and give us our tea, and leave that lord alone in her splendour;" and half carrying, half dragging his mother, he left the dining-room.

Jessie put the chocolates back and smoothed the shining cloth.

"He's an awful boy that Alick, Papa," she said, as she pulled out the lace edge of a d'oyley. "He's always up to some mischief."

"Ay, Jessie," said her father, "he's a wild laddie, but he's real well-meaning. There's your mother calling us. Come away to your tea. I can smell the sausages."

In the parlour they found the rest of the family seated at table. Mrs. Thomson was pouring tea from a fat brown teapot; Alick, with four half-slices of bread piled on his plate, had already begun, while Robert sat in his place with a book before him, his elbows on the table, his fingers in his ears. Jessie slid into her place and helped herself to a piece of bread.

"I wish, Mamma," she said, as she speared a ball of butter, "your hadn't had sausages for tea to-night. It's an awful smell through the house."

Mrs. Thomson laid down the cup she was lifting to her mouth.

"I'm sure, Jessie," she said, "you're ill to please. Who'd ever mind a smell of cooking in the house? And a nice tasty smell like sausages, too."

"It's such a common sort of smell in the evening," went on Jessie. "I wish we had late dinner. The Simpsons have it, and Muriel says it makes you feel quite different; more refined."

"Muriel Simpson's daft," put in Alick; "Ewan says it's her that's put his mother up to send him to an English school. He doesn't want to be made English."

"It's to improve his accent," said Jessie. "Yours is something awful."

Alick laughed derisively and began to speak in a clipt and mincing fashion which he believed to be "English."

"Alick! Stop it," said his mother. "Don't aggravate your sister."

Jessie tossed her head.

"He's not aggravating me, he's only making a fool of himself."

"Papa," said Alick, appealing to his father, "sure the English are awful silly."

Mr. Thomson's mouth was full, but he answered peaceably, "They haven't had our advantages, Alick, but they mean well."

"They mebbe mean well," said Alick, "but they *sound* gey daft."

Robert had been eating and reading at the same time and paying no attention to the conversation, but he now passed in his cup to his mother and asked, "Who's all coming to-night?"

"Well," said his mother, lifting the "cosy" from the teapot, "they're mostly Jessie's friends. Some of them I've never seen."

"I wish, Mamma," said Jessie, "that you hadn't made me ask the Hendrys and the Taylors. The Hendrys are so dowdy-looking, and Mr. Taylor's awful common."

"Indeed, Jessie," her mother retorted, "I wonder to hear you. The Hendrys are my oldest friends, and decenter women don't live; and as for Mr. Taylor, I'm sure he's real joky and a great help at an 'evening.'"

"He'll wear his velveteen coat," said Robert.

"I dare say," said Jessie. "Velveteen coat indeed: D'you know what he calls it?—his 'splush jaicket.'"

"Taylor's a toffy wee body," said Mr. Thomson "but a good Christian man. He's been superintendent of the Sabbath school for twenty years and he's hardly ever missed a day. Is that all from the Church, Mamma? You didn't think of asking the M'Roberts or the Andersons?"

"Oh, Papa!" said Jessie, sitting back helplessly.

"What's the matter with them, Jessie?" asked Mr. Thomson. "Are they not good enough for you?"

"Uch, Papa, it's not that. But I want this to be a nice party like the Simpsons give. They never have their parties spoiled by dowdy-looking people. It all comes of going to such a poor church. I don't say Mr. Seton's not as good as anybody, but the people in the church are no class; hardly one of them keeps a girl. I don't see why we can't go to a church in Pollokshields where there's an organ and society."

"Never heed her," broke in Mrs. Thomson; "she's a silly girl. Another sausage, Papa?"

"No, Mamma. No, thanks."

"Then we'd better all away and dress," said Mrs. Thomson briskly. "Your things are laid out on your bed, Papa, and I got you a nice made-up tie."

"I'm never to put on my swallow-tail?" asked Mr. Thomson, as he and his wife went upstairs together.

"'Deed, John, Jessie's determined on it."

Mr. Thomson wandered into his bedroom and surveyed the glories of his evening suit lying on the bed, then a thought struck him.

"Here, Mamma," he called. "Taylor hasn't got a swallow-tail and I wouldn't like him to feel out of it. I'll just put on my Sabbath coat—it's wiser-like, anyway."

Mrs. Thomson bustled in from another room and considered the question.

"It's a pity, too," she said, "not to let the people see you have dress-clothes, and I don't think Mr. Taylor's the man to mind—he's gey sure of himself. Besides, there'll be others to keep him company; a lot of them'll not understand it's full dress. I'm sure it would never have occurred to me if it hadn't been for Jessie. She's got ideas, that girl!"

At that moment, Jessie, wrapped in a dressing-gown and with her hair undone, came into the room and asked, "What about my hair, Mamma? Will I do it in rolls or in a Grecian knot?"

Mrs. Thomson pondered, with her head on one side and her bodice unbuttoned.

"Well, Jessie, I'm sure it's hard to say, but I think myself the Grecian is more uncommon; though, mind you, I like the rolls real well. But hurry, there's a good girl, and come and hook me, for that new bodice fair beats me."

"All right, Mamma," said Jessie. "I'll come before I put on my dress."

"I must say, John," said Mrs. Thomson, turning to her husband, "I envy you keeping thin, though I whiles think it's a pity so much good food goes into such a poor skin. I'm getting that stout I'm a burden to myself—and a sight as well."

"Not at all, Mamma," replied her husband; "you look real comfortable. I don't like those whippin'-posts of women."

"Well, Papa, they're elegant, you must say they're elegant, and they're easy to dress. It's a thought to me to get a new dress. I wonder if Jessie minded to tell Annie to have the teapot well heated before she infused the tea. We're to have tea at one end and coffee at the other, and that minds me I promised Jessie to get out the best tea-cosy—the white satin one with the ribbon-work poppies. It's in the top drawer of the best wardrobe! I'd better get it before my bodice is on, and I can stretch!"

There were sounds of preparation all over the house, and an atmosphere of simmering excitement. Alick's voice was heard loudly demanding that some persons unknown would restore to him the slippers they had—presumably—stolen; also his tartan tie. Annie rushed upstairs to say that the meringues had come but the cream wasn't inside them, it had arrived separately in a tin, and could Miss Jessie put it

in, as she couldn't trust herself; whereupon Jessie, with her hair in a Grecian knot, but still clad in a dressing-gown, fled to give the required help.

Presently Mrs. Thomson was hooked into her tight bodice of black satin made high to the neck and with a front of pink-flowered brocade. Alick found his slippers, and his mother helped him with his stiff, very wide Eton collar, and tied his tie, which was the same tartan as his kilt. Then she saw that Mr. Thomson's made-up tie was securely fastened down behind, and that his coat-collar sat properly; then, arm in arm, they descended to the drawing-room.

The drawing-room in Jeanieville was on the left side of the front door as you entered, a large room with a bow-window and two side windows. It had been recently papered and painted and refurnished. The wall-paper was yellow with a large design of chrysanthemums, and the woodwork white without spot or blemish. The thick Axminster carpet of peacock blue was thickly covered with yellow roses. It stopped about two feet from the wall all round, and the hiatus thus made was covered with linoleum which, rather unsuccessfully, tried to look like a parquet floor. There were many pictures on the wall in bright gilt frames, varied by hand-painted plaques and enlarged photographs. The "suite" of furniture was covered with brocade in a shade known as old gold; and a handsome cabinet with glass doors, and shelves covered with pale blue plush, held articles which in turn held pleasant memories for the Thomsons—objects of art from the *Rue de Rivoli* (they had all been in Paris for a fortnight last July) and cow-bells and carved bears from Lucerne.

"There's nothing enlarges the mind like travel," was a favourite saying of Mr. Thomson's, and his wife never failed to reply, "That's true, Papa, I'm sure."

To-night, in preparation for the party, the chairs and tables were pushed back to the wall, and various seats from the parlour and even the best bedroom had been introduced where they would be least noticed; a few forms with holland covers had also been hired from the baker for the occasion. The piano stood open, with "The Rosary" on the stand; the incandescent lights in their pink globes were already lit, and a fire—a small one, for the room would get hot presently—burned in the yellow-tiled grate.

Mr. and Mrs. Thomson paused for a moment in the doorway in order to surprise themselves.

"Well, well," said Mr. Thomson, while his wife hurried to the fireside to sweep away a fallen cinder. "You've been successful with your colour scheme, Mamma, I must say that. The yellow and white's cheery, and the blue of the carpet makes a fine contrast. You've taste right enough."

Mrs. Thomson, with her head on one side, regarded the room which, truth to say, in every detail seemed to her perfect, then she gave a long sigh.

"I don't know about taste, Papa," she said; "but how ever we'll keep all that white paint beats me. I'm thinking it'll be either me or Jessie that'll have to do it. I could not trust Annie in here, poor girl! She has such hashy ways. Now, Alick," to that youth who had sprung on her from behind, "try and behave well to-night, and not shame your sister before the Simpsons that she thinks so much of. I'm told Ewan Simpson was a perfect gentleman in an Eton suit at their party."

"Haw, haw!" laughed Alick derisively. "Who's wantin' to be a gentleman? Not me, anyway. Here, Mamma, are you going to ask wee Taylor to sing? Uch, do, he's a comic——"

"Alick," said his father reprovingly. "Mr. Taylor's not coming here to-night for you to laugh at."

"I know that," said Alick, rolling his head and looking somewhat abashed.

The entrance of Jessie and Robert diverted his parents' attention.

Jessie stood in the middle of the room and slowly turned herself round that her family might see her from all points of view.

"D'you like it, Mamma?" she asked.

"Yes, Jessie," said her mother slowly, "I do. Miss White's done well. The skirt hangs beautiful, and I must say the Empire style is becoming to you, though for myself I prefer the waist in its natural place. Walk to the door—yes—elegant."

"Very fine, Jessie," said her father.

"Do you like it, Robert?" asked Jessie.

Robert put down his book for a moment, glanced at his sister, nodded his head and said "Ucha," then returned to it.

"You're awful proud, Jessie," said Alick; "you think you're somebody."

"Never mind him, Jessie," said Mrs. Thomson. "Are ye sure we've got enough cups? Nobody'll be likely to take both tea and coffee, I suppose? Except mebbe Mr. Taylor—I whiles think that wee man's got both eatin' and drinkin' diabetes. I must say it seems to me a cold-like thing to let

them sit from eight to ten without a bite. My way was to invite them at six and give them a hearty set-down tea, and then at ten we had supper, lemonade and jam tartlets and fruit, and I'm sure nothing could have been nicer. Many a one has said to me, 'Mrs. Thomson, they're no parties like your parties; they're that hearty.' How ever'll they begin the evening when they're not cheered with a cup o' tea?"

"We'll begin with music, Mamma," said Jessie.

Mrs. Thomson sniffed.

"I do hope Annie'll manage the showing in all right," went on Jessie. "The Simpsons had one letting you in and another waiting in the bedrooms to help you off with your things."

Mrs. Thomson drew herself up.

"My friends are all capable of taking off their own things, Jessie, I'm thankful to say. They don't need a lady's maid; nor does Mrs. Simpson, let me tell you, for when I first knew her she did her own washing."

"Uch, Mamma," said Jessie.

"It's five minutes to eight," said Alick, "and I hear steps. I bet it's wee Taylor."

"Mercy!" said Mrs. Thomson, hunting wildly for her slippers which she had kicked off. "Am I all right, Jessie? Give me a book—any one—yes, that."

Alick heaved a stout volume—*Shakespeare's Country with Coloured Illustrations*—into his mother's lap, and she at once became absorbed in it, sitting stiffly in her chair, her skirt spread out.

Mr. Thomson looked nervous; Robert retreated vaguely towards the window curtains; even Jessie felt a little uncertain, though preserving an outward calm.

"There's the bell," said Alick; "I'm off."

Jessie clutched him by his coat. "You can't go now," she hissed. "I hear Annie going to the door."

They heard the sound of the front door opening, then a murmur of voices and a subdued titter from Annie, and it closed. Next Annie's skurrying footsteps were heard careering wildly for the best bedroom, followed—a long way behind—by other footsteps. Then the drawing-room door opened prematurely, and Mr. Taylor appeared.

CHAPTER II

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"Madam, the guests are come!"
Romeo and Juliet.

Mr. Taylor was a small man, with legs that did not seem to be a pair. He wore a velveteen coat, a white waistcoat, a lavender tie, and a flower in his buttonhole. In the doorway he stood rubbing his hands together and beaming broadly on the Thomsons.

"The girrl wanted me to wait on Mrs. Taylor coming downstairs, but I says to her, 'No ceremony for me, I'm a

plain man,' and in I came. How are you, Mrs. Thomson? And is Jessie a good wee miss? How are you, Thomson—and Rubbert? Alick, you've grown out of recognition."

"Take this chair, Mr. Taylor," said Mrs. Thomson, while *Shakespeare's Country with Coloured Illustrations* slipped unheeded to the floor; and Jessie glared her disapproval of the little man.

"Not at all. I'll sit here. Expecting quite a gathering to-night, Mrs. Thomson?"

"Well, Mr. Taylor, they're mostly young people, friends of Jessie's," Mrs. Thomson explained.

"Quite so. Quite so. I'm at home among the young people, Mrs. Thomson. Always a pleasure to see them enjoy theirselves. Here comes Mrs. Taylor. C'me away, m'dear, into the fire."

"You'd think he owned the house," Jessie muttered resentfully to Robert.

Mrs. Taylor was a tall, thin woman, with a depressed cast of countenance and a Roman nose. Her hair, rather thin on the top, was parted and crimped in careful waves. She was dressed in olive-green silk. In one hand she carried a black beaded bag, and she moved at a run with her head forward, coming very close to the people she was greeting and looking anxiously into their faces, as if expecting to find them suffering from some dire disease.

On this occasion the intensity of her grasp and gaze was almost painful as "How's Mrs. Thomson?" she murmured, and even Mrs. Thomson's hearty "I'm well, thanks," hardly seemed to reassure her. The arrival of some other people

cut short her greetings, and she and her husband retired arm in arm to seats on the sofa.

Now the guests arrived in quick succession.

Mrs. Thomson toiled industriously to find something to say to each one, and Jessie wrestled with the question of seats. People seemed to take up so much more room than she had expected. The sofa which she had counted on to hold four looked crowded with three, and of course her father had put the two Miss Hendrys into the two best arm-chairs, and when the Simpsons came, fashionably late (having only just finished dinner), they had to content themselves with the end of a holland-covered form hired from the baker. They were not so imposing in appearance as one would have expected from Jessie's awe of them. They had both round fat faces and perpetually open mouths, elaborately dressed hair and slightly supercilious expressions. Their accent was refined, and they embarrassed Mrs. Thomson at the outset by shaking her hand and leaving it up in the air.

The moment the Misses Simpson were seated Jessie sped towards a tall young man lounging against a window and brought him in triumph to them.

"I would like to introduce to you Mr. Stewart Stevenson—the artist, you know. Miss Gertrude Simpson, Miss Muriel Simpson—Mr. Stevenson."

"Now," she said to herself, as she walked away, "I wonder if I did that right? I'm almost sure I should have said his name first."

"Jessie," said her father in a loud whisper, clutching at her sleeve, "should we not be doing something? It's awful dull. I could ask Taylor to sing, if you like."

"Uch, no Papa," said Jessie, "at least not yet. I'll ask Mr. Inverarity—he's a lovely singer;" and shaking herself free, she approached a youth with a drooping moustache and a black tie who was standing alone and looking—what he no doubt felt—neglected.

"Oh, Mr. Inverarity," said Jessie, "I know you sing. Now," archly, "don't say you haven't brought your music."

"Well," said Mr. Inverarity, looking cheered, "as a matter of fact I did bring a song or two. They're in the hall, beside my coat; I'll get them."

"Not at all," said Jessie. "Alick! run out to the hall and bring in Mr. Inverarity's music. He's going to give us a song."

Alick went and returned with a large roll of songs. "Here," he remarked to Jessie in passing, "if he sings all these we'll do."

Mr. Inverarity pondered over the songs for a few seconds and then said, "If you would be so kind, Miss Thomson, as to accompany me, I might try this."

"All right," said Jessie, as she removed her jangling bangles and laid them on the top of the piano. "I'll do my best, but I'm not an awfully good accompanist." She gave the piano-stool a twirl, seated herself, and struck some rather uncertain chords, while Mr. Inverarity cleared his throat, stared gloomily at the carpet, and then lustily announced that it was his Wedding Morn Ding Dong.

There was a commendable silence during the performance, and in the chorus of "Thank yous" and "Lovelys" that followed Jessie led the singer to a girl with

an "artistic" gown and prominent teeth, whom she introduced as "Miss Waterston, awfully fond of music."

"Pleased to meet you," said Mr. Inverarity. "No," as Miss Waterston tried to make room for him, "I wouldn't think of crowding you. I'll just sit on this wee stool, if nobody has any objections."

Miss Waterston giggled. "That was a lovely song of yours, Mr. Inverarity," she said. "I did enjoy it."

"Thank you, Miss Waterston. D'you sing yourself?"

"Oh, well," said Miss Waterston, smiling coyly at the toe of her slipper, "just a little. In fact," with a burst of confidence, "I've got a part in this year's production of the Sappho Club. Well, of course, I'm only in the chorus, but it's something to be even in the chorus of such a high-class Club. Don't you think so?"

"And what," asked Mr. Inverarity, "is the piece to be produced?"

"Oh! It's the *Gondoliers*, a kind of old-fashioned thing, of course. I would rather have done something more up to date, like *The Chocolate Box Girl*, it's lovely."

"It is," Mr. Inverarity agreed, "very tuney; but d'you know, of all these things my wee favourite's *The Convent Girl*."

"Fency!" said Miss Waterston, "I've never seen it. I think, don't you, that music's awfully inspiring? When I hear good music I just feel as if I could—as if I—well, you know what I mean."

"I've just the same feeling myself, Miss Waterston," Mr. Inverarity assured her—"something like what's expressed in the words 'Had I the wings of a dove I would flee,' eh? Is that it?" and Mr. Inverarity nudged Miss Waterston with his elbow.

The room was getting very hot, Mr. Thomson in his nervousness having inadvertently heaped the fire with coals.

A very small man recited "Lasca" on the hearth-rug, and melted visibly between heat and emotion.

"I say," said Mr. Stevenson to Miss Gertrude Simpson, "he looks like Casabianca. By the way, was Casabianca the name of the boy on the ship?"

"I couldn't say, I'm sure," she replied, looking profoundly uninterested.

"Do you go much to the theatre?" he asked her sister.

"We go when there's anything good on," she said.

"Such as——?"

"Oh! I don't know——" She looked vaguely round the room. "Something amusing, you know, but quite nice too."

"I see. D'you care for the Repertory?"

"Oh, well," said Miss Muriel, "they're not bad, but they do such dull things. You remember, Gertrude," leaning across to her sister, "yon awful silly thing we saw? What was it called? Yes, *Prunella*. And that same night some friends asked us to go to *Baby Mine*—everyone says it's

killing—but Papa had taken the seats and he made us use them. It was too bad. We felt awfully 'had.'"

"*I* think," said Miss Gertrude, "that the Repertory people are very amateurish."

Mr. Stewart Stevenson was stung.

"My dear young lady," he said severely, "one or two of the Repertory people are as good as anyone on the London stage and a long sight better than most."

"Fency," said Miss Gertrude coldly.

Stewart Stevenson looked about for a way of escape, but he was hemmed round by living walls and without doing violence he could not leave his seat. Mrs. Thomson sat before him in a creaking cane chair listening to praise of her drawing-room from Jessie's dowdy friend, Miss Hendry.

"My! Mrs. Thomson, it's lovely! *Whit* a carpet—pile near up to your knees!"

"D'ye like the colouring, Miss Hendry?" asked Mrs. Thomson.

Miss Hendry looked round at the yellow walls and bright gilt picture frames shining in the strong incandescent light.

"Mrs. Thomson," she said solemnly, "it's *chaste*!"

Mrs. Thomson sighed as if the burden of her magnificence irked her, then: "How d'ye think the evening's goin'?" she whispered.

"Very pleasant," Miss Hendry whispered back, "What about a game?"

"I don't know," said poor Mrs. Thomson. "*I* would say it would be the very thing, but mebbe Jessie wouldn't think it genteel."

A girl stood up beside the piano with her violin, and somebody said "Hush!" loudly, so Mrs. Thomson at once subsided, in so far as a very stout person can subside in an inadequate cane chair, and composed herself to listen to Scots airs very well played. The familiar tunes cheered the company wonderfully; in fact, they so raised Mr. Taylor's spirits that, to Jessie's great disgust, and in spite of the raised eyebrows of the Simpsons, he pranced in the limited space left in the middle of the room and invited anyone who liked to take a turn with him.

"Jolly thing a fiddle," said Stewart Stevenson cheerily to Miss Muriel Simpson.

"The violin is always nice," primly replied Miss Muriel, "but I don't care for Scotch airs—they're so common. We like high-class music."

"Perhaps you play yourself?" Mr. Stevenson suggested.

"Oh no," said Miss Muriel in a surprised tone.

"Do you care for reading?" he asked her sister.

"Oh, I like it well enough, but it's an awful waste of time."

"Are you so very busy, then?"

"Well, what with calling, and going into town, and the evenings so taken up with dances and bridge parties, it's quite a rush."

"It must be," said Mr. Stevenson.

"And besides," said Miss Gertrude, "we do quite a lot of fency work."

"But still, Gertrude," her sister reminded her, "we nearly always read on Sunday afternoons."

"That's so," said Gertrude; "but people have got such a way of dropping in to tea. By the way, Mr. Stevenson, we'll hope to see you, if you should happen to be in our direction any Sunday."

"That is very kind of you," said Mr. Stevenson.

"There!" cried Mrs. Thomson, bounding in her chair, "Miss Elizabeth's going to sing. That's fine!"

Stewart Stevenson looked over his shoulder and saw a girl standing at the piano. She was slight and straight and tall—more than common tall—grey-eyed and golden-haired, and looked, he thought, as little in keeping with the company gathered in the drawing-room of Jeanieville as a Romney would have looked among the bright gilt-framed pictures on the wall.

She spoke to her accompanist, then, clasping her hands behind her, she threw back her head with a funny little gesture and sang.

> "Jock the Piper steps ahead,
> Taps his fingers on the reed:
> His the tune to wake the dead,
> Wile the salmon from the Tweed,
> Cut the peats and reap the corn,
> Kirn the milk and fold the flock—

Never bairn that yet was born
Could be feared for Heather Jock.

Jock the Piper wakes his lay
When the hills are red with dawn!
You can hear him pipe away
After window-blinds are drawn.
In the sleepy summer hours,
When you roam by scaur or rock,
List the tune among the flowers,
'Tis the song of Heather Jock.

Jock the Piper, grave and kind,
Lifts the towsy head that drops!
Never eyes could look behind
When his fingers touch the stops.

Bairns that are too tired to play,
Little hearts that sorrows mock—
'There are blue hills far away,
Come with me,' says Heather Jock.

He will lead them fast and far
Down the hill and o'er the sea,
Through the sunset gates afar
To the Land of Ought-to-be!
Where the treasure ships unload,
Treasures free from bar and lock,
Jock the Piper kens the road,
Up and after Heather Jock."

In his enthusiasm Mr. Stevenson turned to the Misses Simpson and cried:

"What a crystal voice! Who is she?"

The Misses Simpson regarded him for a moment, then Miss Gertrude replied coldly:

"Her name's Elizabeth Seton, and her father's the Thomsons' minister. It's quite a poor church down in the slums, and they haven't even an organ. Pretty? D'you think so? I think there's awfully little *in* her face. Her voice is nice, of course, but she's got no taste in the choice of songs."

Stewart Stevenson was saved from replying, for the door opened cautiously and Annie the servant put her head in and nodded meaningly in the direction of her mistress, whereupon Mrs. Thomson heaved herself from her inadequate seat and gave a hand—an unnecessary hand—to the spare Miss Hendry.

"Supper at last!" she said. "I'm sure it's time. It niver was my way to keep people sitting wanting food, but there! What can a body say with a grown-up daughter? Eh! I hope Annie's got the tea and coffee real hot, for everything else is cold."

"Never mind, Mrs. Thomson," said Miss Hendry; "it's that warm we'll not quarrel with cold things."

They were making their way to the door, when Mr. Taylor rushed forward and, seizing Mrs. Thomson's arm, drew it through his own, remarking reproachfully, "Oh, Mrs. Thomson, you were niver goin' in without me? Now, Miss Hendry," turning playfully to that austere lady, "don't you be jealous! You know you're an old sweetheart of mine, but I must keep in with Mrs. Thomson to-night—tea and penny-things, eh?" and he nudged Miss Hendry, who only sniffed and said, "You've great spirits for your age, Mr. Taylor, I'm sure."

Mr. Taylor, who was still hugging Mrs. Thomson's arm, to her great embarrassment, pretended indignation.

"Ma age, indeed!" he said. "I'm not a day older in spirit than when I was courtin'. Ask Mrs. Taylor, ask her"; and he jerked his thumb over his shoulder at his wife, who came mincing on Mr. Thomson's arm, then pranced into the dining-room with his hostess.

"Whit is it, Miss Hendry?" asked Mrs. Taylor, coming very close and looking anxiously into her face. "Are ye feelin' the heat?"

"Not me, Mrs. Taylor," said Miss Hendry. "It's that man of yours, jokin' away as usual. He says he's as young as when he was courtin'."

"Ay," said Mrs. Taylor mournfully, "he's wonderful; but ye niver know when trouble'll come. Lizzy Leitch is down. A-ay. Quite sudden yesterday morning, when she was beginning her fortnight's washin', and I saw her well and bright last Wensday—or was it Thursday? No, it was Wensday at tea-time, and now she's unconscious and niver likely to regain it, so the doctor says. Ay, trouble soon comes, and we niver——"

"Mrs. Taylor," said Mr. Thomson nervously, "I think we'd better move on. We're keepin' people back. Miss Hendry, who'll we get to take you in, I wonder? Is there any young man you fancy?"

"Oh, Mr. Thomson," said Miss Hendry, "it's ower far on in the afternoon for that with me."

"Not at all," said Mr. Thomson politely, looking about for a squire. "Here, Alick," he cried, catching sight of his

younger son, "come here and take Miss Hendry in to supper."

Alick had been boring his way supper-wards unimpeded by a female, but he cheerfully laid hands on Miss Hendry (his idea of escorting a lady was to propel her forcibly) and said, "Come on and get a seat before the rest get in, and we'll have a rare feed. It's an awful class supper. Papa brought a real pine-apple, and there's meringues and all."

Half dragged and half pushed, Miss Hendry reached the dining-room, where Mrs. Thomson, flushed and anxious, sat ensconced behind her best teacups, clasping nervously the silver teapot which was covered by her treasured white satin tea-cosy with the ribbon-work poppies. The rest of the company followed thick and fast. There were not seats for all, so some of the men having deposited their partners, stood round the table ready to hand cups.

Mrs. Thomson filled some teacups and looked round helplessly. "Where's Rubbert?" she murmured.

"Can I assist you, Mrs. Thomson?" said a polite youth behind her, clad in a dinner jacket, a double collar, and a white tie.

"Since you're so kind," said Mrs. Thomson. "That's the salver with the sugar and cream; it'll hold two cups at a time. The girl's taking round the sangwiches, if you'd just follow her."

At the other end of the table sat Jessie with the coffee-cups, but as most of the guests preferred tea, she had more time than her harassed mother to look about her.

The sight of food had raised everyone's spirits, and the hum of conversation was loud and cheerful.

Mr. Inverarity, sitting on the floor at Miss Waterston's feet, a lock of sleek black hair falling in an engaging way over one eye, a cup of tea on the floor beside him and a sandwich in each hand, was being so amazingly witty that his musical companion was kept in one long giggle.

Mrs. Taylor was looking into Mr. Thomson's face as she told him an involved and woeful tale, and the extent of the little man's misery could be guessed by the faces he was making in his efforts to take an intelligent interest in the recital.

Alick had deserted Miss Hendry for the nonce, but his place had been taken by her sister, Miss Flora, a lady as small and fat as Miss Hendry was tall and thin. They had spread handkerchiefs on their brown silk laps, and were comfortably enjoying the good things which Alick, raven-like, brought to them at intervals.

The Simpsons, Jessie regretted to see, had not been as well looked after as their superiority merited. Miss Muriel had been taken in to supper by Robert. He had supplied her with food, but of conversation, of light table-talk, he had nothing to offer her. Neither he nor the lady was making the slightest effort to conceal the boredom each felt in the other's company.

Gertrude Simpson had been unfortunate again in the way of a chair, and was seated on an indifferent wicker one culled from the parlour. Beside her stood Stewart Stevenson, eating a cream-cake, and looking disinclined for conversation.

"Jessie," said Mrs. Thomson, who had left her place behind the teacups in desperation. "Jessie, just look at

Annie. The silly girl's not trying to feed the folk, she's just listening to what they're saying."

Jessie looked across the room to where Annie stood dangling an empty plate and listening with a sympathetic grin to a conversation between Mr. Taylor and a lady friend, then, seizing a plate of cakes, she set off to recall her to her duty.

"It's an awful heat," said poor Mrs. Thomson to no one in particular. Elizabeth Seton, who had crossed the room to speak to someone, stopped.

"Everything's going beautifully, Mrs. Thomson," she said. "Just look how happy everyone looks; it's a lovely party."

"I'm sure," said Mrs. Thomson, "I'm glad you think so, for it's not my idea of a party. But there, I'm old-fashioned, as Jessie often says. Tell me—d'ye think there's enough to eat?"

Elizabeth Seton laughed. "Enough! Why, there's oceans. Do let me carry some things round. It's time for the sweets, isn't it? May I take a meringue on one plate and some of the trifle on another, and ask which they'll have?"

"I wish you would," said Mrs. Thomson, "for I never think a body gets anything at these stand-up meals." She put a generous helping of trifle on a plate and handed it to Elizabeth. "And mind to say there's chocolate shape as well, and there's a kind of apricot souffley thing too. Papa brought in the pine-apple. Wasn't it real mindful of him?"

"It was indeed," said Elizabeth heartily, as she set off with her plates.