

"Jeanie is so courageous and determined –
I'd like to be like her."
Maggie, 13



THE HEART OF MIDLOTHIAN

WALTER SCOTT

Edinburgh, 1736.

In the town's grim prison, the Heart of Midlothian, two prisoners await execution. Captain Porteous of the Town Guard has been sentenced to death for ordering his soldiers to open fire on Edinburgh citizens. He hopes for reprieve. The people want revenge.

Effie Deans, wrongly accused of killing her new-born baby, will die unless her sister Jeanie tells a lie. Jeanie, determined to save her sister, makes a terrifying journey as Effie's life hangs in the balance.

Will the two
prisoners get
the justice they
deserve?



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Retold by Margaret Elphinstone
Illustrated by Ken Laidlaw



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THE CHARACTERS



Jeanie Deans

Jeanie is a strictly-brought-up country girl. She could save her sister by telling a lie. But will she?

Effie Deans

Jeanie's beautiful but wilful sister gives birth to a child in secret. Will she be hanged for child murder?



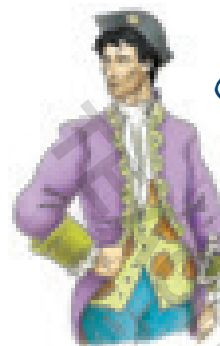
David Deans

Jeanie and Effie's father once fought for religious freedom. But will his God help him now?



Reuben Butler

Reuben is a poor minister. Jeanie loves him, but believes she'd wrong him if she married him.



George Robertson

Smuggler, rioter, Effie's lover and a fugitive – who is the mysterious George Robertson, and what will happen to him?



Madge Wildfire and Meg Murdockson

What made Madge Wildfire insane? What is her mother, Meg, really up to? These two are keeping a vital secret.



Mr and Mrs Saddletree

The Saddletrees have a shop near the Grassmarket, a good place for the latest gossip.



The Duke of Argyll and Queen Caroline

The Duke of Argyll is a powerful Scottish courtier in London, but he's out of favour with Queen Caroline.





THE HEART OF MIDLOTHIAN

Jeanie Deans gazed across the fields towards the road from Edinburgh. In one field her father was feeding the cattle. He'd be angry if her sister wasn't back for evening prayers.

At last a figure appeared. Not one person, but two. One of them drew back hastily behind the field wall. The other climbed the stile. It was Effie.

'Effie! Where hae ye been sae late at e'en?'

'It's no late, lass,' answered Effie.

'It's chappit eight on every clock in town! And who was that parted wi you at the stile?'

'Naebody.'

'Naebody?'

'What needs ye aye speering at folk?' retorted Effie. 'And what about Reuben Butler the school dominie aye coming here? Will you tell me he comes to see our father? Or is it ye he comes to see, Jeanie?' Effie saw that Jeanie was upset. She flung her arms round her neck, and kissed her.

‘I canna be muckle vexed wi anything ye say to me,’ said Jeanie, hurt though she was. ‘But oh – dinna vex our father!’

‘I will not,’ replied Effie. ‘And if there were as many dances the morn’s night as there are merry dancers in the sky on a frosty night, I winna gang near ane o’ them.’

‘Dance! Oh Effie, what could take ye to a dance?’

David Deans, coming from the byre, overheard this. ‘Dance, said ye! Don’t name such a word at my door! It’s a wicked pastime. I bless God that in the days when I could have danced, I was fighting for the freedom to worship God in our own way in Scotland. I lived in dread of bloody rope and swift bullet. I fought an English government that wanted us in Scotland to have bishops, and masses, and all kinds of evil which we Presbyterians know to be wrong. Let me hear no more of dancing, or singing, or such wickedness, ever again.’

Both daughters were crying now. ‘Let’s go in to our prayers now, and we’ll seek god’s grace to preserve us from all manner of sins.’

Effie had meant to confide in Jeanie when she came home. But now she was angry. ‘Jeanie would think me nae better than the dirt under her feet, if I told her I’d danced with him four times on the green,’ she thought. ‘And she’d tell father. But I’ll no go there again. It would be wrong.’

After her stepmother died, Jeanie had brought up Effie as best she could. Although David Deans was a strict Presbyterian, he’d always been gentle with his beautiful younger daughter. The previous year a distant relative, Mrs Saddletree, had offered Effie a job in her husband’s Edinburgh shop. Effie would lodge with the family and worship with them at the Tolbooth Kirk every Sabbath. Deans didn’t know that Mrs Saddletree was now very ill in bed. No one was keeping an eye on young Effie amid the temptations of the capital city.

Stuart line of kings. The current King, George II, who ruled the German state of Hanover as well as Great Britain, and his Queen, Caroline, shared this suspicion of the Scots.

Although there was an elected parliament, only the wealthy could vote, and it was very difficult for ordinary people to get their voice heard unless they knew someone with influence. That is why Jeanie Deans approaches the powerful Scottish nobleman, the Duke of Argyll, as she attempts to save her sister's life.

The church, or Kirk, was very powerful, and played a central role in national life. It was taken for granted that everyone believed in God – within living memory people had been executed for questioning God's existence. It would have been unthinkable for Scott not to have given God a capital G. Kings and governments frequently tried to control the Kirk, but this often provoked popular resistance. David Deans was a Covenanter, one of a group who had fought to defend what he believed was the proper way of worshipping God.

The legal system was very cruel. People could be put to death for a wide variety of crimes. In *The Heart of Midlothian*, Walter Scott, a lawyer as well as a writer, draws on two real cases from the previous hundred years. One was the trial, reprieve and lynching of Porteous, the Captain of the Town Guard; the other was the case of a young woman who, like Effie Deans, faced execution for the crime of keeping her pregnancy secret. Her sister, Helen Walker, like Jeanie Deans in Scott's story, walked to London to secure a royal pardon.

The legal system was also unjust. Porteous, who had shot innocent people, was spared execution because of powerful friends in high places, while Effie faced death because her sister was too honest to tell the lie which would have saved her.

Edinburgh, which was then the most important city in Scotland, was still relatively small and cramped, and the mob was notoriously violent. Most people lived in tall tenement buildings in narrow closes or alleys running off the main street which ran from the castle, past St Giles High