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**Girlhood and Womanhood The
Story of some Fortunes and
Misfortunes**

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CAIN'S BRAND

I.—ON THE MOOR.

CAIN'S BRAND! that is no fact of the far past, no legend of the Middle Ages, for are there not Cains among us; white-faced, haggard-featured Cains to the last? Men who began with a little injury, and did not dream that their gripe would close in deadly persecution? Cains who slew the spirit, and through the spirit murdered the body? Cains unintentionally, whom all men free from the stain of blood, and to whom in the Jewish economy the gates of the Cities of Refuge would have stood wide open, yet who are never again light of thought and light of heart? On their heads the grey is soon sprinkled, and in the chamber of their hearts is drawn a ghastly picture, whose freshness fades, but whose distinct characters are never obliterated.

Of this class of men, of hot passions, with rash advisers, who meditated wrong, but not the last wrong, victims of a narrow, impetuous code of honour, only to-day expunged from military and social etiquette, was the Laird of the [Page 2] Ewes. Many of us may have seen such another—a tall, lithe figure, rather bent, and very white-headed for his age, with a wistful eye; but otherwise a most composed, intelligent, courteous gentleman of a laird's degree. Take any old friend aside, and he will tell, with respectful sympathy, that the quiet, sensible, well-bred Laird, has suffered agonies in the course of his life, though too wise and modest a man to hold up his heart for daws to peck at, and you will believe him. Look narrowly at the well-preserved, well-veiled exterior, and you will be able to detect, through the nicely adjusted folds, or even when it is brightened by smiles, how remorse has sharpened the flesh, and grief hollowed it, and long abiding regret shaded it.

Twenty years before this time, Crawford of the Ewes, more accomplished than many of the lairds, his contemporaries, and possessed of the sly humour on which Scotchmen pride themselves, had been induced to write a set of lampoons against a political opponent of his special chief. He was young then, and probably had his literary vanity; at least he executed his task to the satisfaction of his side of the question; and without being particularly broad and

offensive, or perhaps very fine in their edge, his caricatures excited shouts of laughter in the parish, and in the neighbouring town.

But he laughs best who laughs last. A brother laird, blind with fury, and having more of the old border man in him than the Laird of the Ewes, took to his natural arms, and dispatched Mr. Crawford a challenge to fight him on the Corn-Cockle Moor. No refusal was possible then, none except for a man of rare principle, nerve, and temper. The [Page 3] Laird of the Ewes had no pretensions to mighty gifts; so he walked out with his second one autumn morning when his reapers were flourishing their sickles, met his foe, and though without the skill to defend himself, he shot his man right through the head. He was tried and acquitted. He was the challenged, not the challenger; he might have given the provocation, but no blame was suffered to attach to him. His antagonist, with a foreboding of his fate, or by way of clearing his conscience, as the knights used to confess of a morning before combat, had exonerated Mr. Crawford before he came upon the ground. The Court was strongly in his favour, and he was sent back to his family and property without anything more severe than commiseration; but that could never reach his deep sore.

How was this gentle, nervous, humorous Laird to look out upon the world, from which he had sent the soul of a companion who had never even harmed him? The widow, whom he had admired as a gay young matron, dwelt not a mile from him in her darkened dwelling; the fatherless boy would constantly cross the path of his well-protected, well-cared-for children. How bear the thousand little memories—the trifling dates, acts, words, pricking him with anguish? They say the man grew sick at the mere sight of the corn-cockle, which, though not plentiful on other moors, chanced to abound on this uncultivated tract, and bestowed on it its name; and he shivered as with an ague fit, morning after morning, when the clock struck the hour at which he had left his house. He did in some measure overcome this weakness, for he was a man of ordinary courage and extraordinary reserve, but it [Page 4] is possible that he endured the worst of his punishment when he made no sign.

The Laird was a man of delicate organism, crushed by a blow from which he could not recover. Had he lived a hundred years

earlier, or been a soldier on active service, or a student walking the hospitals, he might have been more hardened to bloodshed. Had his fate been different, he might have borne the brunt of the offence as well as his betters; but the very crime which he was least calculated to commit and survive encountered him in the colours he had worn before the eventful day.

Yet there was nothing romantic about Crawford of the Ewes, or about the details of his deed, with one singular exception, and this was connected with his daughter Joanna. The rest of the family were commonplace, prosperous young people, honest enough hearts, but too shallow to be affected by the father's misfortune. The father's sour grapes had not set these children's teeth on edge. Joanna—Jack, or Joe, as they called her in sport—whom they all, without any idea of selfishness or injustice, associated with the Laird, as one member of the family is occasionally chosen to bear the burdens of the others,—Joanna was papa's right hand, papa's secretary, steward, housekeeper, nurse. It had always been so; Joanna had been set aside to the office, and no one thought of depriving her of it, any more than she dreamt of resigning it.

Joanna was the child born immediately after the duel, and on the waxen brow of the baby was a crimson stain, slight but significant, which two fingers might have covered. Was this the token of retribution—the threat of vengeance? The gossips' tongues wagged busily. Some said it was Cain's brand, "the iniquity of the fathers visited on the children;" others alleged more charitably that it ought to prove a sign in the Laird's favour, to have the symbol of his guilt transferred to a scape-goat—the brow of a child. However, the gossips need not have hidden the child's face so sedulously for the first few days from the mother. Mrs. Crawford took the matter quite peaceably, and was relieved that no worse misfortune had befallen her or her offspring. "Poor little dear!" it was sad that she should carry such a trace; but she daresayed she would outgrow it, or she must wear flat curls—it was a pity that they had gone quite out of fashion. It was the father who kissed the mark passionately, and carried the child oftenest in his arms, and let her sit longest on his knee; and so she became his darling, and learnt all his ways, and could suit herself to his fancies, and soothe his pains, from very youthful years. The public recognised this peculiar property of her

father in Joanna, and identified her with the sorrowful period of his history. She was pointed out in connexion with the story—the tragedy of the county,—and she knew instinctively that there would be a whispered reference to her whenever it was told in society.

The Crawfurds had a cousin visiting them—an English cousin, Polly Musgrave—from the luxury and comparative gaiety of her rich, childless aunt's house in York. Polly was a well-endowed orphan, had no near family ties, and had been educated in the worldly wisdom and epicurean philosophy of a fashionable girls' school. She had come [Page 6] to spend a few weeks, and get acquainted with her Scotch country cousins. Polly had not found her heart, but it was to the credit of her sense and good-nature that she made the very best of a sojourn that had threatened to be a bore to her. She dazzled the girls, she romped with the boys, she entered with the greatest glee into rural occupations, rode on the roughest pony, saw sunset and sunrise from Barnboughle, and threatened to learn to milk cows and cut corn. She brought inconceivable motion and sparkle into the rather stagnant country house, and she was the greatest possible contrast to Joanna Crawford. Joanna was a natural curiosity to Polly, and the study amused her, just as she made use of every other variety and novelty, down to the poultry-yard and kitchen-garden at the Ewes.

The girls were out on the moor, in the drowsy heat of a summer day, grouped idly and prettily into such a cluster as girls will fall into without effort. Susan, the beauty—there is always a beauty among several girls—in languid propriety, with her nice hair, and her scrupulously falling collar and sleeves, and her blush of a knot of ribbon; Lilius, the strong-minded, active person, sewing busily at charity work, of which all estimable households have now their share; Constantia, the half-grown girl, lying in an awkward lump among the hay, intently reading her last novel, and superlatively scorning the society of her grown-up relatives; Joanna, sitting thoughtfully, stroking old Gyp, the ragged terrier, that invariably ran after either Joanna or her father; and Polly, who had been riding with Oliver, standing with her tucked-up habit, picturesque hat and feathers, smart little gentleman's riding-gloves [Page 7] and whip, and very *espiègle* face—a face surrounded by waves of silky black hair, with a clear pale skin, and good eyes and teeth, which Polly

always declared were her fortune in the way of good looks; but her snub nose was neither of a vulgar nor coarse tendency—it was a very lively, coquettish, handsomely cut, irresistible cock nose.

If these girls on the moor had been tried in the fire heated seven times, it would not have been to the strong-minded, broad-chested, dark-browed Lillas that they would have clung. They would have come crouching in their extremity and taken hold of the skirt of round, soft, white Joanna, with the little notable stain on her temple.

Polly was detailing her adventures and repeating her news with a relish that was appetizing.

"We went as far as Lammerhaugh, when Oliver remembered that he had a commission for your father at Westcotes, just when my love, Punch, was broken off his trot, and promised to canter, and the morning was so fresh then—a jewel of a morning. It was provoking; I wanted Noll to continue absent in mind, or prove disobedient, or something, but you good folks are so conscientious."

"Duty first, and then pleasure," said Lillas emphatically.

"That was a Sunday-school speech, Lillas, and spoken out of school; you ought to pay a forfeit; fine her, Susie."

"Aren't you hot, Polly?" asked Susan, without troubling herself to take up the jest.

"Not a bit—no more than you are; I'm up to a great deal yet; I'll go to the offices and gather the eggs. No, [Page 8] I am warm though, and I don't want to be blowsy to-night; I think I'll go into the house to the bath-room, and have a great icy splash of a shower-bath."

"You'll hurt your health, Polly, for ever bathing at odd hours, as you do," remonstrated Joanna.

"All nonsense, my dear; I always do what is pleasantest, and it agrees with me perfectly. In winter, I do toast my toes; and you know I eat half-a-dozen peaches and plums at a time like a South Sea Islander, only I believe they feast on cocoa-nut and breadfruit; don't they, Conny? You are the scholar; you know you have your geography at your finger-ends yet."

"Oh, don't tease me, Polly!" protested Conny impatiently.

"Dear Jack, hand me a sprig of broom to stick in Conny's ear," persisted Polly in a loud whisper.

Constantia shook her head furiously, as if she were already horribly tickled, and that at the climax of her plot.

"Never mind, Conny, I'll protect you. What a shame, Polly, to spoil her pleasure!" cried Joanna indignantly.

"I beg your pardon, Donna Quixotina."

"I wonder you girls can waste your time in this foolish manner," lectured Liliás, with an air of superiority; "you are none of you better than another, always pursuing amusement."

"What a story, Liliás!" put in Polly undauntedly; "you know I sew yard upon yard of muslin-work, and embroider ells of French merino, and task myself to get done within a given time. Aunt Powis says I make myself a slave."

[Page 9] "Because you like it," declared Liliás disdainfully; "you happen to be a clever sewer, and you are fond of having your fingers busy and astonishing everybody—besides, you admire embroidery in muslin and cloth; and even your pocket-money—what with gowns and bonnets, tickets to oratorios and concerts, and promenades, and 'the kid shoes and perfumery,' which are papa's old-fashioned summing up of our expenses, bouquets and fresh gloves would be nearer the truth—won't always meet the claims upon your gold and silver showers; and Susan," added Liliás, not to be cheated out of her diatribe, and starting with new alacrity, "practising attitudes and looking at her hands; and Conny reading her trashy romances."

"It is not a romance, Liliás," complained Conny piteously; "it is a tale of real life."

"It is all the same," maintained the inexorable Liliás; "one of the most aggravating novels I ever read was a simple story."

"Oh, Liliás, do lend it to me!" begged Polly; "I'm not literary, but it is delightful to be intensely interested until the very hair rises on the crown of one's head."

"I don't know that you would like it," put in Joanna; "it is not one of the modern novels, and it has only one dismal catastrophe; it is the fine old novel by Mrs. Inchbald."

"Then I don't want it; I don't care for old things, since I have not a palate for old wines or an eye for old pictures. I hate the musty, buckram ghosts of our fathers."

"Oh! but Mrs. Inchbald never raised ghosts, Polly; she [Page 10] manœuvred stately, passionate men and women of her own day."

"The wiser woman she. But they would be ghosts to me, Jack, unless they were in the costume of the present day; there is not an inch of me given to history."

"And you, Joanna," concluded Lillas, quite determined to breast every interruption and finish her peroration, "you have listened, and smiled, and frowned, and dreamt for an hour."

"I was waiting in case papa should want me," apologized Joanna, rather humbly.

"That need not have hindered you from hemming round the skirt of this frock."

"Oh, Lillas! I am sorry for you, girl," cried Polly. "You're in a diseased frame of mind; you are in a fidget of work; you don't know the enjoyment of idleness, the luxury of laziness. You'll spoil your complexion; your hair will grow grey; no man will dare to trifle with such a notable woman!"

"I don't care!" exclaimed Lillas bluntly and magnanimously. "I don't want to be trifled with; I don't value men's admiration."

"Now! Now!! Now!!! Now!!!!" protested Polly; "I don't value men's admiration either, of course, but I like partners, and I would not be fond of being branded as a strong-minded female, a would-be Lady Bountiful, a woman going a-tracking; that's what men say of girls who don't care to be trifled with. But, Lillas, are you quite sure you don't believe in any of the good old stories—the 'goody' stories I would call them if I were a man [Page 11] —of the amiable girl who went abroad in the old pelisse, and who was wedded to the enthusiastic baronet? My dears, you must have observed they were abominably untrue; the baronet, weak and false, always, since

the world began, marries the saucy, spendthrift girl, who is prodigal in rich stuffs, and bright colours, and becoming fits, and neat boots and shoes—who thinks him worth listening to, and laughing with, and thinking about—the fool."

"Really, Polly, you are too bad," cried both Susan and Lillas at once; their stock-in-trade exhausted, and not knowing very well what they meant, or what they should suggest further if this sentence were not answer enough.

"Now, I believe Joanna does not credit the goody stories, or does not care for them, rather; but we are not all heroines, we cannot all afford an equal indifference."

Joanna coloured until the red stain became undistinguishable, and even Polly felt conscious that her allusion was too flippant for the cause.

"So you see, Lillas," she continued quickly, "I'm not the least ashamed of having been caught fast asleep in my room before dinner the other rainy day. I always curl myself up and go to sleep when I've got nothing better to do, and I count the capacity a precious gift; besides, I will let you into a secret worth your heads: it improves your looks immensely after you've been gadding about for a number of days, and horribly dissipated in dancing of nights at Christmas, or in the oratorio week, or if you are in a town when the circuit is sitting—not present as a prisoner, Conny."

"Polly!" blazed out Constantia, who, on the plea of the needle-like [Page 12] sharpness and single-heartedness which sometimes distinguishes her fifteen years, was permitted to be more plain-spoken and ruder than her sisters; "I hate to hear you telling of doing everything you like with such enjoyment. I think, if you had been a man, you would have been an abominable fellow, and you are only harmless because you are a girl."

Polly laughed immoderately. "Such a queer compliment, Conny!"

"Hold your tongue, Conny."

"Go back to your book; we'll tell mamma," scolded the elder girls; and Conny hung her head, scarlet with shame and consternation.

Conny had truth on her side; yet Polly's independence and animal delight in life, in this artificial world, was not to be altogether despised either.

Polly maintained honestly that the girl had done no harm. She was glad she had never had to endure senior sisters, and if she had been afflicted with younger plagues, she would have made a point of not snubbing them, on the principle of fair play.

"And you were a little heathenish, Polly," suggested Joanna, "not giving fair play to the heroism of the ancients."

But Susan had long been waiting her turn, testifying more interest in her right to speak than she usually wasted on the affairs of the state. She wished to cross-examine Polly on a single important expression, and although Susan at least was wonderfully harmless, her patience could hold out no longer.

[Page 13] "Why are you afraid of being blowsy to-night, Polly?"

"I'm not frightened, I would not disturb myself about a risk; but you've kept an invitation all this time under my tongue, not in my pockets, I assure you;" and Polly elaborately emptied them, the foppish breast pocket, and that at the waist.

"It is only from Mrs. Maxwell," sighed Susan; "we are never invited anywhere except to Hurlton, in this easy way."

"But there is company; young Mr. Jardine has come home to Whitethorn, and he is to dine with the Maxwells, and we are invited over to Hurlton in the evening lest the claret or the port should be too much for him."

The girls did not say "Nonsense!" they looked at each other; Joanna was very pale, the red stain was very clear now. At last Lillas spoke, hesitating a little to begin with, "It is so like Mrs. Maxwell—without a moment's consideration—so soon after his return, before we had met casually, as we must have done. I dare say she is sorry now, when she comes to think over it. I hope Mr. Maxwell will be angry with her—the provoking old goose," ran on Lillas, neither very reverently nor very gratefully for an excellent, exemplary girl.

"There is one thing, we can't refuse," said Susan with marvellous decision; "it would be out of the question for us to avoid him; it would be too marked for us to stay away."

"Read your book, Conny," commanded Lilius fiercely; "you were sufficiently intent upon it a moment ago; girls should not be made acquainted with such troubles."

[Page 14] "I don't want to be a bar upon you," cried the belated Conny, rising and walking away sulkily, but pricking her ears all the time.

"Joanna, you had better mention the matter to papa."

"Don't you think you're making an unnecessary fuss?" remarked Polly. "Of course, I remembered uncle's misfortune," she admitted candidly, "though none of you speak of it, and I noticed Oliver stammer dreadfully when Mrs. Maxwell mentioned Mr. Jardine; but I thought that at this time of day, when everybody knew there was no malice borne originally, and Uncle Crawford might have been killed, you might have been polite and neighbourly with quiet consciences. I tell you, I mean to set my cap at young Mr. Jardine of Whitethorn, and when I marry him, and constitute him a family connexion, of course the relics of that old accident will be scattered to the winds."

"Oh! Polly, Polly!" cried the girls, "you must never, never speak so lightly to papa."

"Of course not, I am not going to vex my uncle; I can excuse him, but Joanna need not look so scared. There is not such a thing as retribution and vengeance, child, in Christian countries; it is you who are heathenish. Or have you nursed a vain imagination of encountering Mr. Jardine, unknown to each other, and losing your hearts by an unaccountable fascination, and being as miserable as the principals in the second last chapter of one of Conny's three volumes? or were you to atone to him in some mysterious, fantastic, supernatural fashion, for the unintentional wrong? Because if you have done so, I'm afraid it is all mist and moonshine, poor Jack, quite as much as the twaddling goody stories."

[Page 15] "Polly," said Joanna angrily, but speaking low, "I think you might spare us on so sad a subject."

"I want you to have common sense; I want you to be comfortable; no wonder my uncle has never recovered his spirits."

"Indeed, Polly, I don't think you've any reason to interfere in papa's concerns."

"I don't see that you are entitled to blame Joanna," defended sister Lilies, stoutly;—Lilies, who was so swift to find fault herself.

"There, I'll say no more; I beg your pardon, I merely intended to show you your world in an ordinary light."

"Do you know, Polly, that Mrs. Jardine has never visited us since?" asked Susan.

"Very likely, she was entitled to some horror. But she is a reasonable woman. Mr. Maxwell told me—every third party discusses the story behind your backs whenever it chances to come up, I warn you—Mr. Maxwell informed me that she never blamed Uncle Crawford, and that she sent her son away from her because she judged it bad for him to be brought up among such recollections, and feared that when he was a lad he might be tampered with by the servants, and might imbibe prejudices and aversions that would render him gloomy and vindictive, and unlike other people for the rest of his life; she could not have behaved more wisely. I am inclined to suppose that Mrs. Jardine of Whitethorn has more knowledge of the world and self-command than the whole set of my relations here, unless, perhaps, my Aunt Crawford—she will only speculate on your dresses—that is the question, Susan."

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II.—THE ORDEAL.

"Would you not have liked to have gone with the other girls, Joanna? for Conny, she must submit to be a *halflin* yet. But is it not dull for you only to hear of a party? country girls have few enough opportunities of being merry," observed Mr. Crawford, with his uneasy consciousness, and his sad habit of self-reproach.

"Oh, Mr. Crawford, it would not have done—not the first time—Joanna had much better stay at home on this occasion. She is too well brought up to complain of a little sacrifice."

It is curious how long some wives will live on friendly terms with their husbands and never measure their temperaments, never know where the shoe pinches, never have a notion how often they worry, and provoke, and pain their spouses, when the least reticence and tact would keep the ship and its consort sailing in smooth water.

Mrs. Crawford would have half-broken her heart if Mr. Crawford had not changed his damp stockings; she would fling down her work and look out for him at any moment of his absence; she would not let any of her children, not her favourite girl or boy, take advantage of him; she was a good wife, still she did not know where the shoe pinched, and so she stabbed him perpetually, sometimes with fretting pin-pricks, sometimes with sore sword-strokes.

"My dear, I wish you were not a sacrifice to me." It is a heart-breaking thing to hear a man speak quite calmly, [Page 17] and like a man, yet with a plaintive tone in his voice. Ah! the old, arch spirit of the literary Laird of the Ewes had been shaken to its centre, though he was a tolerable man of business, and rather fond of attending markets, sales, and meetings.

"Papa, what are you thinking of?" exclaimed Joanna indignantly. "I am very proud to help you, and I go out quite as often as the others. Do you not know, we keep a card hung up on Liliass's window-shutter, and we write down every month's invitations—in stormy weather they are not many—and we fulfil them in rotation. You don't often want me in the evenings, for you've quite given me up at chess, and you only condescend to backgammon when it is mid-winter and there has been no curling, and the book club is all amiss. Liliass insists upon the card, because the parties are by no means always merry affairs, and she says that otherwise we would slip them off on each other, and pick and choose, and be guilty of a great many selfish, dishonourable proceedings."

"Liliass is the wise woman in the household. I'm aware there is a wise woman in every family—but how comes it that Liliass is the authority with us? It always rather puzzles me, Joanna; for when I used to implore Miss Swan to accept her salary, and pay Dominie