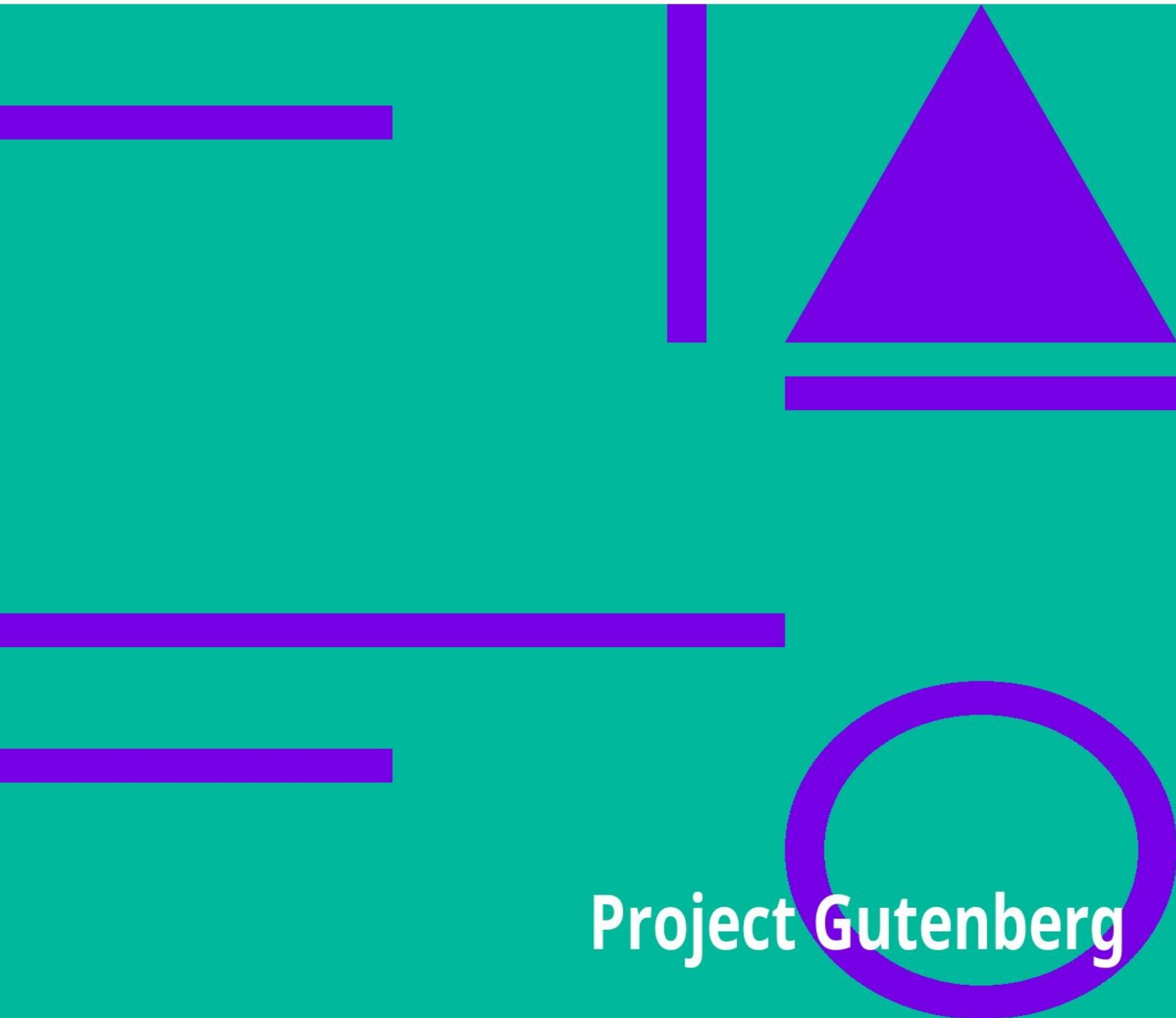
Charred Wood

Bp. Francis Clement Kelley



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CHARRED WOOD

BY

MYLES MUREDACH

"*O, Designer Infinite, must Thou then Char the wood before Thou canst limn with it?*"

ILLUSTRATED BY

J. CLINTON SHEPHERD

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

[Transcriber's note: The Frontispiece and the "Something white…" illustration were missing from the book.]

Charred Wood

CHAPTER I

THE LADY OF THE TREE

The man lay in the tall grass. Behind him the wall of the Killimaga estate, from its beginning some fifty yards to his left, stretched away to his right for over a thousand feet. Along the road which ran almost parallel with the wall was the remnant of what had once been a great woods; yearly the county authorities determined to cut away its thick undergrowth—and yearly left it alone. On the left the road was bare for some distance along the bluff; then, bending, it again sought the shelter of the trees and meandered along until it lost itself in the main street of Sihasset, a village large enough to support three banks and, after a fashion, eight small churches. In front, had the lounger cared to look, he would have seen the huge rocks topping the bluff against which the ocean dashed itself into angry foam. But the man didn't care to look—for in the little clearing between the wall of Killimaga and the bluff road was peace too profound to be wantonly disturbed by motion. And so he lay there lazily smoking his cigar, his long length concealed by the tall grass.

Hearing a slight click behind him and to his right, the man slowly, even languidly, turned his head to peer through the grass. But his energy was unrewarded, for he saw nothing he had not seen before—a long wall, its rough stones half hidden by creeping vines, at its base a rank growth of shrubs and wild hedge; behind it, in the near distance, the towers of a house that, in another land, perched amid jutting crags, would have inspired visions of far-off days of romance. Even in its New England setting the great house held a rugged charm, heightened by the big trees which gave it a setting of rich green. Some of the trees had daringly advanced almost to the wall itself, while one—a veritable giant—had seemingly been caught while just stepping through.

With a bored sigh, as if even so slight an effort were too great, the smoker settled himself more comfortably and resumed his indolent musing. Then he heard the sound again. This time he did not trouble to look around. Something white swished quickly past him and he stared, bewildered. It was a woman, young, if her figure were to be trusted. His cigar dropped in the grass, and there he let it lie. His gaze never left her as she walked on; and he could scarcely be

blamed, for he was still under thirty-five and feminine early twenties has an interest to masculine full youth. He had never seen anyone quite so charming. And so he watched the lady as she walked to the edge of the bluff overlooking the sea, and turned to the left to go along the pathway toward the village.

Five hundred yards away she was met by a tall man wearing a long black coat. Was it the priest he had noticed that morning at the door of the Catholic church in the village? Yes, there was no doubt about that; it was the priest. He had just lifted his hat to the lady and was now turning to walk back with her by the way he had come. They evidently knew each other well; and the man watching them almost laughed at himself when he realized that he was slightly piqued at the clergyman's daring to know her while he did not. He watched the pair until they disappeared around the bend of the bluff path. Then he settled back to look for his cigar. But he did not find it, for other matters quickly absorbed his attention.

From out a clump of bushes on his left, where they evidently had been hiding, two men appeared. He recognized them both. One was a book agent who was stopping at the hotel in the village; the other was the local constable. The book agent had a paper in his hand.

"That her?" he asked.

"Yaas, sir!"—the constable was surely a native New Englander—"I seed her face plain."

"I didn't," said the agent, with annoyance. "I have never seen her without that confounded veil. This is the first time she's had it thrown back. But the description is right? Look at it."

He showed the paper to the constable, tapping it as he read.

"'Brown hair, blue eyes'—did you see her eyes?"

"I sure did," answered the constable; "and they wuz blue."

"All right, then. 'Blue eyes, regular features'—how about that?"

"Reg'lar enough," said the constable. "She'd no pug nose, I kin tell ya that."

"'Regular features,' then, is right. 'Five feet four inches tall'—that's right. 'Small hands and feet'—that's right. 'About twenty-three years old; good figure.'"

"She sure hez all them," vouchsafed the wearer of the star. "I knowed her right away, and I've seed her often. She's been in Sihasset well nigh on a month."

"But where—" the agent turned to look at the unbroken wall—"where in thunder did she come from?"

The constable, pushing back his helmet, scratched his head.

"Damfino," he said. "That's the rub. There's no gate on this side of Killimaga."

"Killimaga?"

"A rich old Irishman built it and put a wall around it, too. We folks of Sihasset don't like that; it shuts off the view of the house and lawn. Lawn's what makes things purty. He wuz a queer old mug—wanted to shut hisself up."

"But how did she get out?" insisted the agent, coming back to the issue.

"Search me," offered the constable. He looked toward the top of the wall. "Clumb the fence, mebbe."

"With her dress looking as it does?"

"There's no other way. I dunno."

The agent was puzzled. "I want a closer inspection of that wall. We'll walk along this side."

Both agent and constable started off, keeping well behind the wild hedge along the wall so that they might not be seen from the bluff road.

The man lying in the grass was more puzzled than the agent. Why a book agent and a constable should be so anxious about a lady who was—well, just charming—but who had herself stepped out of nowhere to join a priest in his walk, was a problem for some study. He got up and walked to the wall. Then he laughed. Close examination showed him marks in the giant tree, the vertical cuts

being cleverly covered by the bark, while the horizontal ones had creepers festooned over them. A door was well concealed. But the tree? It was large, yet there could not be room in it for more than one person, who would have to stand upright and in a most uncomfortable position. The man himself had been before it over an hour. How long had the lady been in the tree? He forgot his lost cigar in trying to figure the problem out.

Mark Griffin had never liked problems. That was one reason why he found himself now located in a stuffy New England inn just at the end of the summer season when all the "boarders" had gone except himself and the book agent.

Griffin himself, though the younger son of an Irish peer, had been born in England. The home ties were not strong and when his brother succeeded to the title and estates in Ireland Mark, who had inherited a fortune from his mother, went to live with his powerful English relatives. For a while he thought of going into the army, but he knew he was a dunce in mathematics, so he soon gave up the idea. He tried Oxford, but failed there for the same reason. Then he just drifted. Now, still on the sunny side of thirty-five, he was knocking about, sick of things, just existing, and fearfully bored. He had dropped into Sihasset through sheer curiosity—just to see a typical New England summer resort where the Yankee type had not yet entirely disappeared. Now that the season was over he simply did not care to pull out for New York and continue his trip to—nowhere. He was "seeing" America. It might take months and it might take years. He did not care. Then England again by way of Japan and Siberia—perhaps. He never wanted to lose sight of that "perhaps," which was, after all, his only guarantee of independence.

Siberia suited Mark Griffin's present mood, which was to be alone. He had never married, never even been in love, at least, not since boyhood. Of course, that had been mere puppy love. Still, it was something to look back to and sigh over. He liked to think that he could still feel a sort of consoling sadness at the thought of it. He, a timid, dreaming boy, had loved a timid, dreaming girl. Her brother broke up the romance by taunting Mark who, with boyish bashfulness, avoided her after that. Then her parents moved to London and Mark was sent to school. After school he had traveled. For the last ten years England had been merely a place to think of as home. He had been in India, and South America, and Canada—up on the Yukon. He would have stayed there, but somebody suggested that he might be a remittance man. Ye gods! a remittance man with ten thousand pounds a year! And who could have had much more, for Mark Griffin

was a master with his pen. His imagination glowed, and his travels had fanned it into flame. Every day he wrote, but burned the product next morning. What was the use? He had plenty to live on. Why write another man out of a job? And who could be a writer with an income of ten thousand pounds a year? But, just the same, it added to Mark Griffin's self-hatred to think that it was the income that made him useless. Yet he had only one real failure checked against him—the one at Oxford. But he knew—and he did not deceive himself—why there had been no others. He had never tried.

But there was one thing in Mark's favor, too. In spite of his wandering, in spite of the men and women of all kinds he had met, he was clean. There was a something in the memory of his mother—and in the memory, too, of that puppy love of his—that had made him a fighter against himself.

"The great courage that is worth while before God," his mother used to say, "is the courage to run away from the temptation to be unclean. It is the only time you have the right to be a coward. That sort of cowardice is *true courage*."

Besides her sweet face, that advice was the great shining memory he had of his mother, and when he began to wander and meet temptations, he found himself treasuring it as his best and dearest memory of her. True, he had missed her religion—had lost what little he had had of it—but he had kept her talisman to a clean life.

His lack of religion worried him, though he had really never known much about his family's form of it. For that his mother's death, early boarding school, and his father's worse than indifference, were responsible. But as he grew older he felt vaguely that he had missed something the quality of which he had but tasted through the one admonition of his mother that he had treasured. His nature was full of reverence. His soul burned to respond to the call of faith, but something rebelled. He had read everything, and was humble enough to acknowledge that he knew little. He had given up the struggle to believe. Nothing seemed satisfactory. It worried him to think that he had reached such a conclusion, but he was consoled by the thought that many men had been of his way of thinking. He hoped this would prove excuse enough, but found it was not excuse enough for him. Here he was, rich, noble, with the English scales of caste off his eyes, doing nothing, indolent, loving only a memory, indifferent but still seeing a saving something of his mother and his child love in every woman to whom he spoke.

Now something else, yet something not so very different, had suddenly stepped into his life, and he knew it. The something was dressed in white and had stepped out of a tree. It was almost laughable. This woman had come into his dreams. The very sight of her attracted him—or was it the manner of her coming? She was just like an ideal he had often made for himself. Few men meet even the one who looks like the ideal, but he had seen the reality—coming out of a tree. He kept on wondering how long she had been there. He himself had been dreaming in front of the tree an hour before he saw her. Had she seen him before she came out? She had given no sign; but if she had seen him, she had trusted him with a secret. Mark looked at the tree. It was half embedded in the wall. Then he understood. The tree masked a secret entrance to Killimaga.

He was still smiling over his discovery when he heard the voices of the agent and constable. They were coming back, so he dropped into his hiding place in the tall grass.

"Well, Brown," the agent was saying, "I am going to tackle her. I've got to see that face. It's the only way! If I saw it once, I'd know for sure from the photograph they sent me."

"Ye'd better not," advised the constable. "She might be a-scared before—"

"But I've got to be sure," interrupted the agent.

"Aw, ye're sure enough, ain't ye? There's the photygraft, and I seed her."

"But she slipped me in Boston, and I nearly lost the trail. I can't take chances on this job—it's too important—and I've got to report something pretty soon. That damn veil! She always has it on."

"Yep, she had it when she come down here, too, and when she tuk the house. All right, see her if ye can! Ye're the jedge. She's coming around the bend of the road now." The constable was peering out from his hiding place among the bushes.

"Is the priest with her?" asked the agent.

"He's gone back to the village. She didn't go that far—she seldom does. But he goes to see her; and she goes to his church on Sundays."

"I wonder if he knows anything?"

"Trust that gent to know most everything, I guess." The constable was very positive. "Father Murray's nobody's fool," he added, "and she won't talk to nobody else. I'll bet a yearlin' heifer he's on; but nobody could drag nothing out of him."

"I know that," said the agent. "I've been up there a dozen times, and I've talked with him by the hour—but always about books; I couldn't get him to talk about anything else. Here she is! Go on back."

The constable disappeared behind the bushes, and his companion stood out in the little clearing to wait.

The woman saw him; Mark, watching from the long grass, thought she hesitated. Then she dropped her veil and came on. The agent stepped forward, and the woman seemed distressed. What the agent intended to do Mark could not guess, but he made up his mind at once as to what he would do himself. He arose and, just as the agent met the lady, Mark's arm went through his and he—not of his own volition—turned to face the ocean.

"Hello, Saunders!" Mark said heartily. "Who'd expect to see you here, with no one near to buy rare editions?"

Saunders looked at him with annoyance, but Mark was friendly. He slipped his arm out of the agent's and slapped him on the shoulder.

"Look out at that sea, you old money-grabber. There's a sight for your soul. Did you ever think of the beauty of it? Such a day!—no wonder you're loafing. Oh! I beg your pardon, Madam. I am in your way."

Keeping Saunders' back to the lady, Mark stepped aside to let her pass. Saunders could not even look back, as she walked quickly behind them. The agent stammered a reply to Mark's unwelcome greeting before he turned. But it was too late, for Mark heard the click that told him that the tree had closed. He looked for the constable, to see if he had been watching her and had discovered the secret door; but the constable was leisurely walking toward the village.

CHAPTER II

MONSIGNORE

As the two men walked along, Mark Griffin, tall and of athletic build, offered a sharp contrast to the typical American beside him. With his gray tweeds, Mark, from his cap to shoes, seemed more English than Irish, and one instinctively looked for the monocle—but in vain, for the Irish-gray eyes, deep-set under the heavy straight brows, disdained artifice as they looked half-seriously, though also a bit roguishly, out upon the world. The brown hair clustered in curls above the tanned face with its clear-cut features, the mouth firm under the aquiline nose, the chin slightly squared—the face of one who would seek and find.

He looked at his companion, clad in a neat-fitting business suit of blue, his blond hair combed straight back under the carelessly-tilted Alpine, and felt that the smaller man was one not to be despised. "A man of brains," thought Mark, as he noted the keen intelligent look from the blue eyes set in a face that, though somewhat irregular in feature, bespoke strong determination.

Mentally, the two men were matched. Should they ever be pitted against each other, it would be impossible for anyone to determine offhand which would be the victor.

The agent was disposed to be surly during the walk to the hotel, for he had become suspicious. Why had the fool Englishman done this thing? Did he know or suspect that the supposed book agent was really a detective? Did he know the woman? Was he in her confidence? How had she disappeared so quickly?

Saunders found it difficult to keep up even a semblance of interest in the conversation, for Mark gave him little time to think. He plied him with friendly questions until the detective wondered if his companion were a fool, or someone "on the inside." He wished that Mark would stop his chattering long enough to let him do the questioning. But Mark went right on.

"How's the book trade? Bad, I'll wager, so far from town. Why aren't you working?"

Saunders had to think quickly.

"Oh, I took an afternoon off; business has off days, you know."

"Of course. Any success this morning?"

"One order. Took me a month to get it—from the Padre."

"Ah!"

Mark gave the word the English sound, which convinced the detective that the speaker really was a fool who had stumbled into an affair he knew nothing about. But Mark kept up his questioning.

"Did you get to talk much with the Padre? You know, he interests me. By the way, why do you call him by that Spanish name?"

"Oh, I got into the habit in the Philippines; that's what they call a priest there. I was a soldier, you know. Did you ever meet him?"

"No; but I'd like to."

"Perhaps I could introduce you." They were walking through the village now, and Saunders glanced toward the rectory. "There he is."

The chance to get away attracted Saunders; and nothing suited Mark better than to meet the priest at that very time.

"Certainly," he said; "I'd be glad if you introduced me. I'll stop only a moment, and then go on to the hotel with you."

But this did *not* suit Saunders.

"Oh, no; you must talk to the Padre. He's your kind. You'll like him. I can't wait, though, so I'll have to leave you there."

"By the way," Mark went on with his questioning, "isn't the Padre rather—well, old—to be in such a small and out-of-the-way place? You know I rather thought that, in his church, priests as old as he were in the larger parishes."

"Why, you couldn't have been listening much to gossip since you came down

here—not very much," said Saunders. "The Padre is here by choice—but only partially by choice."

"By choice, but only partially by choice?" Mark was curious by this time. "I don't quite understand."

Saunders smiled knowingly, and dropped his voice.

"It's like this," he whispered. "The Padre was a big man in the city six months ago. He was what they call a vicar general—next job to the bishop, you know. He was a great friend of the old Bishop who died three months before the Padre came here. A new Bishop came—"

"'Who knew not Joseph'?"

But the Scripture was lost on the agent.

"His name is not Joseph," he answered solemnly, "but Donald, Donald Murray. I read it on the book order I got."

"Donald! Funny name for a Catholic," commented Mark. "It sounds Presbyterian."

"That's what it is," said Saunders quickly. "The Padre is a convert to the Catholic Church. He was 'way up once, but he lost his big job as vicar general, and then he lost all his big jobs. I met a priest on the train once—a young fellow—who told me, with a funny sort of laugh that sounded a bit sad, too, that the Bishop had the Padre buried."

"I see," said Mark, though he didn't see any more than the agent. "But the priest doesn't take it hard, does he?"

"Not that you could notice," Saunders answered. "The Padre's jolly—smart, too—and a bookman. He has books enough in that little house to start a public library, but he's too poor now to buy many of the kind he's daffy over—old stuff, you know, first editions and the like."

They crossed the street to the rectory, an old-fashioned house nestling among the trees, the parapet and pillars of its broad veranda almost hidden by a heavy growth of ampelopsis. In front of the house, a stretch of well-kept lawn was

divided from the public walk by a hawthorn hedge, and, cutting through its velvety green, a wide graveled pathway swept up to the steps whose sharp angle with the veranda was softened by a mass of low-growing, flowering shrubs. To the side, extending towards the church, the hedge was tripled, with a space of some six feet between. The lower branches of the evergreens forming the second row were scarcely higher than the hawthorn in front; while, in their turn, the evergreens were barely topped by the silver maples behind. That triple hedge had been the loving care of the successive priests for fifty years and served as an effectual bar to the curiosity of the casual passer-by. In the little yard behind its shelter the priest could read or doze, free from the intrusive gaze of the village.

Father Murray, who was comfortably reading on the veranda, arose as his two visitors approached.

Saunders spoke quickly. "Don't worry, Padre. I ain't goin' to get after you again to sell you another set. I just thought I'd like to have you meet my friend, Mr. Griffin. I know you'll like him. He's bookish, too, and an Englishman. Then, I'm off." Suiting the action to the word, the agent, raising his hat, walked down the graveled path and down toward the hotel.

Father Murray took Mark's hand with a friendly grip quite different from the bone-crushing handshake he so often met in America. Mark gazed thoughtfully at his host. With his thin but kindly face and commanding presence, the priest seemed almost foreign. What Mark saw was a tall—he was six feet at least of bone and muscle—and good-looking man, with an ascetic nose and mouth; with hair, once black, but now showing traces of white, falling in thick waves over a broad brow. Mark noticed that his cassock was old and faded, but that reddish buttons down its front distinguished it from the cassocks of other village priests he had seen on his travels.

"You are welcome, Mr. Griffin—very welcome." Mark found Father Murray's voice pleasing. "Sit down right over there. That chair is more comfortable than it looks. I call it 'Old Hickory' because, though it isn't hickory, yet it began life in this old house and has outlived three pastors. Smoke?"

"Thanks, I do—but a pipe, you know. I'm hopelessly British." Mark pulled out his pipe and a pouch of tobacco.

Turning to the wicker table beside him, the priest dug down into an old cigar

box filled with the odds and ends that smokers accumulate. He found a pipe and filled it from Mark's extended tobacco pouch.

"It's poor hospitality, Mr. Griffin, to take your tobacco; but I offered you a cigar. You know, this cigar habit has so grown into me that it's a rare occasion that brings me back to old times and my pipe." Father Murray pressed the tobacco down into the bowl. "How long are you to be with us, Mr. Griffin?"

Mark was dropping into a lazy mood again; it was very comfortable on the veranda. "I haven't fixed a time for going on. I beg your pardon, but aren't those buttons significant? I once spent six months in Rome. Aren't you what they call a *Monsignore*?"

"Don't tell them so here, or I'll lose my standing. Yes, I am a prelate, a Domestic Prelate to His Holiness. I am afraid it is the domesticity of the title that sticks here in Sihasset, rather than the prelacy. My people are poor—mostly mill workers. I have never shown them the purple. It might frighten them out of saying 'Father.'"

"But surely—" Mark hesitated.

"Oh, yes, I know what you are thinking. I did like it at first, but I was younger then, and more ambitious. You know, Mr. Griffin, I find that the priesthood is something like a river. The farther you go from the source the deeper and wider it gets; and it's at its best as it nears the ocean. Even when it empties into the wider waters, it isn't quite lost. It's in the beginning that you notice the flowers on the bank. Coming toward the end, it's—well, different."

"You are not beginning to think you are old?"

"No." Father Murray was very positive. "I am not old yet; but I'm getting there, for I'm forty-five. Only five years until I strike the half-century mark. But why talk about priests and the priesthood? You are not a Catholic?"

"I don't know," said Mark. "The difference between us religiously, Monsignore, is that I was and am not; you were not and behold you are."

Father Murray looked interested.

"Yes, yes," he said; "I am a convert. It was long ago, though. I was a young

Presbyterian minister, and it's odd how it came about. Newman didn't get me, though he shook his own tree into the Pope's lap; I wasn't on the tree. It was Brownson—a Presbyterian like myself—who did the business. You don't know him? Pity! He's worth knowing. I got to reading him, and he made it so plain that I had to drop. I didn't want to, either—but here I am. Now, Mr. Griffin, how did you happen to go the other way?"

"I didn't go—that is, not deliberately. I just drifted. Mother died, and father didn't care, in fact rather opposed; so I just didn't last. Later on, I studied the church and I could not see."

"Studied the church? You mean the Catholic Church?" Father Murray's mouth hid the ghost of a smile.

"No, it wasn't the Catholic Church in particular. When we worldlings say 'the church,' we mean religion in general, perhaps all Christianity in general and all Christians in particular."

"I know." The priest's voice held a touch of sorrow now. "I hope you will pardon me, Mr. Griffin, if I say one thing that may sound controversial—it's just an observation. I have noticed the tendency you speak of; but isn't it strange that when people go looking into the question of religion they can deliberately close their eyes to a 'City set upon a Mountain'?"

"I don't quite—"

"Get me?" Father Murray laughed. "I know that you wanted to use that particular expressive bit of our particularly expressive slang. What I mean is this: People study religion nowadays—that is, English-speaking people—with the Catholic Church left out. Yet she claims the allegiance of over three hundred million people. Without her, Christianity would be merely pitiful. She alone stands firm on her foundation. She alone has something really definite to offer. She has the achievements of twenty centuries by which to judge her. She has borne, during all those centuries, the hatred of the world; but to-day she is loved, too—loved better than anything else on earth. She has hugged the worst of her children to her breast, has borne their shame that she might save them, because she is a mother; yet she has saints to show by the thousands. She has never been afraid to speak—always has spoken; but the ages have not trapped her. She is the biggest, most wonderful, most mysterious, most awful thing on earth; and yet, as

you say, those who study religion ignore her. I couldn't, and I have been through the mill."

Mark shifted a little uneasily. "I can't ignore her," he said, "but I am just a little bit afraid of her."

"Ah, yes." The priest caught his pipe by the bowl and used the stem to emphasize his words. "I felt that way, too. I like you, Mr. Griffin, and so I am going to ask you not to mind if I tell you something that I have never told anyone before. I was afraid of her. I hated her. I struggled, and almost cursed her. She was too logical. She was leading me where I did not want to go. But when I came she put her arms around me; and when I looked at her, she smiled. I came in spite of many things; and now, Mr. Griffin, I pay. I am alone, and I pay always. Yet I am glad to pay. I am glad to pay—even here—in Sihasset."

Mark was moved in spite of himself. "I wonder," he said softly, "if you are glad, Monsignore, to pay so much? Pardon me if I touch upon something raw; but I know that you were, even as a Catholic, higher than you are now. Doesn't that make it hard to pay?"

"To many it might appear that it would make things harder; but it doesn't. You have to be inside in order to understand it. The Church takes you, smiling. She gives to you generously, and then, with a smile, she breaks you; and, hating to be broken, you break, knowing that it is best for you. She pets you, and then she whips you; and the whips sting, but they leave no mark on the soul, except a good mark, *if you have learned*. But pardon me, here's a parishioner—" A woman, old and bent, was coming up the steps. "Come on, Mrs. O'Leary. How is the good man?"

The priest arose to meet the woman, whose sad face aroused in Mark a keen thrill of sympathy.

"He's gone, Father," she said, "gone this minute. I thank God he had you with him this morning, and went right. It came awful sudden."

"God rest him. I'm sorry—"

"Don't be sorry, Father," she answered, as he opened the door to let her go into the house ahead of him. "Sure, God was good to me, and to John and to the childer. Sure, I had him for thirty year, and he died right. I'm happy to do God's

will."

She passed into the house. The priest looked over to where Mark was standing hat in hand.

"Don't go, Mr. Griffin, unless you really have to. I'll be away only a few minutes."

Mark sat down again and thought. The priest had said nothing about the lady of the tree, and Mark really wanted him to mention her; but Father Murray had given him something else that made him thoughtful and brought back memories. Mark did not have long to wait, for the door opened in five minutes and the priest came out alone.

"Mrs. O'Leary came to arrange for the funeral herself—brave, wasn't it?" he said. "I left her with Ann, my housekeeper, a good soul whose specialty is one in which the Irish excel—sympathy. Ann keeps it in stock and, though she is eternally drawing on it, the stock never diminishes. Mrs. O'Leary's troubles are even now growing less."

"Sympathy and loyalty," said Mark, "are chief virtues of the Irish I knew at home."

"Ann has both," said Father Murray, hunting for his pipe. "But the latter to an embarrassing degree. She would even run the parish if she could, to see that it was run to save me labor. Ann has been a priest's housekeeper for twenty-five years. She has condoled with hundreds; she loves the poor but has no patience with shams. We have a chronic sick man here who is her particular *bête noir*. And, as for organists, she would cheerfully drown them all. But Mrs. O'Leary is safe with Ann."

"Poor woman!" said Mark.

"That reminds me," said Father Murray. "I had a convert priest here a little while ago. His Bishop had sent him for his initial 'breaking in' to one of the poorest parishes in a great city. I questioned a little the advisability of doing that; so, after six months, when I met the priest—who, by the way, had been a fashionable minister like myself—I asked him rather anxiously how he liked his people. 'Charming people,' he answered, 'charming. Charming women, too—Mrs. O'Rourke, Mrs. Sweeney, Mrs. Thomasefski—' 'You speak of them,' I said,

'as if they were society ladies.' 'Better—better still,' he answered. 'They're the real thing—fewer faults, more faith, more devotion.' I tell you, Mr. Griffin, I never before met people such as these."

"Mrs. O'Leary seems to have her pastor's philosophy," ventured the visitor.

"Philosophy! That would seem a compliment indeed to Mrs. O'Leary. She wouldn't understand it, but she would recognize it as something fine. It isn't philosophy, though," he added, slowly; "rather, it's something bigger. It's real religion."

"She needs it!"

"So do we all need it. I never knew how much until I was so old that I had to weep for the barren years that might have bloomed." The priest sighed as he hunted for his pipe.

The discussion ended for, to Mark's amazement, who should come up the walk, veiled indeed, yet unmistakable, but the lady of the tree? Both the priest and his visitor stood up. Mark reached for his hat and gloves.

"Pardon me," said the lady, "for disturbing you, Monsignore."

Father Murray laughed and put up his hand. "Now, then—please, please."

"Well, *Father*, then. I like it better, anyway. I heard that poor man is dead. Can I do anything?"

"I think you can," said Father Murray. "Will you step in?"

"No, Father; let me sit here." She looked at Mark, who stood waiting to make his adieux. There was no mistaking the look, and the priest understood at once. Plainly astonished, he introduced Mark. The lady bowed and smiled. As she sat down, she raised her veil. Mark gazed timidly into her face. Though she was seemingly unconscious of the gaze, yet a flush crept up under the fair skin, and the low voice faltered for an instant as she addressed him.

"I am a stranger here, like yourself, I fancy, Mr. Griffin," she ventured, "but I have to thank you for a service."

Mark was scarcely listening. He was wondering if, underneath the drooping brim of her hat, amongst the curling tendrils of golden-brown hair, there might not be a hint of red to show under the sunlight. He was thinking, too, how pretty was the name, Ruth Atheson. It was English enough to make him think of her under certain trees in a certain old park of boyhood's days.

"Do you know each other?" Father Murray was evidently still more astonished.

"Not exactly," she said; "but Mr. Griffin has quick discernment, and is unhesitating in action. He saw someone about to—make himself, let us say, unpleasant—and he moved promptly. I am glad of this chance to thank him."

Mark hoped she would not try. The heavily lashed eyes of violet blue, under the graceful arches, were doing that splendidly. Mark was uneasy under the gaze of them, but strangely glad. He wanted to go and yet to stay; but he knew that it was proper to go.

Father Murray walked with him to the end of the lawn.

"There was nothing serious in the matter to which Miss Atheson referred, Mr. Griffin?" he said. "No one offered insult?" He was plainly anxious.

"Not at all," answered Mark. "I think the man only wanted to stare. I gave him a chance to stare at me—and at the water. That is all."

Father Murray looked relieved as he clasped Mark's hand.

"Good-bye," he said. "Come to see me again. I am usually alone. Come often. The latch-string is where you can reach it."

In the street Mark met Saunders, but this time it was the agent who wanted to talk.

"How did you like the Padre?" he began.

"Splendid. Thank you for the meeting."

"Did you see the lady who went in?"

"Yes; I was introduced."

"Introduced? Never!"

"Why not?"

"Well," the agent was confused, "I don't see why not after all. Did you see her face?"

"She had on a veil."

"Of course; she always has. She was the woman who passed us on the bluff road."

"You saw her, then?"

"Yes, I saw her; but not close enough to know whether—"

"What?"

"I think she is someone I know. Are you coming back to the hotel?"

CHAPTER III

UNDER SUSPICION

That night, tossing in bed, Mark Griffin found the lady of the tree occupying the center of his thoughts. He had to acknowledge to himself the simple truth, that she interested him more than any other woman he had ever seen; and he had a vague idea that he had met her before—but where? He was wise enough to know where such interest would ultimately lead him. The more he worried about it, the more a cause for worry it became. The very idea was foolish. He had seen her twice, had spoken to her once. Yes, she was charming; but he had known others almost as charming and he had not even been interested. Now he might go deeper—and what of the risks?

Saunders was certainly shadowing the woman. The town constable was constantly with him, seemingly ready to make an arrest the moment the detective was sure of his ground. It was easy to figure that out. Worse than all, the woman was afraid—or why the veil? Why the secret door through a tree? Why her embarrassment when she faced the danger of having the detective see her face?

On the other hand, she was a friend of the priest, and Mark had formed a very favorable opinion of Father Murray. Then she had referred to the incident on the bluff road very openly and without embarrassment These things were in her favor, but—well, the rest looked bad. Above all was the danger of falling in love with her.

Mark thought of his people in England and of his brother the Irish peer. He knew their prejudices. What would they say if the heir presumptive to the barony came home with an American wife? Yet why should he care?

The worry about Saunders came back. He was undoubtedly a detective, and surely detectives did not without cause shadow ladies of good social standing? Mark knew there was something wrong. He knew there was danger to himself, to his heart, and to his peace; so he decided that he had better go away at once. Then the face he had seen as she stepped past him out of the tree rose up, and he heard again the voice that had in it so much gratitude when she thanked him for

his little service.

"Damn it, man," he said to himself, "you can't be a coward! She needs help; stay to give it." That was Mark's first and last struggle over his long-delayed moving problem.

He met Saunders at breakfast the next morning. The detective must have been thinking, too, for his glance at Mark held a trifle of suspicion. Mark was too old a student of human nature to miss the significance of the look, and Saunders was too young at his business entirely to conceal his own feelings. He tried—but too late—and was foolish enough to think he had not betrayed himself.

Mark made up his mind to profit by the suspicion.

"Good morning, Saunders. You are thinking of the lady in the veil?"

But Saunders was already back in his shell. He looked puzzled. "Veil? Lady? Oh, yes. Sure I am. It would be very ungallant to forget her. She's too pretty."

"How do you know? You didn't see her face."

"I was just guessing. We Yankees are good at guessing. Don't you English concede that?"

"Guessing and wooden nutmegs," said Mark, "both go with the Yankee character."

"Guessing, wooden nutmegs, and a little taste of Brandywine thrown in for flavor."

"Very unkind of you to throw our defeats in our teeth—and especially into mine; for you know that I am half Irish, and we Irish helped you."

Saunders laughed as they approached the desk together.

"Letter for you, Mr. Griffin," said the clerk, throwing a square envelope on the desk.

Saunders just glanced at it before Mark himself saw that the letter was without a stamp; it had come by messenger. The detective turned his back to

hide a smile, then walked to the reading table and picked up a paper.

Mark opened his letter. It was from the lady of the tree—only a few lines—an invitation to tea that afternoon at the house behind the great wall. Twice he read it over.

"Dear Mr. Griffin: Monsignore is coming to tea at four o'clock to-day. Won't you come with him? He likes you—that I know—and he always looks lonesome when he comes alone, with only two women to talk to.
Sincerely,
Ruth Atheson."

That was all. The letter went into Mark's pocket as he saw Saunders looking over the top of his paper.

"Getting acquainted in Sihasset pretty quickly, eh?" ventured the detective.

"Yes," replied Mark, "bad pays get acquainted fast." The reply was obviously inadequate, but Mark wanted the detective to know. Saunders took the bait, hook and all.

"Sihasset's getting up in the world," he commented. "Square, tinted envelopes for bills were just coming in at New York two weeks ago."

Both gentlemen were evidently quite pleased with themselves. Saunders took the cigar Mark offered, and they sat talking over first editions until ten.

"Going out?" Saunders asked, as Mark threw away his cigar and rose. Something in his tone made Mark think he wanted him to go. Why?

"Just for a little while. Want to go?"

"No, I'm going to write letters. I'll go out later."

Mark understood. Saunders suspected him to be an accomplice of the woman and intended to search his room. Mark thought quickly. Immediate action was

necessary; there were important papers in his room, and he didn't care to have his identity known just now. Then he smiled cheerfully, for his whole plan of action was suddenly clear. Not only would he guard his papers, but he'd keep the detective guessing—guessing *hard*. He walked to the desk and addressed the clerk:

"Has any of the town banks a safety deposit vault for the public?"

"Yes, sir. The National has one and its terms are very reasonable."

Mark went to his room, and carefully gathered every scrap of paper. The useless went into the old stove which had stood all summer waiting the winter's need; the others he carefully placed in his pocket. Then he went out. At the bank he rented a box and left the papers he didn't want Saunders to see. He felt satisfied that nothing Saunders found would relieve him of suspicion. The burning of the papers would make the detective all the more certain that Mark ought to be watched. That would help Miss Atheson by keeping the detective on the wrong scent.

At noon Mark went to his room to wash before lunch. Saunders had not been very clever. There was a tell-tale smudge on the stove—a smudge made by a hand that had blackened itself by diving down into the ashes to search among the burned papers. Mark knew that Saunders had lost no time in searching his room, and he was happy to be still under suspicion.

But Mark was not so happy in contemplating the rest of the situation. He was getting deeper into a game he knew nothing about. What was the reason for the suspicion against the girl? Could she be a thief—or worse? Mark had heard of pretty criminals before, and he knew that beauty without is no guarantee of virtue within. But he had resolved to go through with the adventure, and he would not change his mind. He argued, too, that it was not entirely the beauty of Ruth Atheson that interested him. There was an indefinable "something else." Anyhow, innocent or guilty, he made up his mind to stand by her.

At lunch he met Saunders again and found him overly friendly, even anxious to talk. The detective opened the conversation.

"Going to see the Padre again?"

"I have an engagement with him this afternoon. I rather like the Padre!"

"Sure you do," said the detective. "Everybody does. The Padre's a wonder, and the last man one might expect to find in a little parish like this."

Mark wanted to learn more on that score.

"True enough," he said. "In the Anglican Church they would make such a man a bishop, or at least a dean."

"Well, they didn't do that with the Padre." The detective shook his head as if to express his regret that something of the kind had not been done. "He was the right hand man of the old Bishop of the diocese; but the new Bishop had to have new counselors. That's one way of the world that the church fellows have gotten into. Some say that it broke the Padre's heart, but he doesn't look it. Must have hurt him a little, though. Human nature is human nature—and after all he did for the Church, too."

"Did he do so much?" questioned Mark.

"Sure he did! You saw the Cathedral, didn't you, when you passed through the city? Well, the Padre built that, and the big college, too, the one you see from the train. He was president of the college. He was the life and soul of the Catholic Church in this section."

"Why was he dropped?"

"Search me," offered the detective. "No one knows that except the Bishop, I guess. Padre came here six months ago. Some of the young priests used to come to see him, but seldom any of the older ones. I got all I know from one of those young chaps—the one I told you I met on the train. He almost cried over the affair."

"It's sad enough to make any friend cry over it," said Mark; "but somehow it makes the man seem bigger to me."

"True." Saunders was clearly the Padre's admirer. "They say he had the best pulpit in London before he went over to the Catholics—big salary, and all that. Then he had to begin all over again as a layman. Went to school, by gosh!—dead game! But when they made him a priest he jumped right to the front. His last money went into the college he built. He has only five hundred a year to live on now. You know, Griffin, if it wasn't for the rotten way the Church treated him, I

honestly believe the Padre could put some religion into me. He's a power here already. Look at the way he makes that girl at Killimaga work."

It seemed to Mark that the detective was beginning to fence again.

"She's a stranger, isn't she?" he asked.

The detective half closed his eyes. "How do you know?"

"You told me so."

Saunders blew a thoughtful smoke ring.

"I guess I did. You know, of course, Killimaga was rented to her about the time Padre came here. The old Irishman who built it, died, and his family went over to your country to buy a title for their only daughter. The girl up there must be a rich one to rent such an estate; and, Griffin, that old Irishman had taste, believe me. His gardens are a wonder. Ever see them?"

"No."

"Try to; they're worth while. This girl spends her money and herself on the Padre's charities. He directs, and she does things for the mill people. By gad, Griffin, they just love her! I passed her just now going into O'Leary's. The old man was crushed at the mill, and died yesterday. It's dollars to doughnuts she takes care of that family all winter. Where she gets the money is beyond me."

"You Americans are all rich," said Mark. "You English think we are, but you only see the gang that goes over to the other side every summer. There's one Atheson family in America worth millions, but I know that crowd; she doesn't belong to it. I don't know what Atheson family she does belong to. She's a mystery, with her Killimaga and her money and her veil."

"Why," said Mark, "every woman wears a veil—the sun, you know."

"Yes; the sun, and the rain, and the shade, and *every* kind of weather!"

The detective's face was betraying him again. But the luncheon was over, and Mark would not be probed. He had made up his mind to go early to the rectory, so he left Saunders with a parting shot:

"You'd better go on with the book sales. You've loafed all day. That's bad business policy for a Yankee. What would your wooden nutmeg ancestors say to that?"

Saunders grinned.

"They wouldn't like it," he answered. "They're not like ancestors who wouldn't have been able to sell even a real nutmeg."

Mark acknowledged that in repartee Saunders scored, then went out to make his way toward the rectory. As he passed the First National Bank he saw the constable talking to the cashier.

CHAPTER IV

KILLIMAGA

Father Murray was sitting in his favorite chair on the rectory veranda when Mark came up the lawn. He rose with a welcome.

"You must pardon me, Father," began Mark, "for coming so soon after your noon meal—" Mark hesitated about saying "luncheon," not knowing the habits of the rectory—"but, frankly, I wanted to talk to you before—"

"Before we go to Killimaga," supplied Father Murray as Mark paused. "Yes, I know that you are invited. Sit down and open up. I am always glad to talk—and to listen, too. What is it?"

Again Mark hesitated. "It's to ask about Miss Atheson."

Father Murray's eyes smiled. "I thought so," he said. "What do you want to know?"

Mark hesitated. "I know that the lady is very charitable and kind, but especially so to anyone whom you suggest. You must, therefore, be interested in anything that concerns her."

"I am," said Father Murray. "Very much interested."

Mark thought he noticed a new and half-suspicious note in the priest's voice, and was distressed. He felt like blaming himself for having mentioned the subject. He feared he had lost ground with his new-made friend; but, having started the discussion, Mark was determined to go through with it.

"It's just this way, Father," he said. "I think you ought to know that there is someone besides yourself interested in Miss Atheson. The incident she mentioned yesterday seemed a small one, but—well, I had to move pretty quick to keep that man from making himself obnoxious. He had a photograph in his hand and was determined to see her face in order to make comparisons. Incidentally, the constable was with him."

Mark, watching closely to note the effect of his words, saw the face before him whiten.

"The constable with him?"

"And I am confident that the other man is a detective. I feel sure he thinks Miss Atheson is someone he has been commissioned to find. And they evidently think that I am in the matter to defend the lady. This morning I left some papers in the safety deposit vault at the First National, and as I passed the bank a little while ago I saw the constable talking to the cashier—about me, judging from their confusion as they acknowledged my greeting through the window. My room was searched this morning. They didn't find anything, though." Mark laughed as he thought how disappointed Saunders must have been.

"I hope you will pardon me, Mr. Griffin," said Father Murray, "if I confine myself for the present to asking questions. Have you ever noticed the camp of Slavic laborers about a mile east of Killimaga—along the line of the new railway?"

"I have passed it several times."

"Did you by chance notice," Father Murray went on, "whether this detective looked like a Slav?"

"On the contrary, he is—" Mark half paused, then hurried on—"an American." It was not necessary that he mention Saunders' name—not now, at least.

Father Murray seemed puzzled. "There are two or three educated men in that camp," he said, "who have been hanging around Killimaga a great deal of late; and they have been worrying an old parishioner of mine—a retired farmer who finds plenty of time to worry about everybody else, since he has no worries of his own. He thinks that these well-dressed 'bosses' are strange residents for a railroad construction camp. He tells me that he has often been in such camps, but that he had never seen what he calls 'gintlemen' living in them before."

Mark laughed. "Your old parishioner is a discerning man."

"Uncle Mac," replied Father Murray, "is the kind of man who believes that virtue stands in the middle. When I first came here he called to see me to ask

about my politics. Uncle Mac is a lifelong Democrat, and when I told him that I usually voted the Republican ticket he became suspicious. Just before the election I preached on 'Citizenship'—careful always to avoid any reference to partisanship. Uncle Mac came in after Mass and said: 'I think ye were preachin' Republican sintiments this morning Father.' I said, 'Not at all, Uncle Mac. I made no reference to either party.' 'No,' said he, 'but yer sintiments were awful highfalutin'.'"

Mark laughed his appreciation. "Wasn't that rather a compliment to the Republicans?" he asked.

"I took it so," said Father Murray. "But Uncle Mac does not like the 'highfalutin'.' One day he said to me, when he saw all my books, 'The man who was here before you, Father, wasn't smart enough; but you're too dom smart. Now, I don't like a priest who isn't smart enough, but I'm afeerd of one who's too dom smart. If you'd only half as many books, I'd feel betther about ye.'"

The Padre paused a moment; then the anxious look returned and he spoke slowly as if he were trying to solve the puzzle even while he spoke.

"Uncle Mac told me yesterday that there was a very 'highfalutin' gintleman' in the camp the night before last. He came there in a long, rakish automobile. Uncle Mac said that 'he parted his whiskers in the middle, so he did,' and that 'he looked like a governor or somethin' of the sort.' I was just wondering if that detective of yours has anything to do with that camp, and if these strange visitors are not in some way connected with his interest in Miss Atheson. But perhaps that's making too much of a mystery of it."

"As to that," said Mark, "of course I cannot say. I merely wanted you to know, Father Murray, just what was going on; to tell you that while you don't know me, nevertheless I hope you will permit me to be of assistance if these people are annoying Miss Atheson. If you wish to know more about me, I shall be glad to bring you the papers I left in the vault this morning."

"I do not need to see your papers, Mr. Griffin," Father Murray answered. "I am satisfied with you, especially since Miss Atheson owes something to you. Will you mind if I do not discuss the matter with you further now?"

"Not at all, Father Murray. I do not ask for information that you feel you should not give."

"Perhaps," said Father Murray, "I shall give it to you later on; but for the present let matters stand as they are. You know the detective, and I don't. The principal thing is to find out whether there is any connection between that camp, the 'highfalutin' gintleman' of Uncle Mac, and the detective. I have reason to think there may be. This much I will say to you: You need have no fear whatever for Miss Atheson. I can assure you that there is no good reason in the world why a detective should be watching her. Miss Atheson is everything that she looks."

"I am confident of that," said Mark. "Otherwise I should not have spoken to you."

"Then," said the priest, "suppose we go now to our engagement at Killimaga."

The two passed across the lawn, then down the street and along the road toward the great house whose towers looked out over the trees. Neither Mark nor the priest said a word until the town was well behind them. Then Father Murray turned to his companion.

"You will find Miss Atheson a remarkable woman, Mr. Griffin. There is a reason, perhaps, why I might not be a competent judge—why I might be prejudiced—but still I think that you, too, will see it. She has not been here long, but she is already loved. She receives no one but me. But she seems to like you, and I didn't hurt you any in her estimation by my own rather sudden attraction."

"I am grateful for your appreciation," replied Mark, "even though I may not deserve it. And more grateful for your confidence."

Walking slowly, and chatting in friendly fashion, they reached Killimaga. As the great gates swung open their attention was arrested by the purring of a motor. Father Murray uttered a low "Ah!" while Mark stared after the swiftly vanishing machine. He, too, had seen its passenger, a heavy, dark man with a short beard combed from the center to the sides. The flashing eyes had seemed to look everywhere at once, yet the man in the car had continued to smoke in quiet nonchalance as if he had not noticed the two standing by the gates. Uncle Mac had described the man well. He was 'highfalutin" without a doubt.

"Sihasset is greatly honored," Father Murray remarked softly.

"Do you know him?"

"I have seen him before. He comes from a foreign state, but he is no stranger to America—nor to England, for that matter. Have you any acquaintance with the diplomats in London?"

"I have attended balls at which some of them were present."

"Does your memory recall one of that type?" persisted the priest.

"No, it does not."

"Mine does," said Father Murray. "I once had occasion to offer a prayer at an important banquet at which that gentleman was the guest of honor. He sat near me, and when I asked him where he had acquired such a mastery of English, he told me that he had been for five years minister at the Court of St. James. He is now accredited to Washington. Do you see why I suggest that Sihasset is greatly honored to-day?"

Mark could not conceal his astonishment.

"But why under heaven," he said, "should a foreign diplomat be mixed up in a camp of Slavic laborers?"

"There are strange things in diplomacy," said Father Murray. "And stranger things in Sihasset when the town constable has so much interest in your taking of tea at Killimaga. If you had turned around a moment ago, you would have seen our constable's coattails disappearing behind the bushes on our right."

CHAPTER V

WITH EMPTY HANDS

In the long after years Mark Griffin used to wonder at the strange way in which love for Ruth Atheson entered his life. Mark always owned that, somehow, this love seemed sent for his salvation. It filled his life, but only as the air fills a vacuum; so it was, consequently, nothing that prevented other interests from living with it. It aroused him to greater ambition. The long-neglected creative power moved without Mark's knowing why. His pen wrote down his thoughts, and he no longer destroyed what he committed to paper. It now seemed a crime to destroy what had cost him only a pleasure to produce. The world had suddenly become beautiful. No longer did Japan and Siberia call to him. He had no new plans, but he knew that they were forming, slowly, but with finality and authority.

Yet Mark's love was never spoken. It was just understood. Many times he had determined to speak, and just as many times did it seem quite unnecessary. He felt that Ruth understood, for one day, when an avowal trembled on his lips, she had broken it off unspoken by gently calling him "Mark," her face suffused the while with an oddly tender light that was in itself an answer. After that it was always "Ruth" and "Mark." Father Murray also seemed to understand; with him, too, it was "Ruth" and "Mark." After one week of that glorious September, Mark was at Killimaga daily; and when October came and had almost passed, without a word of affection being spoken between them, Ruth and Mark came to know that some day it would be spoken, quite as naturally as she had uttered his Christian name for the first time. When Mark thought of his love, he thought also of his mother. He seemed to see her smile as if it quite pleased her; and he rejoiced that he could believe she knew, and saw that it was good.

"I love many things in men," said Father Murray one day as he and Mark watched the waves dashing against the bluff. "I love generosity and strength, truthfulness and mercy; but, most of all, I love cleanness. The world is losing it, and the world will die from the loss. The chief aid to my faith is the clean hearts I see in my poor."

"Uncle Mac again?" ventured Mark.

"Uncle Mac, and Uncles Mac—many of them. They have a heritage of cleanness. It is the best thing they brought to this new world, and *we* were the losers when they left us."

"*We*? But you are English, are you not?" asked Mark courteously.

"Ah! So you caught me then, did you? Yes, I am English, or rather British. But don't question me about that; I am real Yankee now. Even my tongue has lost its ancestral rights."

Mark was persistent. "Perhaps you, too, have a little of the 'blessed drop' that makes the Uncle Macs what they are? I really think, Father, that you have it."

"Not even a little of the 'blessed drop.' I am really not English, though born in England. Both father and mother were Scotch. So I am kin to the 'blessed drop.'"

"And you drifted here—"

"Not exactly 'drifted,' Mark. I came because I wanted to come. I came for opportunity. I was ambitious, and then there was another reason—but that is at present forbidden ground. Here is your constable friend again."

The constable passed with a respectful touch of his helmet. *He* at least was of the soil. Every line of his face spoke of New England.

"He is a character worth studying," remarked Father Murray. "Have you ever talked with him?"

"No. I have had no chance."

"Then find one, and put him in a book. He was once rich for Sihasset. That was in the lumber days. But he lost his money, and he thinks that the town owes him a living. That is the Methodist minister to whom he is speaking now. He, too, is worth your attention."

"Do you get along well with the Protestant clergy of the town?" asked Mark.

"Splendidly," said Father Murray; "especially with the Universalist. There is a

lot of humor in the Universalist. I suspect the 'blessed drop' in him. One day I happened to call him a Unitarian, and he corrected me. 'But what,' I asked, 'is the difference between the Universalists and the Unitarians?' The little man smiled and said: 'One of my professors put it like this: "The Unitarians believe that God is too good to damn them, and the Universalists believe they are too good to be damned."'"

"Still, it cannot be an easy life," said Mark, "to be one of seven or eight Protestant pastors in such a small town."

"It certainly is hard sledding," replied Father Murray. "But these men take it very philosophically and with a great deal of self-effacement. The country clergyman has trials that his city brother knows nothing about. He has to figure on the pennies that rarely grow to dollars."

The two friends walked on, Mark's mind reverting to his own lack of faith and contrasting his dubiety with the sincerity of men who firmly believe—foremost among them the man who walked by his side. Ah, if he, too, could only *know*! He broke the silence.

"Father." He spoke hurriedly, as if fearing he might not have courage to continue what he had so boldly begun. "Father, I can't forget your words regarding those who claim to have studied religion and yet who deliberately leave out of the reckoning the greatest part of religion. I believe I did that very thing. I was once a believer, at least so I thought. I let my belief get away from me; it seemed no longer to merit consideration. I thought I had studied and discarded it; I see now that I simply cast it away. Afterwards, I gave consideration to other religions, but they were cold, lacking in the higher appeal. I turned at last to Theosophy, to Confucianism, but remained always unsatisfied. I never thought to look again into the religion I had inherited."

Father Murray's face was serious. "I am deeply interested," he said, "deeply, although it was only as I thought. But tell me. What led you to do this? There must have been a reason formed in your mind."

"I never thought of a reason at all; I just did it. But now it seems to me that the reason was there, and that it was not a very worthy one. I think I wanted to get away. My social interest and comfort, my independence, all seemed threatened by my faith. You will acknowledge, Father, that it is an interfering

sort of a thing? It hampers one's actions, and it has a bad habit of getting dictatorial. Don't you see what I mean?"

"I do," said the priest; and paused as if to gauge the sincerity of his companion. "In fact, I went through a similar experience."

"Then you can tell me what you think of my position."

"I have already told you," said the priest earnestly. "You are the one to do the thinking now. All I can do is to point out the road by which you may best retrace your way. You have told me just what I expected to hear; I admire your honesty in telling it—not to me, but to yourself. Don't you see that your reason for deserting your Faith was but a reason for greater loyalty? The oldest idea of religion in the world, after that of the existence and providence of God, is the idea of sacrifice. Even pagans never lost that idea. Nothing in this world is worth having but must be paid for. Its cost is summed up in sacrifice. Now, religion demands the same. If it calls for right living, it calls for the sacrifice that right living demands. An athlete gets his muscle and strength, not by coddling his body, but by restraining its passions and curbing its indolence, by working its softness into force and power. A river is bound between banks, and only thus bound is it anything but a menace. If a church claims to have the Truth, she forfeits her first claim to a hearing if she asks for no sacrifice. That your Church asked many sacrifices was no cause for your throwing her over, but a sign that she claimed the just right to put religion in positive form, and to give precepts of sacrifice, without the giving of which she would have no right to exist at all. Am I clear?"

"You are clear, Father, and I know you are right. I have never been able to leave my own Faith entirely out of the reckoning. I am not trying to excuse myself. I could not ignore it, for it intruded itself and forced attention. In fact, it has been forcing itself upon me most uncomfortably, especially of late years."

"Again," said Father Murray, "a reason why you should have attended to it. If there is a divine revelation confided to the care of a church, that revelation is for the sake of men and not for the sake of the church. A church has no right to existence for its own sake. He was a wise Pope who called himself 'Servant of the Servants of God.' The position of your Church—for I must look upon you as a Catholic—is, that a divine revelation has been made. If it has been made it must be conserved. Reason tells us that something then must have been

established to conserve it. That *something* will last as long as the revelation needs conserving, which is to the end of the world. Now, only the Catholic Church claims that she has the care of that revelation—that she is the conserving force; which means that she is—as I have told you before—a 'City set upon a Mountain.' She can't help making herself seen. She *must* intrude on your thoughts. She *must* speak consistently through your life. She can permit no one to ignore her. She *won't* let anyone ignore her. Kick her out one door, and she will come in another. She is in your art, your music, your literature, your laws, your customs, your very vices as well as your virtues—as she was destined to be. It is her destiny—her manifest destiny—and she can't change it if she would."

Mark drew in a deep breath that sounded like a sigh. "I suppose, Father," he said, "I could argue with you and dispute with you; under other circumstances perhaps I should. I hate to think that I may have to give up my liberty; yet I am not going to argue, and I am not going to dispute. I wanted information, and I got it. The questions I asked were only for the purpose of drawing you out. But here is another: Why should any institution come between a man and his God? Is that necessary?"

The priest's eyes held a far-away look. It was some little while before he spoke, and then very slowly, as if carefully weighing his words.

"There is nothing," said the priest, "between the trees and the flowers and their God—but they are only trees and flowers; they live, but they neither think nor feel. There is nothing between the lower animals and their God; but, though they live and feel, they have none of the higher power of thought. If God had wanted man thus, why should he have given him something more than the lower animals? Man cannot live and feel only and still be a man. He must feed not only his body but his heart and soul and intellect. The men who have nothing between themselves and their God are mostly confined in lunatic asylums. The gift of intelligence demands action by the intellect; and there must be a foundation upon which to base action. When the foundation is in place, there never can be any limit to the desire for building upon it. Now, God willed all that. He created the condition and is, therefore, obliged to satisfy the desires of that condition. Some day He must satisfy the desires to the full; but now He is obliged only to keep them fed, or to give them the means to keep fed. Of course, He could do that by a direct revelation to each individual; but that He has not done so is proved by the fact that, while there can be but one Truth, yet each individual who 'goes it alone' has a different conception of it. The idea of private religious inspiration

has produced public religious anarchy. Now, God could not will religious anarchy—He loves truth too much. So reason tells us that He *must* have done the thing that His very nature would force Him to do. He *must* have confided His revelation to His Church in order to preserve it, to teach it, to keep it for men. That is not putting any man or institution between Himself and His creatures. Would you call the hand which drags you over a danger an interference with your liberty? Liberty, my dear Mark, is not the right to be blind, but the privilege of seeing. The light that shows things to your eyes is not an interference between those things and your eyes. The road you take to your destination is not an obstacle to your reaching it."

The priest was silent for a moment, but Mark knew that he had not quite finished.

"The rich young man of the Scriptures went to Christ and asked what he should do to be saved. He got his answer. Was Christ in his way? Was the answer a restraint upon his liberty?"

"No," answered Mark, breaking in, "it was not a restraint upon his liberty. But you say that Christ is God, so the young man had nothing between himself and his God."

"Oh, yes, he had," said the priest. "He had the command or counsel that Christ gave him. It was against the command or counsel that he rebelled. Now have not I, and you, and all the world, the same right to get an answer as that young man had? Since we are all equal in the sight of God, and since Christ came for all men, have we not the right to an answer now as clear as His was then?"

"It seems logical," admitted Mark.

"Then," said Father Murray, "the unerring Voice must still be here. Where is it?"

"Yes," retorted Mark, "that is my cry. Where is it? I think it's the cry of many other men. What is the answer?"

"It is the thing that you threw over—or believed you had thrown over—and that you can't get away from thinking about. It waits to answer you."

A silence settled between the two men. It lasted for over a minute. Finally Mark broke it.

"You told me, Father," he said, "that what I called 'Mrs. O'Leary's philosophy' was religion. I now know better what you meant, for I have been gossiping about you. The best point you make is—yourself. I know what you have been, what you have done, and how sadly you have suffered. Doesn't your religion demand too much—resignation? Does a God of Justice demand that we tamely submit to injustice? I am not saying this to be personal, or to pain you, but everyone seems to wonder at your resignation to injustice. Why should such a fault be in the Church you think so perfect?"

The priest looked at Mark with kindly and almost merry eyes. "I can answer you better, my friend, by sticking to my own case. I have never talked of it before; but, if it helps you, I can't very well refuse to talk of it now. I came to the Church with empty hands, having passed through the crisis that seems to be upon you. She filled those empty hands, for she honored me and gave me power. She set me in high places, and I honestly tried to be worthy. I worked for her, and I seemed to succeed. Then—and very suddenly and quietly—she pulled me down, and tore my robe of honor from me. My fellow priests, my old friends, criticised me and judged me harshly. They came no more to see me, though I had been generous with them. In the college I built and directed, one of my old friends sits in my place and forgets who put him there. Another is the Bishop who disgraced me. Now, have I a right to feel angry and rebel?"

"To me," said Mark, "it seems as if you have."

"I have not," and the priest spoke very earnestly. "I have no such right. I never knew—for I did not ask—the reason of my disgrace. But one thing I did know; I knew it was for my good. I knew that, though it was a trial given me by men, there was in it, too, something given by God. You judge as I should have judged ten years ago—by the standards of the world. I judge now by other standards. It took adversity to open my eyes. We are not here, my dear Mark, for the little, but for the big things. I had the little and I thought they were big. My fall from a place of honor has taught me that they were really little, and that it is only now that I have the big. What is religion for but to enlighten and to save—enlighten here that the future may hold salvation? What were my purple, power and title? Nothing, unless I could make them help to enlighten and to save myself and others. I ought to have fought them, but I was not big enough to see

that they hindered where I could have made them help. Like a bolt out of the sunlight came the stripping. My shame was the best offering I have made during all the days of my life. In my misery I went to God as naturally as the poor prodigal son went to his father when he was reduced to eating husks from the trough of the swine. I asked nothing as to the cause of my fall. I knew that, according to man's standard—even according to the laws that she herself had made—that the Church had been unjust; but I did not ask to know anything about it, for the acceptance of the injustice was worth more to my soul than was the great cathedral I had been instrumental in building. I was grieved that my friends had left me, but I knew at last that I had cultivated them at the expense of greater friends—sacrifice and humility. Shorn of my honors, in the rags and tatters left of my greatness, I lay before my Master—and I gained more in peace than I had ever known was in life."

"God!" Mark's very soul seemed to be speaking, and the single word held the solemnity of a prayer. "This, then, is religion! Was it this that I lost?"

"No one has lost, Mark, what he sincerely wishes to find."

CHAPTER VI

WHO IS RUTH?

Leaving Father Murray at the rectory, Mark went on to the hotel. Entering the lobby, he gave vent to a savage objurgation as he recognized the man speaking to the clerk. Mark's thoughts were no longer of holy things, for the man was no other than Saunders, from whom, for the past two weeks, Sihasset had been most pleasantly free.

"Damn!" he muttered. "I might have known he'd return to spoil it all." Then, mustering what grace he could, Mark shook hands with the detective, greeting him with a fair amount of cordiality, for, personally, he rather liked the man. "You here!" he exclaimed. "I scarcely expected ever to see you again."

Saunders grinned pleasantly, but still suspiciously, as he answered. "I can't say the same of you, Mr. Griffin. I knew you would be here when I returned; fact is, I came back to see you."

"Me? How could I cart books all over the world with me? What do you want to see me for? No, no. I am bad material for you to work on. Better go back to the Padre. He's what you call an 'easy mark,' isn't he?"

"Oh, he's not so easy as you think, Griffin. By the way, have you lunched?"

"No."

"You will join me then?"

"Thanks; I will."

"We can get into a corner and talk undisturbed."

But lunch was disposed of before Saunders began. When he did, it was right in the middle of things.

"Griffin," he said, leaning over the table and looking straight at Mark,

"Griffin, what's your game? Let's have this thing out."

"I am afraid, Saunders," replied Mark, "that I must take refuge again in the picturesque slang which the Padre thinks so expressive: I really don't get you."

"Oh, yes, you do. What are you doing here?"

"Honestly, my good fellow," Mark began to show a little pique, "you have remarkable curiosity about what isn't your business."

"But it *is* my business, Griffin. I am not a book agent, and never was."

It was Mark's turn to smile.

"Which fact," he said, "is not information to me. I knew it long ago. You are a detective."

"I am. Does that tell you nothing?"

"Nothing," replied Mark, "except that you make up splendidly as a really decent sort of fellow."

"Perhaps I am a decent sort, decent enough, anyhow; and perhaps I don't particularly like my business, but it *is* my business. Now, look here, Griffin, I want you to help instead of hindering me. I have to ask this question of you: What do you know about Ruth Atheson? You see her every day."

"So," said Mark, annoyed, "the constable has not been around for nothing."

"You have seen him then?"

"Everywhere."

"Which proves he is a reliable constable, even if he is not a good detective." Saunders looked pleased. "But what about Ruth Atheson?"

But Mark would have his innings now. He knew well how to keep Saunders anxious.

"I am quite—well, interested in Miss Atheson."

"What!" Saunders half arose.

"Sit down, Saunders," said Mark quietly, "sit down. What's so astonishing about that?"

"You—you—are engaged to Miss Atheson? You can't mean it!"

"I didn't say *that*."

Saunders sat down again. "You know nothing about her," he gasped.

"The Padre's friends are good enough to appeal to me."

"But does the Padre know?"

Mark's eyes began to steel and glitter. He fixed them on Saunders, and his voice came very steady and quiet.

"Know what, Saunders? Know what?"

"Know what? Why, that Ruth Atheson is *not* Ruth Atheson."

"Then who *is* she?"

Saunders drew a deep breath, and stared hard at Mark for what seemed a long time to both. The detective broke the tension.

"Griffin," he almost shouted, "either I am a fool, and ought to be given a job as town crier, or you are the cleverest I've ever gone up against, or—"

"Or," Mark's voice was still quiet, "I may be entirely lacking in the knowledge which you possess. Get it off your mind, man—better do it soon, for you will *have to* later on, you know. I have *quite* made up my mind on that."

"Yes," Saunders seemed half satisfied, "yes, you may not know—it really looks as if you didn't. Are you the simon-pure Mark Griffin, brother of Baron Griffin of the Irish peerage?"

"Yes. Where did you get that last bit of information?"

Saunders ignored the query.

"Did you really drop in here as a traveler, aiming at nothing in particular?"

"Yes."

"Did you never know Ruth—"

"Miss—"

"Miss Ruth Atheson before?"

"No."

"Ever hear of her?"

"No."

"Are you really—interested in her?"

"Yes."

"Do you intend to stay interested?"

"Yes."

"I *was* mistaken. You don't know, and I guess it's my duty to tell you the truth. This girl is a *runaway*."

"What?" Mark was rising.

Saunders put out his hand. "Easy now, Griffin, easy now. Just wait. I am going to tell you something. I see that you really know nothing, and it's up to me to enlighten you. As I said, Ruth Atheson is *not* Ruth Atheson. She's the daughter of a grand duke. I can't tell you the name of the Grand Duchy, but I'll say this: it isn't very far from a certain Big Kingdom we hear a great deal about now—in fact the Duchy is a dependency of the Big Kingdom—more than that, the so-called Ruth Atheson is heiress presumptive to the throne. She'll some day be the Grand Duchess."

Mark sat stunned. It was with difficulty that he could speak. He saw a tragedy that Saunders could not see. Then he broke out:

"But you? How do you know?"

"It's my business to know—the business you don't like. I was instructed to watch her. She got out of Europe before certain people could reach her—"

"But," objected Mark, "how do I know you are telling the truth?"

Saunders dug into his pocket and pulled out a postal card. "This will tell you—or the photograph on it will."

The picture was a foreign one, bearing the strange characters of a Slavic language, such a card as is sold in every country with portraits of reigning or distinguished personages. The facsimile signature, in a bold feminine hand across the lower part of the picture, was "Carlotta."

"Do you believe me now, Griffin?" asked Saunders, with some sympathy showing on his face, which fact alone saved Mark from smashing it.

"I am afraid I must, Saunders. You had better tell me the whole of this."

"I will; for, as I have sized up the situation, it is best that I should. The Duchess ran away. She was supposed to be at San Sebastian with a trusted attendant. The attendant was evidently *not* to be trusted, for *she* disappeared, too. They were traced to London, then to Madeira, then to a North German Lloyd liner which stopped at the island on its way to America. Then to Boston. Then to Sihasset."

"This attendant you spoke of—what was she like?"

Saunders gave the description: "Dark, fairly stout, white hair, bad English, piercing black eyes, sixty years old, upper lip showing a growth of hair, slight wart on the right side of the nose."

"Madam Neuville!"

"So she's here with her, is she? I suspected that, but I have never seen the old lady."

"She doesn't go out much."

"Are you satisfied now, Mr. Griffin?"

"As to identity, yes. Now, I will ask the questions. I have a right, haven't I, Saunders?"

Saunders nodded.

"Why did the Duchess run away?"

Saunders hesitated before he answered. "I hate to tell you that. Don't ask."

"But I *do* ask."

"Well, you may have a right to know. There was a man, that's why."

Mark wondered at his own self-control.

"Who was he?"

"An army officer, attached to the Italian embassy at her father's court. But, look here, Griffin, there was no scandal about it. She just fell in love with him, that's all. I was here watching for *him*. I thought, for a while, that *you* might be the man, though the descriptions did not tally. I was taking no chances. If I saw him, my business was to telegraph to a certain Ministry at Washington; that was all."

"And they would—"

"I don't know. Those fellows have ways I can't fathom. I don't know what they would do. They probably have their plans laid. It's evident that they don't want her to meet him. I can't arrest her, and neither can they; but they certainly could do for him if they wanted to. It would be easier to bring her back, then, without scandal or publicity. Now you've got all I know. What are you going to do?"

"I'm afraid," Mark spoke with an effort, "I'm afraid that I don't know just what to do, Saunders. You see, I happen to love her."

"But what about the other man?"

"Well, Saunders, I find it very hard to believe that."

"Griffin," said Saunders, "I've told you a lot, because I know you are a gentleman, and because you have a right to know. I make only one request of you: please don't speak of this."

"I appreciate the confidence, Saunders. My word is given."

"Think this thing over, Griffin. You're the right stuff. I don't blame you for wanting her. You know better than I if she's right, and if you ever can have her."

Mark went back to his room. On his table lay a note. He opened it and read:

"My dear Mark: The Bishop is coming this morning to confirm the little class of tots who received their First Holy Communion last Sunday. His Lordship is a charming man. I'm sure you would like to meet him. Come up and take dinner with us at noon. He leaves on the three o'clock train. Better be at the rectory at eleven thirty.

Sincerely,

Donald Murray."

CHAPTER VII

BITTER BREAD

When Mark arrived at the church, which stood quite close to the little rectory, he heard the choir singing the *Veni Creator,* and remembered enough of former visits to church services to know that the sermon was about to begin. Early for dinner, he decided to pass the time listening to what the Bishop might have to say. There were no vacant seats near the door of the church, so he had to go quite close to the sanctuary before he found a place. Only two seats ahead of him was the group of twenty little girls about to be confirmed, and directly across the aisle from them were fifteen little boys.

Mark had vivid recollections of the day of his own First Communion, but he had never been confirmed. Things looked just as they did on the day he so well remembered. The girls were dressed in white, and each small head was covered by a veil which fell in soft long folds to the bottom of the short skirts. The boys were in black, each with a white ribbon around his right arm. These boys all had serious faces, and had evidently been prepared well for the reception of the Sacrament. Mark found himself wondering how the pastor could possibly have succeeded in taming some of the lads, in whom he recognized certain mischievous youngsters he had seen about the hotel; but tamed they certainly were.

Mark had scarcely sat down before the Bishop turned to the congregation and began to speak. His words were addressed entirely to the children. He told them in simple language, which Mark found himself admiring, the meaning and importance of the ceremony, sketching the apostolic origin of Confirmation, and dwelling upon its strengthening spiritual effects.

The Bishop was young, too young, Mark thought, since he was not yet forty. His hair was still black, and his cheeks ruddy. He was quite a contrast to Father Murray who sat near by. Mark noticed that the pastor did not wear the manteletta of a prelate, but only the surplice of a simple priest. There were two other priests in the sanctuary, both young, one probably the Bishop's secretary.

The Bishop allowed his gaze to wander over the congregation as he spoke with a rich, clear voice, and with growing eloquence. The children had fixed their wondering eyes on his impressive figure, as he stood before them, crozier in hand and mitre on head. Mark found that he was growing more attentive, and liking the Bishop even better as the sermon went on. More than that, he found himself interested in the doctrine of Confirmation, a ceremony which but a few months before he would have thought quite meaningless. He watched the Bishop and listened as closely as did the children.

In the very midst of a sentence Mark saw a startled look on the face of the preacher, a quickly suppressed look that told of great surprise. The Bishop saved himself from breaking the current of his speech, but so plainly did Mark notice the instance that his mind jumped at once to the conclusion that the Bishop had seen in the congregation somebody he had not expected in that place and at that time. Instinctively Mark's gaze followed the Bishop's. Across the aisle, and in a direct line with himself, sat Ruth, veiled as usual, and Madame Neuville. For an instant only the Bishop's glance rested on the veiled girl; then he turned again to the children. But the sermon had been spoiled for Mark. The uneasiness was coming over him again. What did the Bishop know? Mark could not help thinking that somehow the incident was a proof that the detective had told the truth.

The sermon over, the Bishop's attendant came up to him, while Father Murray went to marshal his little charges up to the foot of the altar. As the Bishop was about to sit down on the faldstool, Mark saw him whisper to the young priest beside him, the one Mark thought to be the secretary. He was a well trained secretary, for he made no sign; but Mark watched him as he calmly turned around to face the congregation. His searching glance swept the church until it rested upon the girl with the veil. He, too, seemed startled, but gave scarcely a sign as he turned quickly away. When the ceremony had ended Mark left his pew, looking straight at Ruth as he turned to face the door. He imagined that her eyes looked directly into his; but if they did they looked at him as a stranger. He could have seen a smile under the veil if it had been there, but there was none. Still more worried, he left the church. The girl remained behind, until there was no one but herself and Madame Neuville left. In his anxiety for the girl, Mark returned and looked at her from the rear of the church. Her face was buried in her hands. The sacristy door opened slightly and the young secretary looked out. The girl, not seeing the door open, lifted the veil for an instant to wipe away her tears. The secretary closed the door softly as soon as he had seen

her.

Mark went directly to the rectory. The old housekeeper met him at the door before he could ring.

"Come right in, Mr. Griffin," she said. "I'm going to take ye into the dining room, sir, till the Father comes to present ye to His Lordship. He'd be wantin' to do that himself, I know; and sure I have the Bishop in the front room, so ye'll stay here please."

Mark stepped into the little dining room, where the table was already set, and waited for the priest. Ann went back to her cooking. Mark could hear her rattling the dishes and pans, all the while issuing orders to her assistants for the day. Ann was quite the most important personage in the parish on this occasion and had to show it. It was seldom she had such authority over others. Why not make the most of it?

There was only a folding door between the dining room where Mark waited and, the room in which the Bishop sat Mark heard the Bishop arise impatiently from his chair and pace the room, a fact which caused him no little wonder. The Bishop had not impressed him as a man of nervous temperament. Mark now heard him sit down again, crunching the springs of the chair, and again jump up, to continue his nervous pacing. Then the door from the hallway into the parlor opened and Mark heard the Bishop's voice:

"Is she the woman?"

A young voice, which Mark was sure belonged to the secretary, answered:

"I am sorry to say, Bishop, that she is."

"My God!" said the Bishop. There was deep distress in his tones. "Father, are you perfectly sure?"

"I could not be mistaken, Bishop. I stayed in the sacristy until all had left the church except her attendant and herself. She was crying, and she threw back the veil to use her handkerchief. Then I saw her face quite plainly. She is the woman."

"Crying?" The Bishop seemed about to cry himself. "Poor creature, poor

creature—and unfortunate man. So he has brought her here after all. I am afraid, Father, I did not do right when I omitted telling him the exact situation. What shall we do? We cannot possibly stay."

Mark felt that he was eavesdropping, but everything had happened so quickly that there had been no chance to escape. He could not help hearing. His uneasiness became a great fear, and he felt that his face was bloodless. Turning to escape if possible through the kitchen, he paused long enough to hear the secretary say:

"No, Bishop, I am afraid you cannot stay. Monsignore Murray is quite beyond understanding. He seems so good, and yet to have done a thing like this is awful. Surely he realizes what a scandal he may stir up."

"Could you possibly secure an automobile to take us to Father Darcy's?" asked the Bishop anxiously. "He lives in the next town, and we could catch the train at his station."

"I will try."

By this time Mark had decided that he could not very well go through the kitchen, and he had heard enough to make him feel that his duty toward Ruth was to wait. It was something he would not have done under other circumstances; but Mark was in love, and he remembered the adage about love and war.

"At once, please," he heard the young priest say over the telephone. Then he hung up the receiver, just as Father Murray stepped into the dining room from the kitchen through which he had passed from the sacristy.

"Welcome, Mr. Griffin," he said cordially. "Come, you must meet His Lordship. He's in here," and he threw open the folding-doors. The Bishop was standing. The secretary entered from the hall. The Bishop's face was grave; but Father Murray did not notice that. He was like a youth, with the excitement of the occasion upon him.

"Let me present a traveler, Mr. Mark Griffin, of England, to Your Lordship—or is it Ireland, Mr. Griffin? Mr. Griffin is going to stay to break bread with us, Bishop, and I know you will like him."

"I am pleased indeed to meet Mr. Griffin," said the Bishop. "I saw you in the church, sir. But I am very sorry, Monsignore, that I am not to have the opportunity of knowing Mr. Griffin better. I am not—"

But the tactful secretary saved the Bishop an unpleasant explanation.

"His Lordship has to leave, Monsignore, and at once. The automobile is even now, I think, coming around the corner. It has become necessary for the Bishop to go to Father Darcy's before taking the train back to the city. He hopes to catch Father Darcy for a few minutes before taking the train at the next station."

Father Murray almost gasped.

"But, My Lord," he cried, "our meal is prepared. We have been looking forward to your staying. It is customary, is it not? I shall never be able to—" and then his voice broke, for he was pleading, "My dear Bishop, you will surely stay?"

Mark thought that all the misery of the world was in the priest's tones.

"I am sorry, Monsignore," and the Bishop looked it, though he spoke very quickly; "but circumstances compel me to leave at once. No one regrets the necessity more than I do. I should willingly stay if it were expedient, but unfortunately it is not."

"The auto is waiting, Bishop," said the secretary, who by this time had the prelate's coat and hat in his hand. The valises were lying packed in the hall, as they had come from the church.

The Bishop put out his hand to Mark.

"Good-bye, Mr. Griffin," he said. "I hope we may meet at another time."

He looked at Father Murray, but the poor pastor had dropped into a chair, and Mark noticed that his face was white and drawn. For an instant it appeared as though the Bishop would go up to him, for he made one step in his direction. But Father Murray took no heed. Crushed by grief, he stared unseeing into space. The Bishop turned abruptly and followed his secretary to the door. Mark heard them go down the steps. He listened as the door of the car slammed; then he heard the chugging of a motor, and they were gone. The noise grew fainter and

fainter. There was silence. Father Murray never moved.

Ann clattered in from the kitchen, calling back an order to one of her assistants. Through the folding-doors she saw Mark.

"Where's the Father?" she asked, for the priest was hidden by part of the wall between the two rooms. As she came up, Mark pointed to the silent figure in the chair. Ann forgot her importance in an instant, and rushed over to the inert priest.

"What is it, Father?" she cried. "What is it? Are ye sick?"

But Father Murray did not answer.

"Where is His Lordship?" she asked sharply, turning again to Mark.

"Gone."

"Gone!" Ann almost whispered the word, as if in awe of it. "What! he wouldn't eat here—again!" Her face showed an agony of rage. "The dirty—but God forgive me—he's the Bishop—I can't judge him—"

Father Murray arose, and Ann said no more.

"Hush, Ann," he cautioned, "hush." Then, turning to Mark, "Come outside, Mark."

The two passed out onto the veranda. Father Murray dropped heavily into his chair, with the weight of an old, feeble man. Mark felt that he could not break the tension, but the priest relieved it himself. His voice had a ring of pathos in it, and he addressed Mark as though he needed him and knew he could count upon him.

"My friend, have you ever read Thomas à Kempis?"

"No, Father, I have not."

"It is a pity, indeed; there is so much of consolation in him when we need it. Listen to this quotation that I have learned by heart: 'If thou thinkest rightly and considerest things in truth, thou oughtest never to be so much dejected and troubled for any adversity; but rather to rejoice and give thanks, yea, to account

this as a special subject of joy, that afflicting thee with sorrows I do not spare thee.' It is Christ speaking, and the quotation is from His *Imitation*." Then Father Murray made a gesture as though he were trying to throw it all off.

"Come in, Mark. The other guests did not intend to stay. The Bishop has never broken bread with me since—but let that pass. Come in and eat. It is bitter bread, my friend, bitter bread; but, alas, I must eat it."

And Mark thought of his own bitter bread, too, as he reentered the rectory.

CHAPTER VIII

FATHER MURRAY OF SIHASSET

Ann bustled into Father Murray's study next morning with something on her mind. When Ann had something on her mind the pastor was always quite likely to notice it, for Ann never had learned how to conceal her thoughts. Good, pious, and faithful she was, but with an inherent love of gossip. She had loyal feelings to express this morning, but long experience as the housekeeper of priests had made Ann wary of approaching a subject too abruptly.

"Mrs. Thompson was here, yer Reverence."

"Yes? What was it this time?"

"Sure, 'twas about her young b'y Jack, the good-fer-nothin'. He's drinkin' ag'in."

"And she wants me to—"

"Give him the pledge."

"All right; but why didn't you bring him in?"

"Well, wan raison is that he isn't sober yet and she couldn't bring him wid her. The other is that yer Reverence has sp'iled more good pledges on that lad than would kape the Suprame Coort in business for tin years."

Father Murray smiled and Ann knew she had made considerable progress, but not quite enough yet.

"I'll go and see him to-morrow morning. He'll be sober then," said the priest, looking down longingly at his work.

But Ann had another case. "The choir's busted."

Father Murray put down his book. Here was disaster indeed. "Again?"

"Yes, ag'in. The organist, Molly Wilson, is insulted."

"Who insulted her?"

"Ye did. She says ye didn't appreciate her music for the Confirmation."

"But I did."

"But ye didn't tell her so, the hussy."

"Hush, Ann. Don't call names. I had no time to tell Miss Wilson anything. I'll see her to-day."

"Yes, ye will, and that'll make her worse. She's got to be soft-soaped all the time, the painted thing!"

"Please, Ann, don't talk like that. I don't like it, and it makes hard feelings."

"'Tis little feelings yer Reverence should have left after the way the Bishop —"

"Ann!"

"I *will* say it. Didn't he slide out of bein' here three months ago? An' I wid a dinner fit fer the auld Bishop, and too good fer this—"

"Please, Ann."

"Wasn't ye the Vicar Gineral once? Why should he hurt ye now? I could tell him things if I had me tongue on him—"

But Father Murray was on his feet, and Ann was afraid. She held her tongue.

"Once and for all, Ann, I forbid you to say a word about my superiors. The Bishop is a great and a good man. He knows what he is about, and neither you nor I may judge him. No! not a word."

The housekeeper was crying. "Sure, I'm sorry, yer Reverence. I won't say a word ag'in, even if I do think he treated ye dirthy. But I hope ye won't spake like that to me. Sure I thry to serve ye well and faithfully."

"And so you do, Ann; so respect my wish in this. There, there, don't cry. I don't want to hurt you; but please don't hurt me."

"I'd cut me tongue out if it hurted yer Reverence."

"I think you would. Indeed, I know you would. Don't mind a spoiled dinner. There are plenty of dinners spoiled."

"Sure, them that has theirs spoiled kin afford it." Father Murray could not help being amused again. Ann was always bemoaning his slender revenues. "An' ye a Vicar Gineral."

"Never mind, Ann. I'll get on somehow. Is there anything else?"

"McCarthy's sick ag'in."

"Well, I'll take the Holy Oils and go down there this morning."

Ann was now herself again, or she wouldn't have come back so hard on the chronically dying McCarthy.

"Sure, ye n'adn't do that. Ye've wasted a whole gallon of Holy Oil anointin' that omadhan four times already."

The priest passed off the unthought irreverence without notice.

"I'll go and see him now, Ann. The man may be very sick. Get me my hat. I left it in my bedroom when I came in last night from O'Leary's."

Ann gave him his hat at the door, with another bit of information.

"Miss Atheson telephoned for me to ask ye to drop in to Killimaga on yer way back. Ye'll be stayin' fer lunch, as they call it?"

"Yes, I probably shall, Ann. It will save you a little work, and there are plenty of servants at Killimaga."

He went down the walk to the street. Ann looked after him, the rebuke forgotten.

"Savin' me work, is it? Faith, he ought to be thinkin' of savin' his pinnies,

slashin' thim around to the likes of McCarthy." Then the remembrance of her spoiled tirade came to her, as she thought of her ruined dinner and the Bishop. "What did he do that fer to a man who was the Vicar Gineral? But God forgive me. An auld woman niver knows how to hauld her tongue. Sure, the Father is a saint anyhow, whativer the Bishop, bad scran to him, is."

There was the eternal maternal in Ann, if nothing else was left of the eternal feminine. It is the eternal maternal that fights and hates, without knowing why—and loves and protects too—still without knowing, or asking, a reason.

In the kitchen Ann saw Uncle Mac taking his ease by the table. He often dropped in for a chat.

"Where's the Father?" he asked.

"Gone to look over McCarthy ag'in," she answered, with pleased anticipation of the things she could safely say, without rebuke, of the parish's chronic hypochondriac.

But Uncle Mac, while he never rebuked, yet was adroit in warding off temptations to break the Commandments. He began to chuckle as if he had just heard a wonderful story.

Ann looked up. "What's biting ye this mornin'?"

"'Tis what the Father said to Brinn, the man that runs the *Weekly Herald*. Ye know him?"

"I know no good av him."

"He's not a bad fella a-tall. Ye know he has a head as bald as an aig. Well, he was goin' to the Knights of Pythias ball, and was worrited about a fancy suit to wear; fer it appears that thim that goes must be rigged up. He met the Father in Jim's drug sthore on the corner, and he ups and axes him to tell him what to wear."

"The omadhan!"

"Av coorse." Uncle Mac fell from righteousness. "He shud not have axed such a question of a priest. But the Father had him. 'Ye want to be disguised?' he

said. 'That I do,' said Brinn, takin' off his hat to mop the top of his shiny pate. 'What'll I wear?' The Father giv wan glance at his head. 'Wear a wig,' sez he."

Ann chuckled, and fetched the old man the cup of tea he always expected.

"Faith, he did better nor that lasht week," she confided. "'Twas auld Roberts at the hotel down by the deepo that got it. His little dog does always be barkin' at Rover. The Father wint out walkin' to the other side of the thracks to see the Widow McCabe's Jacky about servin' Mass on week days. Roberts comes along with his snarlin' little pup, and the imp bit at Rover's heels. Rover med wan bite at him, and he ran off yelpin'. 'I'll shoot that big brute some day,' sez Roberts to the Father. 'Don't do that, Mr. Roberts,' he sez, quiet-like. 'The dogs understand each other.' 'I will, so,' sez Roberts, 'and I kin shoot a human dog, too.'"

"What's that?" Uncle Mac was on his feet in an instant. "What's that? He said that to the Father? I'll murther him!"

"Ye n'adn't," said Ann quietly. "The Father murthered him betther nor ye could, wid an answer. 'Don't let yer bad timper make ye thry to commit suicide, Mr. Roberts,' sez he, and off he marched. Sure the whole town is laffin' at the mane auld snake."

"Murther an' Irish!" was all Uncle could say. "An' he says he's Scotch. 'Tisn't in raison that a Scotchman could do it."

Father Murray was ignorant of the admiration he had excited; he walked quickly toward the railway, for McCarthy lived "over the tracks." A man was standing at the door of the drug store as he passed.

"Good day to you, Elder," he drawled.

"Oh, good day, Mr. Sturgis. How are you?" Father Murray stopped to shake hands. Mr. Sturgis was a justice of the peace and the wag of the town. He always insisted on being elected to the office as a joke, for he was a well-to-do business man.

"Fine, fine, Elder," he answered. "Have you seen my new card?" He fumbled for one in his pocket and handed it over. Father Murray read it aloud:

JOHN JONATHAN STURGIS
Justice of the Peace

The only exclusive matrimonial magistrate.

Marriages solemnized promptly, accurately and eloquently.

Fees Moderate. *Osculation extra*.

Office at the Flour Mill, which has, however, no connection with my smooth-running Matrimonial Mill.

P. S. My Anti-Blushine is guaranteed not to injure the most delicate complexion.

"You'll be running the clergy clean out of business if this keeps up, Mr. Sturgis," laughed the priest. "But unless I am much mistaken, you didn't stop me only to show the card. There's something else? I see it on your face."

"I thought you would, Elder. Let us walk down the side street a bit and I'll tell you." The Justice became serious. "Elder, I suppose you know Roberts who keeps the Depot Hotel?"

"I know him only slightly."

"He was in to see me to-day, on what he called 'important business.' He is a crony of my constable. He had a cock and bull story about that lady at Killimaga, who goes to your church. I guess the constable told it to him. I gave him no satisfaction because there was nothing in it that concerned me; but the old scamp thinks it might hurt you, so he gave it to Brinn, who will publish it if you don't drop in on him."

Father Murray put his hand on the shoulder of the justice. "Thank you kindly, Mr. Sturgis," he said. "I would like to save the lady from annoyance, and will see Mr. Brinn at once; but I must begin by apologizing for my recent attack on his beauty."

"No need to do that, Father," assured the justice. "He printed the joke himself

in to-day's *Herald*."

When the priest left the office of the editor, he walked toward the rectory in deep thought, quite evidently worried, but the suppressed story was safely in his pocket.

CHAPTER IX

THE BISHOP'S CONFESSION

"How do you do, Mr. Griffin. I am delighted to see you again, and so soon after our first meeting."

Two days had elapsed since the unpleasant incident at the rectory, and Mark, engrossed in thoughts by no means in harmony with the peaceful country through which he wandered, was taken unawares. He turned sharply. A big automobile had stopped near him and from it leaned the young Bishop, hand outstretched.

Mark hurried forward. "I am glad to see Your Lordship again. You are still traveling?" He had retained no pleasant recollections of the dignitary, and, as he shook the extended hand, was rather surprised to realize that he felt not a little pleased by the unexpected encounter.

"I am still traveling—Confirmation tours all this season. Are you going far, Mr. Griffin?"

"I am merely walking, without goal."

"Then come in with me. I am on my way to a little parish ten miles farther on. I want to chat. My secretary went on ahead by train, to 'prepare the way,' as it were. I will send the car back with you. Won't you come?" The tone of the Bishop's voice indicated an earnest desire that the invitation be accepted.

Mark hesitated but a moment. "I thank Your Lordship. I will gladly go with you on such pleasant terms." He entered the car and, sinking into its soft cushions, suddenly awakened to the fact that he had tramped far, and was tired.

The Bishop took up the conversation.

"You are thoroughly British, Mr. Griffin, or you would not have said 'Your Lordship.' The bishops in England are all addressed in that way, are they not?"

"Of course, and here also. Did I not hear Father Murray—"

"Oh, Father Murray is quite different. He is a convert, and rather inclined to be punctilious. Then, too, he is from England. In America the best we get as a rule is just plain 'Bishop.' One of your own kind of Bishops—an Episcopalian—I knew him well and a charming man he was—told me that in England he was 'My Lorded' and 'Your Lordshiped' everywhere, until he had gotten quite used to the dignity of it. But when he stepped on the dock at New York, one of his lay intimates took all the pomposity out of him by a sound slap on the back and the greeting, 'Hello, Bish, home again?'"

"It was very American, that," said Mark. "We wouldn't understand it."

"But *we* do. I wouldn't want anyone to go quite that far, of course. I have nerves. But I confess I rather like the possibility of it—so long as it stays a possibility only. We Yankees are a friendly lot, but not at all irreverent. A bishop has to be 'right' on the manhood side as well as on the side of his office. That's the way we look at it."

A wicked thought went through Mark's head. He let it slide out in words before he weighed the words or the thought. An instant after, he could have bitten his tongue with chagrin.

"But don't you take the manhood into account in dealing with your clergy?"

To Mark's surprise the Bishop was not offended by the plain reference to the unpleasant scene in the rectory at Sihasset.

"Thank you; thank you kindly, Mr. Griffin, for giving me such an excellent opening. I really wanted you to say something like that. If you hadn't, I should certainly have been nonplussed about finding the opening for what I desire to say to you. You are now referring to my seemingly unchristian treatment of Monsignore Murray? Eh, what?" It seemed to please the Bishop to lay emphasis on the English "Eh, what?" He said it with a comic intonation that relieved Mark's chagrin.

"Your Lordship is a diplomat. I was wrong to ask the question. The affair is simply none of my business."

"But it is, Mr. Griffin. I would not want you, a stranger—perhaps not even a

Catholic—to keep in your mind the idea that a Catholic bishop is cold and heartless in his dealings with his flock, and particularly with his under-shepherds."

Mark did not know what to answer, but he wanted to help the Bishop understand his own feelings.

"I like Father Murray very much, my dear Lord—or rather my dear Bishop."

It was the Bishop's turn to smile. "You are getting our ways fast, Mr. Griffin. When we part, I suppose you'll slap me on the back and say 'Bish.'"

"The Lord forbid."

"For my back's sake," the Bishop was looking at Mark's strong shoulders, "for my back's sake I hope the Lord does forbid. But to your question. I must get at the answer in a round-about way. Father Murray, or Monsignore Murray, for he is a prelate, was one of my dearest friends. For no man had I a greater regard. He was the soul of generosity, earnest, zealous, kind, and—I believed then—a saint."

"*Then*?"

"*Then*. I am going to confide in you, and for a good purpose. You like him. His people in Sihasset adore him, as did his curates and his people at the Cathedral. I expected, as did others, that he would be in the place I occupy to-day." The Bishop broke off to look fixedly at Mark for a moment. "Mr. Griffin, may I trust you to do your friend a service?"

"Yes, Bishop, you may."

"Then I will. I have no other way to do this thing. I cannot do it through another priest. They are all of one mind except a few of the younger ones who might make matters worse. You can help Monsignore Murray, if you will. Now, listen well. You heard the conversation between my secretary and myself at the rectory, did you not? You were in the next room, I know."

"Yes; I could not help hearing it, and there was no way of escape."

"I know there was no escape. You heard it all?"

"All."

"That decides me to tell you more. It may be providential that you heard. A woman's name was mentioned?"

"No name, only a reference to a woman, but I think I know who was meant."

"Exactly." The Bishop's voice took on even a graver tone. "What I am going to say to you is given into your confidence for a stronger reason than to have you think more charitably of a bishop in his dealings with his priests. I am taking you into my confidence chiefly for Monsignore Murray's sake. He is a *different* sort of man from the ordinary type. He has few intimate friends because his charity is very wide. You seem to be one of the rare beings he regards with special favor. You like him in return. The combination is excellent for my purpose. I do not know when this woman first came into Monsignore Murray's life, but he has seen her quite frequently during the last few years. No one knows where she came from or who she is, except that she calls herself 'Miss Atheson.'"

"That is her name, if you are thinking of the lady I have in mind—Ruth Atheson."

"Exactly. The old Bishop, my predecessor, seemed oblivious to the situation. I soon learned, after my appointment, that Monsignore Murray and Miss Atheson were together almost daily, either at the rectory or at her hotel. But I said nothing to Monsignore and had every confidence in him until—well, until one day a member of the Cathedral clergy, unexpectedly entering the rectory library, saw Miss Atheson sitting on the arm of the priest's chair, with her head close to his and her arm across his shoulders. They were reading from a letter, and did not see the visitor, who withdrew silently. His visit was never known to Monsignore Murray. You understand?"

Mark was too much surprised to answer.

"Don't look so horror-struck, Mr. Griffin. The thing might have an explanation, but no one asked it. It looked too unexplainable of course. The story leaked out, and after that Monsignore Murray was avoided. Never once did I give in to the full belief that my dear old saint was wrong, so I gently suggested one day that I should like his fullest confidence about Miss Atheson. He avoided the subject. Still I was loath to believe. I made up my mind to save him by a transfer, but he forestalled me and asked a change; so I sent him to Sihasset."

Mark found his voice.

"That was the reason? And he never knew?"

"That was the reason. I thought he would ask for it, and that I would then have a chance to tell him; but he asked for nothing. The scene when he left his work at the cathedral was so distressing to me that I would willingly lay down my office to-morrow rather than go through with it again."

"But he is so gentle. He could not make a scene?"

"That's it, that's it. There was no *scene*, and yet there was. I told you how I loved him. We first met at college, in Rome. In years the difference between us was not so very great, but in experience he was far older than I. I was alone in the world, and he was both father and friend to me. When I sent him away, I felt as Brutus must have felt when he condemned his sons to death. Only it was worse. It was a son condemning his father to disgrace. But I hoped to save him."

"And you did not?"

"No, that was harder yet. I thought I had—until I went to Sihasset and saw her in the church. Poor creature! She must have followed him."

"But, my dear Lord Bishop, she is so young and he—"

"Yes, I know. But facts are facts. What could I do? Look here, Mr. Griffin. Whatever there is in this that excuses him I ought to know. And he ought to know the cause of my actions in his regard. I shall have to tell him and then— If there *is* an explanation, how can I forgive myself? But he cannot be blind. Soon all Sihasset will notice and talk. I shall have to remove him again, and then.… My God! I cannot think that my saint could ever merit such an end. Do you know what it means to be an unfrocked priest?"

"Yes." Mark had no other answer. His distress was too deep. His mind was working fast, however.

"Do you think, Mr. Griffin, that you could tell him—point out the danger of his position—without hurting him? He is very sensitive. Don't tell him all you know—only intimate gently that there may be some misunderstanding of this kind. He surely will guess the rest. You may save him if you can do this and—if

you will do it."

It was on Mark's tongue to refuse, but he happened to glance at the Bishop's face. The tears were streaming down his cheeks.

"Don't mind my weakness, Mr. Griffin. It is a weakness in me thus to take a stranger into my confidence in such a matter. But I feel that you alone have his confidence. You can't realize what this thing has cost me, in peace. He was the last I should have suspected. I must save him. Help me do it. The Church is supposed to be hard-hearted, but she is forgiving—too forgiving sometimes. My duty is to be stern, and a judge; but I cannot judge him with sternness. I would give my life to think that this was all a bad dream. Don't you see that he is the man I always thought would be my own bishop? How can I go to him—and hurt him?"

If Mark Griffin had had any misgivings about the character of the Bishop, they had vanished. He saw no bishop beside him, but only a man who in his heart of hearts had for years treasured a friendship and, in spite of everything, could not pluck it out. Now he had opened that heart to an utter stranger, trusting him as if snatching at every chance to save his sacred ideals, shrinking from inflicting pain himself as a surgeon would shrink from operating on his own father. Mark's heart went out to the weeping man beside him.

But his own sorrow Mark resolved to keep to himself yet a little while. He was not ready to think out his own case. The sweet, compelling face of Ruth Atheson rose up before him to plead for herself. Who was she, this girl of mystery? His half-promised wife? A runaway duchess pledged to another man? A priest's—God! that was too much. Mark clenched his hands to stifle a groan. Then he thought of Father Murray. Good and holy and pure he had seemed to be, a man among men, a priest above all. Surely there was an explanation somewhere. And he hesitated no longer to accede to the request of the Bishop who still, Mark felt, believed in his friend, and was hoping against hope for him.

"Here, Mr. Griffin, is my stop. You have been silent for fifteen minutes." The Bishop's voice was sad, as if Mark had refused to help.

"Was I silent so long? I did not know. There is something I cannot tell you yet that may bring you consolation. Some day I will tell you. In the meantime, trust me. I see no way now by which I can fully justify your faith in my efforts, but I

will try. I promise you that I will try."

So they parted, and Mark was driven back to Sihasset alone.

The Bishop prayed longer—much longer—than usual before he left the little church to join the priests who had gathered in the rectory after the ceremony.

CHAPTER X

AT THE MYSTERY TREE

All next day Mark Griffin wandered about brooding. Father Murray had returned to his old place in his thoughts. Distress had bred sympathy between the two, and instinctively Mark looked upon the priest as a friend; and, as a friend, he had cast doubt from his mind. There was an appointment to fill at Killimaga in the afternoon, an appointment to which Mark had looked forward with much joy; but he remembered the coldness of Ruth when he saw her in the church, and felt that he was not equal to meeting her, much as he longed to be in her presence. So he sent a note pleading sickness. It was not a lie, for there was a dull pain in both head and heart.

All the afternoon he walked along the bluff road, studiously avoiding Saunders who had seemed desirous of accompanying him, for Mark wanted to be alone. Taking no note of the distance, he walked on for miles. It was already late in the afternoon when he turned to go back, yet he had not thought out any solution to his own problem, nor how to approach Father Murray in behalf of the Bishop.

To Mark Griffin pain of any kind was something new. He had escaped it chiefly by reason of his clean, healthful life, and through a fear that made him take every precaution against it. He did not remember ever having had even a headache before; and, as to the awful pain in his heart, there never had been a reason for its existence till this moment.

With all the ardor of a strong nature that has found the hidden spring of human love, Mark Griffin loved Ruth Atheson. She had come into his life as the realization of an ideal which since boyhood, so he thought, had been forming in his heart. In one instant she had given that ideal a reality. For her sake he had forgotten obstacles, had resolved to overcome them or smash them; but now the greatest of them all insisted on raising itself between them. Poor, he could still have married her; rich, it would have been still easier so far as his people were concerned; but as a grand duchess she was neither rich nor poor. The blood royal was a bar that Mark knew he could not cross except with ruin to both; nor was

he foolish enough to think that he would be permitted to cross it even did he so will. Secret agents would take care of that. There was no spot on earth that could hide this runaway girl longer than her royal father desired. Mark Griffin would have blessed the news that Ruth Atheson was really only the daughter of a beggar, or anything but what he now believed her to be.

Then there was the man Saunders had spoken of, but Mark thought little of him. Whatever he had been to the girl once, Mark felt that the officer was out of her life now and that she no longer cared for him.

It was dusk when the weary man reached that part of the bluff road where the giant tree stood. Tired of body, and with aching heart, he flung himself into the tall grass wherein he had lain on the day he first saw her. Lying there, bitter memories and still more bitter regrets overmastered him as he thought of the weeks just past.

The gray ocean seemed trying—-and the thought consoled him a little—to call him back home; but the great tree whispered to him to remain. Then Father Murray's face seemed to rise up, pleading for his sympathy and help. It was strange what a corner the man had made for himself in Mark's heart; and Mark knew that the priest loved him even as he, Mark, loved the priest; but he felt that he must go away, must flee from the misery he dared not face. Mark was big and strong; but he cried at last, just as he had cried in boyhood when his stronger brother had hurt his feelings, or his father had inflicted some disappointment upon him; and a strong man's tears are not to be derided.

How long he thus lay, brooding and miserable, he did not even care to know. A step aroused him from his stupor.

He looked up. A man was coming from the road toward the tree. He was tall, handsome and dark of face, Mark thought, for the moon had risen a little and the man was in the light. His stride was that of a soldier, with a step both firm and sure. He looked straight ahead, with his eyes fixed on the tree as though that were his goal. He passed Mark's resting-place quickly and struck three times on the tree, which gave back a hollow sound. Then he waited, while Mark watched. In a minute the signal was repeated, and only a few more instants passed before the doorway in the tree was flung open.

Mark saw the white-gowned figure of the lady of the tree step out. He heard

her cry "Luigi!" with a voice full of joy and gladness. The two met in quick embrace, and the desolation of the watcher was complete as he heard her speak lovingly to the officer who had at last come back into her life. She spoke in French and—was it because of the language used or of the unusual excitement?—her voice took on a strange elusive quality utterly unlike the richness of the tones Mark loved so well, yet remained vibrant, haunting in its sibilant lightness. Never again would he hear it so. He longed to go, but there was no present way of escape, so he steeled his heart to listen.

"You have come, my beloved," he heard her say.

"I have come, Carlotta. I told you that nothing could keep me. When you wrote telling me where to come, and when and how to signal, I did not delay one minute."

"I feared to write, Luigi. Perhaps they are even now watching you."

"I think they do not know I am here," he answered. "I have seen no one watching. And who knows of our love? How could they know?"

"They know very much, my Luigi, and I am afraid I should not have called you. But I wanted you so much."

"If you had not called me I should have died. Without you, how could I live?"

"You love me, then, so much?"

"It takes great love to look up to you, Carlotta, and have I not looked?"

"Yes, yes, Luigi, and I love you."

They wandered down the little lane between the wall and the trees that lined the road, while Mark lay in dumb misery in the grass. It had been hard before. It was harder now when he knew for sure. He must go away, and never see her again. It was all that was left him, as an honorable man, to do.

Down the road his eye caught a movement as if someone were slipping into the bushes. Mark watched for a second glimpse of the lovers, but they were far away on the other side. For a long time there was no other visible movement of the figure that had slipped into the shadows; but the listener could hear softened

steps in the underbrush, and the crackling of dead branches. Was it Saunders who at last had found his man? Instinctively Mark resolved to protect, for did he not love her? He watched the shrubbery, and soon he saw a face peer out; but it was not the face of Saunders. It was a strange face, youthful, but bearded and grim, and a gun was poised beside it. Mark lay quite still, for now he heard the lovers' steps returning; but he never took his gaze off that terrible face. He saw the gun lifted and he prepared to spring; but when the man and the girl came into sight the gun barrel dropped, and the face disappeared. In an instant Mark realized that it was the man and not the girl who was threatened, and that nothing would be done while she was there.

The lovers stood before the tree, saying good-bye.

"You will come back, Luigi?" the girl asked anxiously.

"I will come when you call, my beloved."

"But if they find you?"

"They will not find me."

"Then we can go away. There is a great West in this country. I have my jewels, you know. We could hide. We could live like other people. We could be just alone together."

"But would you be happy, Carlotta?"

"I should be happy anywhere with you, Luigi. It is too much to pay for being a duchess, to lose all I want in life."

"But many duchesses must do that, you know. I never have asked such a sacrifice, though, God knows, I have wanted it."

"You have never asked, Luigi, and that makes me all the more happy to give. I will tell you when to come."

With an ardent embrace the two parted. She stepped inside the tree and closed the door.

The young officer turned. Mark knew that the time had come for action, and

jumped for the other side—but too late. There was no sound, but powder burned Mark's hand—powder from the muffled gun barrel which he had tried to knock aside. The lover stood for an instant with his eyes wide open, as if in wonder at a strange shock, but only for an instant. Mark sprang to his side, and caught him as he fell to the ground. There was a heavy crashing through the underbrush, then a voice was raised in an oath and there was the sound of a struggle. Mark looked up as Saunders broke through the bushes dragging after him the body of the murderer. Dropping his unconscious burden, the detective came up to where Mark was bending over the victim and pulled a little electric glow lamp from his pocket.

"Let me look at him, Griffin," he said. He looked long and earnestly at the man's face, then snapped off the light.

"He's the man," he announced.

Saunders looked long and earnestly at his face. "He's the man!" he announced.

[Illustration: Saunders looked long and earnestly at his face. "He's the man!" he announced.]

"Who is he?" asked Mark quickly.

"The man I told you about—the man I took you for—the man for whose sake the Duchess ran away—the chap I was watching for."

"And the other?" Mark nodded toward the gunman, who still lay unconscious.

"Oh, he doesn't matter." Saunders spoke carelessly. "He'll get out of it. It's all been arranged, of course. They really sent me here to watch her; evidently they had him trailed from the beginning."

Crossing over, Saunders again snapped on his light, and examined the face and clothing of the murderer.

"It's easy to see, Griffin, what the game was. This chap is one of the foreigners at the railroad camp. He can say he was out hunting—shooting squirrels—anything."

"He can't say that," put in Mark quickly, "for I saw him do it. I tried to stop him."

Saunders turned quickly to Mark.

"Forget it, Griffin," he said earnestly. "You saw nothing. Keep out of it. If it were only a common murder, I'd tell you to speak. But this is no common murder. There are international troubles mixed up in it. No one will thank you, and you will only get into difficulties. Why, the biggest men in the country would have a special messenger down here inside of twenty-four hours to keep you silent if they knew who were behind this thing. For God's sake, leave it alone. Let this fellow tell his story." He pointed to the man who was now coming to his senses. "He has it all prepared."

"I'll leave it alone only if the man is dead; but, good God! you can't expect me to leave him here to the mercy of that brood if he's only wounded."

The detective smiled grimly.

"Wounded! Why, Griffin, do you think they would send a man who would miss? Come, look at him."

Mark placed his hand over the young officer's heart. He felt for the pulse, and looked into the face.

"Come, Saunders," he said, "we can do nothing for him."

CHAPTER XI

THIN ICE

"I don't think you quite realize, Griffin," Saunders' voice had quite an uneasy tremor in it, as he spoke, "that you are in some danger."

The detective was sitting in Mark's bedroom, and the clock was striking midnight in the hotel office below. They had returned together from the bluff road and had been discussing the tragedy ever since.

"I think I do," Mark answered, "but I don't very much care."

"Then," said Saunders, "you English have some nerves!"

"You forget, Saunders, that I am not quite English. I am half Irish, and the Irish have 'some nerves.' But I am really hit very hard. I suppose it's the English in me that won't let me show it."

Saunders did not answer for a moment. Then he took his cigar out of his mouth.

"Nerves?" he repeated half laughingly. "Yes, nerves they have, but in the singular number."

"Beg pardon?"

"Oh, I forgot that your education in United States has been sadly neglected. I mean to say that they have *nerve*, not nerves."

"By which you mean—?"

"Something that you will need very soon—grit."

"I—I don't quite understand yet, my dear fellow. Why?"

The face of Saunders was serious now. The danger that confronted both of

them was no chimera.

"Look here, Griffin," he broke out, "that murderer did this thing under orders. He either has had a story fixed up for him by his employers, or he will try to put the deed off on someone else. An explanation must be given when the body is discovered in the morning. All was certainly foreseen, for these chaps take no chances. Now, you may wager a lot that his superiors, or their representatives, are not far away; no farther, in fact, than the railroad camp. You may be sure, too, that their own secret service men are on the job, close by. The question is, what story will this fellow tell?"

"You can—ah—search me, Saunders," retorted Mark.

Saunders laughed. Mark had a way of appearing cheerful.

"Come now, that's doing fine. 'Search you,' eh? That is just exactly what the police probably will do."

"Why?"

"Why? Because your being there was the unforeseen part of the whole tragedy. I think it quite upset their calculations. Your hand is marked with powder from the gun fire. Everyone will see that to-morrow. The principal will know something of it from the murderer. In fact, he probably knows now. To-morrow they will be searching for the man with the powder mark. The murderer himself can swear that he saw someone fire at the man who was killed. He may charge robbery. Only when the body is found shall we know what he is going to do. If they have taken his money, it means that you are going to be arrested, for they intend putting it on you. Unless I am mistaken, his pockets are inside out right now. The powder marks alone are enough to fasten suspicion on you. Then, you were absent all day, and someone certainly must have seen you on the bluff road. Above all, you love Ruth Atheson, and lovers have been known to kill rivals. My detective intuition tells me, Griffin, that you stand a good chance of being charged with murder."

"Well," said Mark, "I have an excellent witness for the defense, in one James Saunders, detective."

"You have," answered Saunders, "but not at the inquest; for if James Saunders, detective, shows his hand then, he will not live to testify at the trial,

where his testimony, sprung as a surprise, might be useful."

"You mean that they would—"

"Just so," Saunders nodded wisely; "that's just what they would do. On the other hand, that fellow may stick to the story, whatever it is, that they had fixed up for him. It looks reasonable to me that he would be instructed to do that. He may come forward when the body is found, and give himself up, saying that he was out shooting coons, or some other animals that you can best get at night, and that one of his bullets must have killed the man. That looks like the easiest way out of it."

"That sounds all right, Saunders," answered Mark, "but I incline to the other theory. I think they'll accuse me. Their first plan would have been best if nobody had seen the deed. But since they know someone did see it, they'll probably try to be on the safe side. Fortunately, they don't know there were two of us, which leaves me better off."

"If they find there was another," said the detective, "you'll be safer in jail. Lives count nothing in the games of princes, and they'll get us both if they can."

"Then you're in danger yourself, Saunders."

"Not yet. As you remarked, they don't know there was another. You see, it was dark among the trees, and I caught the fellow in the rear as he ran away. He would naturally think that the man who caught him was the one who jumped as he fired."

Mark smoked thoughtfully before he spoke.

"You're right, Saunders. My complacency is not so great that I do not recognize the danger. I merely am indifferent to danger under the present circumstances. It's no use running away from it, and we can't help it now. Let's go to bed."

"Well, those English-Irish nerves get me," Saunders answered, as he arose and walked toward the door. "I suppose they're a good thing to have; but, Griffin, take it from me, you're the worst lump of ice I ever saw. Aren't you even just a little afraid?"

"Oh, yes," answered Mark, "I'm afraid all right, old man; I really am afraid. But there is somebody I am more afraid for than myself. I am worried about the lady."

Mark thought of what he had seen as he lay near the tree. Walking over to the window, he thoughtfully pulled down the blind before he turned again to Saunders. "I shall always love her, no matter what happens. Of course, I can't marry a grand duchess, especially one who is watched day and night; but I rather welcome the chance to stay near and protect her good name if the story does come out. That is why I won't go to jail for safety, not if I can prevent it."

Saunders closed the half-opened door and walked back into the room.

"Protect her? I don't understand," he said. Clearly bewildered, he sat down, carelessly swinging one leg over an arm of the big chair, and stared at his host.

Mark looked up. He spoke haughtily, with a slight shrug of the shoulders.

"There is a British Ambassador in Washington. You have a free country, so I can always talk to him, even if I am a prisoner or on bail. I happen to be brother to a baron; that fact may prove useful, for the first time in my life. One word that involves her name in scandal, even as Ruth Atheson, brings the story out. And Great Britain does not particularly care about your certain Big Kingdom. I am presuming, of course, that I have rightly guessed what Big Kingdom is looking after the interests of your Grand Duchy."

"You're right, Griffin; the Ministry could never let her name be mentioned."

"As the grand duchess, no. But they could mention the name of Ruth Atheson, the Padre's friend, the Lady Bountiful of his poor, the girl I love. The Padre has had trouble enough, too, without that scandal in his little flock."

"I don't see how you can avoid it."

"Oh, I can avoid it very simply. I can send word to the Ministry in question that I know who the lady really is, and that I am almost ready to talk for the public."

"That's right, Griffin, you could. Gee, what a detective you would have made! You're sure right." He arose, stretched lazily, and walked to the door, where he

turned, his hand on the knob. "If it's any consolation for you to know, Griffin, they won't arrest—they'll just stick a knife into you. Good night, and pleasant dreams."

"Good night, Saunders, and thanks for your cheerful assurances."

But Mark had no dreams at all for, left alone, he smoked and worried over his problem until morning.

Very early he wrote a long letter, sealed it and put it in his pocket so that he could register it in person. It was addressed to the British Ambassador.

As Mark passed on his way to the dining room, the hotel clerk gave him a note, remarking: "That's a bad-looking hand you have, Mr. Griffin."

"Yes, rather." Mark looked at his hand as though noticing its condition for the first time. Then he spoke consolingly. "But it was the only one I had to put on this morning. Pleasant outside, isn't it?"

But the clerk had suddenly discovered that his attention was needed elsewhere, and Mark proceeded to his breakfast.

Sitting down, he gave his order, then opened the letter. It was from Ruth. "I am sorry you were not feeling well yesterday, and hope you are all right now. If so, come to Killimaga to-day, quite early. Somehow I am always lonesome now. Ruth."

It was rather strange—or was it?—that, in spite of what Mark knew, he watched his chance and, when the waiter turned his back, kissed the sheet of scented paper.

Saunders was in the hotel office when Mark came out of the dining room. The constable was with him. With little difficulty Saunders got rid of the officer and walked over to Mark.

"Come outside," he said. "I have some news."

They left the hotel and moved down the street. When out of anyone's hearing, Saunders touched Mark's arm.

"I routed out the constable early this morning—at daybreak, in fact—and sent him on a wild-goose chase along the bluff road. I wanted him to stumble onto that body, and get things going quickly. The sooner the cards are on the table, the better. His errand would keep him close to the Killamaga wall, on the roadside. He saw nothing; if he had I should have known it. What do you think it means?"

"Means?" echoed Mark. "Why, it means that someone else has been there."

"It looks that way," admitted Saunders. "But why hasn't it been reported?"

"I think, Saunders," Mark said thoughtfully, "that we had better take a walk near the wall ourselves."

"I was going to suggest that very thing."

The morning was not beautiful. The chill wind of autumn had come up, and the pleasant weather that Mark had taken the trouble to praise was vanishing. The clouds were dark and gloomy, threatening a storm. When the men reached the bluff road, they saw that the ocean was disturbed, and that great white-capped waves were beating upon the beach below. Their own thoughts kept both of them in tune with the elements. Neither spoke a word as they rapidly covered the distance between the town and the spot of the tragedy. But instinctively, as if caught by the same aversion, both slackened pace as they neared the wall of Killimaga. Going slowly now they turned out of the road and approached the tree, looking fearfully down at the grass. They reached the spot whereon they had left the body the evening before. There was no body there.

They searched the bushes and the long grass, but there was no sign of anything out of the ordinary. Closely they examined the ground; but not a trace of blood was to be seen, nor any evidence of conflict. Saunders was stupefied, and Mark showed signs of growing wonder.

"It isn't here," half whispered Saunders. "And it isn't in the bushes. What do you make of it, Griffin?"

Mark answered hesitatingly and half-nervously.

"I can't make anything out of it, unless they have decided to hush the whole thing up, figuring that the men who interfered will never tell. They disposed of the body overnight and covered all their traces. Unless I am mistaken, no one

will ever find it or know that the murder took place at all."

"Then," said Saunders emphatically, "they certainly had one of the big fellows here to see that it was properly done."

"It looks probable," replied Mark; "for a common murderer would not have planned so well. An expert was on this crime. The body is disposed of finally."

Saunders looked around nervously.

"We had better go back, Griffin. There's nothing left for us to do, and they may be watching."

Both men left the spot and returned to town; but they were no longer silent. Mark was decidedly anxious, and Saunders voiced his worry in tones that shook.

"I have more fear than ever for your sake, Griffin, and I'm beginning to have some for my own. Those fellows know how to act quickly and surely. Their principal is in Washington. He has had word already by cipher as to what has happened. He won't rest until he finds the witness, and then—"

"And then?"

"I'm afraid they will try another murder. They won't trust a living soul to hold his peace under the circumstances."

"But how are they to know I saw the thing?"

"By your hand. In fact, I think they know already."

"Already?"

"Yes. There was somebody about when we were there, and he was evidently hiding."

"You heard him?"

"Yes. I didn't want to alarm you. I have reason now to be alarmed for myself. They know I am in it. We've got to think quickly and act quickly. The minute that orders come they will try to get us. As long as we stay in public places we

are safe. But we must not go out alone any more."

The two went on to the hotel. Saunders glanced back as they were entering the town. His eyes covered the hedge.

"I thought so," he said. "That chap has been dodging in and out of the trees and keeping watch on us. From this point he can see right along the street to the hotel door. It's no use trying to conceal anything now. Our only safety lies in keeping in public places; but they won't strike till they get their orders."

As the two entered the hotel, a messenger boy came up carrying two telegrams. The clerk nodded to the boy, who went over to Mark and Saunders.

"Which is Mr. Saunders?" he asked. The detective reached out his hand and the boy gave him one of the messages. "The other one," he said, "is for Mr. Griffin.

"Sign here, please." The boy extended his book. Both men signed and the boy went out. Sitting down in a corner of the writing room, Mark and Saunders looked at one another, then at the yellow envelopes.

"Why don't you open your telegram, Saunders?" asked Mark.

"Because I know pretty well what's in it. I guessed it would be coming. I am ordered off this case, for the men who employed our agency have no use for me after last night. They have found everything out for themselves, and have settled it in their own way. Why don't you open yours?"

"For opposite reasons to yours, old chap: because I don't know what's in it, and, whatever it is, I don't think I shall like it. I have not had many messages of this kind. None but my solicitors would send one, and that means trouble. But here goes!"

Mark tore off the end of the envelope, opened the message and read. Saunders did the same with his. One glance was enough for each.

"I told you so," said Saunders. "Here's my message: 'Central disconnected.'"

Mark looked up with surprise.

"'Central disconnected'? What's that, Saunders? More United States?"

"It's our code," replied the detective, "for 'Come back to the central office at once. Our connection with the case is at an end.'"

There was a trace of pain in Mark's face, as he handed his own telegram over for Saunders to read. It was from New York:

"Harvey, Sullivan and Riggs, your solicitors, wire us to find you and say that your brother is dead and that you are to return at once."

"I'm sorry, Griffin, very sorry." There was real sympathy in Saunders' voice. "Perhaps it is better that you should go. It may be a way out. Your Ambassador can help you. I've got to stay and face it. Yes, it would be better for you to go."

"You're wrong, Saunders." Mark's voice had a decided note in it. "My disappearance might complicate the international part of the situation. Baron Griffin was a member of the House of Lords, and quite a personage. And I am the only brother of that late personage. He had no children. I can fight better here—as Baron Griffin."

"Great Scott!" cried Saunders. "Come to think of it, you *are* Baron Griffin now!"

"Yes, I am, and only half sorry for it, much as I regret my brother's death. What are you going to do, Saunders?"

The detective looked embarrassed.

"I didn't intend to tell you, but I guess I will. I'm going to throw up my job. I'm in this thing and I'm going to stay and see it out."

"Good old chap!" answered Mark. "I thought you would. But can you afford it?"

"Frankly, I can't; but I'm going to do it just the same."

"Saunders," said Mark, "I think I need the services of a sort of detective."

"You mean a protective bodyguard."

"Put it as you like—any way that will let me pay you for your time. You say you are going to stay on the case. I want to have you on it. You may not need me badly, but I'm sure that I need you."

"Then you want me to apply for the job?"

"I'd employ you if you would take it, old chap."

"Then I apply. I never asked for a job before, but I want this one. Shake!"

The men shook hands and started to go upstairs. When they were out of hearing, the clerk called up a number on the telephone.

CHAPTER XII

HIS EXCELLENCY SUGGESTS

In an upstairs room of a Washington Ministry three men sat in conference. One, a stout, bearded man, was seated behind a flat-top desk on which he constantly thrummed with nervous fingers; the others sat facing him. The man at the desk was the Minister of a Kingdom, and looked it. His eyes were half closed, as if in languid indifference, effectually veiling their keenness. The expression of his mouth was lost in the dark moustache, and in the beard combed from the center. The visible part of his face would have made a gambler's fortune; and, save for its warm color, it might have been carved out of ice. Without ever a hint of harshness or loudness, his voice was one to command attention; though it came out soft and velvety, it was with the half assurance that it could ring like steel if the occasion arose. The occasion never arose. The hands, whose fingers thrummed on the glass-topped desk, were soft, warm-looking, and always moist, with a dampness that on contact made you feel vaguely that you had touched oil—and you had.

Both of the other men were beardless, but one had the ghost of a moustache on his upper lip. He was dapper, clean and deferential. The other was short and somewhat ungainly in build, and his face showed evidence of the recent shaving off of a heavy beard. He had no graces, and evidently no thoughts but of service—service of any kind, so long as he recognized the authority demanding it. His clothes did not suit him; they were rich enough, but they were not his kind. A soldier of the ranks, a sailor before the mast, a laborer on Sunday, could have exchanged clothes with this man and profited in values, while the other would certainly have profited in looks.

"You did not see the other, then, Ivan?" the fat man asked, interrupting the story of his awkward guest.

"I did not, Excellency. He came at me too quickly, and I had no idea there was anyone there besides myself and—and the person who—"

"Yes, yes. The person who is now without a name. Go on."

"I was in the shrubs, near a great large tree that seemed to form part of a wall, when the two, the person and a lady, came back together. She—"

"Did they act as if they knew one another?"

The man smiled. "Excellency, they acted as if they knew one another quite well. They embraced."

"*That* you did *not* see, Ivan?"

"No, Excellency, of course, I did not see *that*."

"Proceed, Ivan."

"After they—parted, Excellency, the lady opened the tree and went into it."

"*Opened the tree*?" The nervous fingers were stilled.

"Yes, Excellency. It must have been a door."

"Rather odd for America, I should say. Eh, Wratslav?"

The dapper man bowed. "As you say, Excellency, it is rather unusual in America."

"Proceed, Ivan." The Minister resumed his thrumming.

"When the lady closed the tree and was gone, the—ah—person—turned to go past me. My gun had the silencer on which Your Excellency—"

"You are forgetting again, Ivan." The half-closed eyes opened for an instant, and the steel was close underneath the velvet of the tone.

"Which Your Excellency has no doubt heard of."

"Oh, yes—Maxim's."

"My gun exploded—but noiselessly, Excellency, because of the silencer—just as the strange man jumped at me. The—ah—person fell, and I ran. The strange man followed and caught me. I fought, but he knew where to hit; and when I awoke I was alone with the—person—who had, most unfortunately, been

killed when the gun went off. I came back and—" he glanced at the one who had been called Wratslav—"he came with me."

The Minister looked inquiringly toward the dapper man, who then took up the story.

"We thought it better to dispose of the—person, Excellency, and avoid—"

"Exactly. You did well. That will do, Ivan. You may return to your duties."

The man arose and went toward the door, but the Minister stopped him.

"One moment, Ivan. Do you think we could find the other?—the man who struck you?"

"I think his face, or hands, or arms, would be marked by the gun fire, Excellency."

"Thank you, Ivan."

The rough man bowed himself out. For a while the Minister sat silent, gazing contemplatively at the fingers which were moving more slowly now as though keeping pace with his thoughts. Finally he looked up.

"Did you find out if there were any strangers in town last night, Wratslav?"

"There were two, Excellency. One was our own detective, who knew not at all that I was on the work. The other was an Englishman—the same who visits the lady."

"H-m, h-mmmm." The tones were long drawn out, and again His Excellency was silent, considering what this new development might mean. The fingers ceased their thrumming and closed around a delicate ivory paper-knife which lay near by. When the Minister again spoke, he did so slowly, carefully, weighing each word.

"Have you seen him—the Englishman—since?"

"No, Excellency—"

"No?" The word came with cold emphasis.

"The hotel clerk, who is friendly—for a consideration—telephoned me that the Englishman was out at the time of the accident, and that his hand was burned slightly, and showed powder marks."

"So! He has said nothing to the authorities?"

"Not a word, so far as I have heard."

"Strange. Why should he conceal the matter?"

"He might think that he would be suspected."

"True, true. That is well spoken, Wratslav. But yet he knows a little too much, does he not?"

"A great deal too much, Excellency."

"There is no certainty that he does not know also who the lady is."

"He goes to see her, Excellency."

The ivory knife swayed delicately, rhythmically, in the mobile fingers, then was still. The Minister spoke deliberately.

"It would be well if he did not go again—did not speak to her again for that matter—" The heavy lids flickered for an instant as His Excellency flashed one look of keen intent towards his hearer as though to emphasize the portent of his words. Then the smooth voice continued, "if it could be arranged."

"It can be arranged, Excellency."

"I thought so." Again the keen look. Then the Minister leaned back in his chair, revolving it slightly that his arm might rest more comfortably on the desk.

"Excellency?" Wratslav spoke with some anxiety.

"Yes?"

"Unfortunately, the Englishman is a person of some consequence in his own

country."

"Indeed? One Griffin, is he not?"

"His brother is dead. He died last week. The Englishman is now Baron Griffin."

The fingers tightened around the ivory knife.

"That," the Minister's voice became softer and even more velvety, "*that* is unfortunate." There was silence again. The knife was laid down, and the fingers moved slowly, heavily, on the desk. "Still, I think, Wratslav, that Ivan should continue to work on the railroad—and you also—while the excellent shooting continues near—ah—the camp. It seems best."

The telephone on the desk tinkled. His Excellency picked up the receiver.

"Yes, someone will come down."

He hung up the receiver and turned to Wratslav.

"There is a telegram downstairs. Go down and get it and bring it here. Hurry."

The secretary was back in a few moments with the envelope, which he handed to the Minister, who cut it open and read the message. The ivory knife snapped in the tense grip; His Excellency looked idly at the pieces, but never a line of his face moved.

"Matters are a trifle more complicated, Wratslav. We must think again." He handed the telegram to his assistant. It read:

"A British subject presents his compliments to Your Excellency, and begs to assure you that the statement which he has written and sent under seal to the British Ambassador in Washington will not be opened or its contents made known to anyone except in the event of the sudden demise of Baron Griffin or James Saunders."

Wratslav returned the message to His Excellency and sat waiting. The slow thrumming was resumed. Then the Minister turned back to his desk, and his hand strayed to the papers on it.

"We may, perhaps, need both you and Ivan here in Washington for some time yet, Wratslav."

"Yes, Excellency."

The silence lasted a full minute.

"About the lady, Wratslav—" the Minister almost smiled; "it would be a great honor were she to visit the Ministry soon."

"Would she come, Excellency?"

The question was ignored.

"A very fast automobile could be used. It could be made quite comfortable, I think."

"If she made no outcry, Excellency. There is that danger—and of gossip also."

"That, too, might be arranged."

"But if she proves—"

"She will not—not if I announce, after receiving your telegram, that her arrival is momentarily expected—traveling incognito, you see—no fuss or receptions—but a short visit before sailing back to Europe. Over there it has been given out that she is traveling, so they know nothing outside the court. The King is anxious." There was another flashing look from the keen eyes before the slow, "He rewards well," spoken with meaning emphasis.

Wratslav answered the look. "I will try, Excellency."

"To try is not sufficient, Wratslav."

"I will do it, Excellency."

"That is better."

So it came to pass that the dapper young man called Wratslav, and the rough one called Ivan, left next day in a fast automobile whose limousine body seemed especially built to interfere as little as possible with its speed. Why it was kept constantly stored with provisions, and why it carried ropes and a tent of silk, no one of the workers in the camp knew; for none of them ever saw those things—or indeed ever saw the interior of the car at all.

CHAPTER XIII

THE ABDUCTION

Father Murray called at the hotel two days later and inquired for Mr. Griffin. Mark was in his room and hastened down.

"I must apologize, Father," he began, "that you had to come for me. I should not have let such a thing happen. But I thought it best not to break in upon you after—" Mark stopped, deeply chagrined at having almost touched what must be a painful subject to the priest. "I—I—"

But Father Murray smiled indulgently.

"Don't, please, Mark. I am quite reconciled to that now. A few hours with my *Imitation* heals all such wounds. Why, I am beginning to know its comforts by heart, like that one I inflicted on you the other day. Here's my latest pet: 'What can be more free than he who desires nothing on earth?'"

"Fine—but a certain pagan was before your monk with that," said Mark. "Wasn't it Diogenes who, asked by Alexander the Great to name a favor the emperor could bestow upon him, asked His Majesty to step out of the sunlight? Surely he had all the philosophy of your quotation?"

"He had," smiled back the priest; "but, as Mrs. O'Leary has the religion which includes the best of philosophy, so our à Kempis had more than Diogenes. Philosophy is good to argue one into self-regulation; but religion is better, because it first secures the virtue and then makes you happy in it. 'Unless a man be at liberty from all things created, he cannot freely attend to the things divine.' It is the attending to things divine that really makes true liberty."

"Then," said Mark, "I am forgiven for my failure to call, for I left you free for the more important things."

Father Murray laughed. "You are quite a master in the art of making excuses, my dear Mark. You *are* forgiven, so far as I am concerned. But I am not the only one who has been neglected."

"That is true, Father. Won't you let me walk with you? I want to speak about a matter of importance."

So the friends walked along the main street of Sihasset and out toward the Bluff Road. Mark was silent for a long time, wondering how he could approach the subject. When he spoke he went directly to the point:

"Father, you know that I love Miss Atheson?"

"Yes."

"You approve?"

"Decidedly."

"But I am not of her faith."

"You are. Lax you may be in practice, but you are too good to stay long satisfied with present conditions. I am frank, my dear Mark."

"And you would trust me?"

"Absolutely."

"At first, I could not quite see why I fell in love with her so soon, after having escaped the pleasant infliction for so long a time. Now I think I know. Do you remember ever having met me before?"

"I have no such recollection."

"Did you know some people named Meechamp?"

"I knew a family of that name in London. They were parishioners of mine during my short pastorate there, before I became a Catholic."

"Then you did meet me before. I was present at your farewell sermon. I was visiting the Meechamps at the time. That sermon made a lifelong impression on me. After hearing it I was worried about my own state of mind, for I had given up the practice of the very religion you were sacrificing your prospects to embrace. I went in to your study to see you that morning."

"Ah, now I remember," exclaimed the priest. "So it was you who came to see me?"

"Yes; and I have never forgotten your last words to me: 'Remember this: the door we are passing through this morning, going in opposite directions, is never locked.' But let that pass. I want to come quickly to something else. That morning a little girl sat all alone in a pew near your study door. She spoke to me as I came out: 'Is he crying?' she asked. I answered, 'I'm afraid, my dear, that he is.' She bristled at once: 'Did you make him cry?' I had to smile at her tone of proprietorship in you. 'No, my dear,' I said, 'I never make good people cry.' That made us friends. 'Do you love him?' I asked. 'I do. I like you, too, because you think he is good. Those others only worried him.' Father, I haven't quoted her exact words, of course, but the substance. I kissed her. The last I saw of your church in London included that little girl. I looked back from the door as I was going out; she was kneeling on the pew seat waving her hand after me. I never forgot the face—nor the kiss. Now I know I have met her again—a woman. Quite by accident I saw, at Killimaga, a picture of you and that little girl taken years ago in London together. Both have changed; it was only last night that memory proved true and the faces in the picture identified themselves. Do you understand now?"

"I do," said Father Murray. "It is a remarkable story. I wonder if Ruth remembers you. She told me all about the 'nice young gentleman' when I came out of the study to take her home."

"Then you knew her family well?"

"Her mother was my sister."

"Your sister!"

"Exactly. You are surprised?"

Mark was dumfounded rather than merely surprised.

"I do not, then, understand some other things," he stammered.

"Please be explicit."

"Father, I have already told you of the detective. You yourself figured out,

correctly, as it proves, a connection between his activities and the well-dressed men in the labor camp. You yourself saw the diplomat who was here. I now know why they are watching Miss Atheson. They take her for a runaway grand duchess. They are confident she is the one they have been instructed to watch. Several things have happened within the last forty-eight hours. I am convinced Miss Atheson is in danger; and I don't understand some things I have myself seen, if she is really your niece."

"Will you just continue to trust me, my dear Mark?" asked Father Murray anxiously.

"Certainly, Father."

"Then do not question me on this point. Only wait."

The men walked on in silence, both thoughtful, for five minutes. Then all at once Mark thought of the charge the Bishop had put upon him. Here was his chance.

"Father, one good has come out of this talk. Listen!" Mark related the incident of his ride with the Bishop, and all that had passed. "You see, Father," he said when the story was finished, "your reputation will be cleared now."

Father Murray could not conceal his gratification; but he soon became grave again.

"You are right," he said, "and I am deeply grateful to you. I knew there was some unfortunate misunderstanding, but I never thought of that. My old Bishop knew all the circumstances, and instructed me to keep silence so far as others were concerned. But I thought that—" Father Murray seemed puzzled. His mind had reverted to the seminary days in Rome. Then his brow cleared, as though he had come to some decision, and he spoke slowly. "For the present it is best that no explanation be attempted. Will your trust stand the strain of such a test, Mark?"

Mark's answer was to put out his hand. Father Murray's eyes were wet as he took it.

Before Mark had noticed, they had arrived at the place of the tragedy. Mark stopped and related the story of the shooting. Father Murray stood as though

petrified while he listened. His face showed the deepest agitation. It was some minutes before he could speak.

"You are in New England, Mark. Those things are not done here."

"Father Murray, do you see the powder marks on my hand? Yes? I got them trying to throw up the gun that killed the young officer."

Father Murray's reply was cut short. Before he could utter two words, the tree was suddenly thrown open. Madame Neuville sprang out of it, screaming. Her hair was disheveled, her dress torn, and blood was trickling down her cheek from a small wound—evidently the result of a blow.

"*Mon Dieu*! *Mon Dieu*!" she cried, wringing her hands. "Miss Ruth is gone. They have taken her away in a great car. *Mon Dieu*, Father! Come—come at once!"

The priest stepped into the tree, and Mark followed closely. As he had surmised, the tree was a secret entrance into the grounds of Killimaga. Madame Neuville pointed to the main entrance of the estate and to the road showing beyond the open gates, "The North Road," Sihasset called it.

"That way!" she cried. "They went that way. There were two of them. They were hiding by the wall and seized her just as we were going out. I was behind Miss Ruth and they did not see me at first. I tried to fight them, but one of them struck me and they went off like the wind. *Mon Dieu*! *Mon Dieu*! Let me die!"

"Stop, please." The sternness of Mark's voice effectually silenced the weeping woman. "What were those men like?"

"Big, so big. One had bushy eyebrows that frown always. He was dark and short, but he was very large of the shoulders."

Mark turned to Father Murray.

"It is useless to follow in a car, Father. The man she describes is the murderer. I saw the car early this morning; it is a seventy horsepower, and nothing but a racing car could catch it now. The lady is safe, in any event. They will carry her to Washington. When they find she is not the Grand Duchess, they will let her go. Will you come to Washington with me?"

"Her mother was my twin sister, and she herself has been as a daughter to me ever since I first saw her, a babe in arms," replied Father Murray. "Let us go."

Madame Neuville rushed toward the great house, but the two men stepped back through the tree and hurriedly returned to Sihasset.

CHAPTER XIV

THE INEXPLICABLE

Saunders, having selected the most comfortable chair in the hotel lobby, was dozing placidly when Mark rushed in, and shook the detective vigorously.

"Wake up," he called. "Will you come with me to Washington? When is there a train connecting with the Congressional Limited? Father Murray wants to catch that."

Saunders was alert in an instant.

"Sure, I'll go. Train leaves in fifty minutes; you get the Limited at the Junction—have to wait nearly an hour for the connection, though. What's up?"

"Hurry! I'll tell you later. Pack only what you need. Here, you pay the bills." Mark shoved his purse into Saunders' hands. "Keep the rooms; we'll need them when we return. I'm off. Oh, yes! I forgot." Mark stopped on his way to the stairs. "Telephone the Padre about the train."

In good time, Father Murray, Mark and Saunders stood at the end of the station platform, grips in hand.

"Now, open up," said Saunders. "What's wrong?"

Mark looked inquiringly at the priest. Father Murray briefly gave the detective a resume of what had occurred, including the information which had so stunned Mark Griffin, and now had an even more stunning effect on Saunders, the information regarding the priest's relationship to Ruth Atheson.

"But, Father, this looks like the impossible. It's unbelievable that these people could be mistaken about someone they had trailed from Europe. They were so sure about it that they killed that officer."

"Ruth Atheson is my sister's daughter, Mr. Saunders," was the only answer vouchsafed by the priest. He boarded the train, followed by his companions.

Saunders sat in puzzled silence till the junction point was reached. Then the three alighted, and Father Murray turned to the detective.

"Mr. Saunders, I am going to ask a favor of you. I do not know how long I may be away, and my parish is unattended. The Bishop is here to-day on his Confirmation tour, and I am going to take Mr. Griffin with me and call on him. Will you remain here in charge of our effects?"

"Sure, Father. Go on." He glanced toward the bulletin board. "The Limited is late, and you have more than an hour yet. I'll telegraph for sleeper reservations."

Father Murray and Mark started out for the rectory. Very little was said on the way. The priest was sad and downcast, Mark scarcely less so.

"I almost fear to meet the Bishop, Mark," Father Murray remarked, as they approached the rectory, "after that shock the other day; but I suppose it has to be done."

The Bishop was alone in his room and sent for them to come up. There was a trace of deep sorrow in his attitude toward the priest, joined to surprise at the visit. To Mark he was most cordial.

"My Lord," the priest began, "circumstances compel me to go to Washington for a few days, perhaps longer. My parish is unattended. The matter which calls me is urgent. Could you grant me leave of absence, and send someone to take my place?"

The Bishop glanced at Mark before he answered. Mark met his gaze with a smile that was full of reassurance. The Bishop seemed to catch the message, for he at once granted Father Murray's request.

"Certainly, Monsignore, you may go. I shall send a priest on Saturday, and telegraph Father Darcy to care for any sick calls in the meantime."

Mark lingered a moment as Father Murray passed out. The Bishop's eyes were appealing, and Mark could not help whispering:

"It will all come out right, Bishop. Cease worrying. When we return I think you will feel happier. Your message was carried to Monsignore."

At the station Saunders was waiting. "Everything is arranged," he announced. "I tried to get drawing-rooms or compartments, but they were all gone. The last was taken five minutes before I telephoned. I have sections for you both and a lower for myself. It was the best possible, so late."

When the train came in and they had disposed of their effects, Father Murray sat down and took out his breviary. Mark and Saunders, anxious for a smoke, sought the buffet car five coaches ahead. They sat down and Mark passed the detective his cigarette case.

"Thanks, no," said Saunders. "I like the long black fellows best." He pulled a cigar out of his pocket and lighted it. He appeared nervous.

"Griffin," he said, after a long silence, "there is something peculiar about this whole business."

"Yes, I know that very well."

"It is quite a little more peculiar than you think. The abduction of the lady was no surprise to me. It is quite in line with what I expected. They had to get her somehow. The way they are supposed to have taken would probably look the best way to them."

"'Supposed to have taken?' What do you mean?"

"Easy now, I'm coming to that. This lady cannot be the Duchess and Ruth Atheson at the same time."

"Decidedly not."

"She is one or the other."

"Well?"

"Either there is no Duchess, or no Ruth Atheson."

"True; but I cannot question the Padre's word. That, at least, I know is good. Then, look at his distress."

"Sure, I know that. I have been looking. And I've been thinking till my brain

whirls. The Padre wouldn't lie, and there's no reason why he should. But if the lady is Ruth Atheson, she is *not* the Duchess?"

"N-no."

"Then why did they shoot that poor devil of an Italian? And why the abduction?"

"Oh, I don't know, Saunders." Mark spoke wearily.

"Whoever she is, she can't be in two places at one time, can she?"

"For heaven's sake, Saunders!" Mark's look was wild, his weariness gone. "What are you driving at? You'll have my brain reeling, too. What is it now?"

"I thought I'd get you," coolly retorted Saunders. "Here's where the mystery gets so deep that it looks as if no one can ever fathom it." He paused.

"Well?" snapped Mark, exasperatedly.

"From habit a detective is always looking about for clues and possible bits of information. And so, largely as a matter of habit, I glanced into every open compartment as we passed through the coaches. In the second car from this the porter was entering Drawing Room A. I had a clear view of the people inside, and—" the speaker's tone became impressive—"one was that old lady who told you of the abduction; the other was—your lady of the tree."

Mark jumped, and seemed about to rise, but Saunders held him back.

"Don't do that; there may be others to notice."

"Ruth? You saw Ruth?"

"I saw that lady, Ruth Atheson or the Duchess, whichever she is, and the other. I made no mistake. I know for sure. The lady of the tree is on this train."

It was very late when Mark and Saunders retired to their berths. Father Murray was already sleeping; they could hear his deep, regular breathing as they passed his section. Both were relieved, for they dreaded letting him know what Saunders had discovered. Indeed all their conversation since Saunders had told

Mark of this new development, had been as to whether they should break the news gently to the priest, and if so, how; or whether it would be better to conceal it from him altogether.

Mark tossed in his berth with a mind all too active for sleep. He was greatly troubled. Cold and calm without, he was far from being cold and calm within. When he had believed Ruth to be the runaway Grand Duchess he had tried to put her out of his heart. He knew, even better than Saunders, that, while there might be love between them, there could never be marriage. The laws that hedge royalty in were no closed book to this wanderer over many lands. But he had believed that she loved him, and there had been some satisfaction in that, even though he knew he would have to give her up. But the sight of the love passage between the girl and the unfortunate officer had opened his eyes to other things; not so much to the deep pain of having lost her, as to the deeper pain caused by her deception. What was the reason for it? There surely had been no need to deceive him. Or—Mark was startled by the thought—had it all been part of an elaborate plan to conceal her identity in fear of her royal father's spies? Mark well believed that this might explain something—until he thought of Father Murray. There was no doubting the priest's words. He had said positively that the girl was Ruth Atheson, his own niece; and Mark remembered well the sweet face of the child in the big London church fifteen years before. He knew that he had begun to love Ruth then, and that he could never love anyone else. Now came the crowning cause of worry. Supposedly abducted as the Grand Duchess, she was even now free, and attended by her own servant, in this very train. What part in the strange play did the false abduction have? Mark could think of no solution. He could only let things drift. Through his worries the wheels of the train kept saying:

"You love her—you love her—" in monotonous cadence. And he knew that, in spite of everything, he would love her to the end.

Then his thoughts went back to the beginning, and began again the terrible circle. Despairing of getting any sleep, and too restless to remain in the berth, Mark determined to get up and have a quiet smoke. He was just arising when there came a most terrific crash. The whole car seemed to rise under him. His head struck sharply against the end of the berth and for an instant he could not think clearly. Then he was out. It looked as if one end of the car had been shattered. There were shouts, and cries of pain. The corridor was filled with frightened people scantily clad; a flagman rushed by with a lantern and his

hastily-flung words were caught and repeated:

"Collision—train ahead—wooden car crushed." Cries began to arise outside. A red glare showed itself at the windows. The passengers rushed out, all white with fear.

Saunders was beside Mark. "The Padre! Where is he?" he cried.

"In his berth; he may be hurt."

They drew back the curtains. Father Murray was huddled down at the end of his section, unconscious. The blow had stunned him. Mark lifted him up as Saunders went for water. Then they carried him out and laid him down in the air. He opened his eyes.

"What—what is it?" he asked.

"Wreck—there was a collision," answered Saunders.

Father Murray struggled to arise. "Collision? Then I must go forward, if it is forward—where the people are—maybe dying."

Mark made no attempt to stop him. He knew it would be useless, and he knew, too, that it was only the Soldier of the Cross called to his battlefield. When Saunders would have remonstrated Mark motioned him to silence.

"Let him go, Saunders," he said. "Perhaps his whole life has been a preparation for this. I have given up trying to interfere with God's ways."

So the Padre went, and his friends with him. The dead and wounded were being borne from the two wrecked Pullmans, but the Padre seemed led by some instinct to go on to where the engine was buried in the torn and splintered freight cars of the other train.

"The engineer and the fireman! Where are they?" he asked of the frightened conductor.

The man pointed to the heap of splinters. "In there," he answered.

The priest tore at the pile, but could make no impression on it.

"My God!" he cried to Mark; "they may need me. And I cannot get to them."

A groan beneath his very hands was the answer. The priest and Mark tore away enough of the splinters to see the face beneath. The eyes opened and, seeing the priest, the man essayed to speak; the priest bent low to catch the words.

"Father—don't—risk—trying—to get me—out—before you hear—my confession."

"But the flames are breaking out. You'll be caught," remonstrated Mark. "You have a chance if we act quickly."

"The only—chance—I want—is my—confession. Quick—Father."

With his head held close to that of the dying man, the priest listened. The men stood back and saw the smoke and flames arise out of the pile of splintered timbers. Then the priest's hand was raised in absolution.

"Quick now!" called Father Murray; "get him out."

The men stooped to obey, but saw that it was no use. The blood-spattered face was calm, and around the stiller lips there lingered a smile, as though the man had gone out in peace and unexpected contentment.

Turning aside, they found the fireman, and one man from the wrecked freight, lying beside the tracks—both dead. Then they went to the lengthening line along the fence. The priest bent over each recumbent form. At some he just glanced, and passed on, for they were dead. For others he had only a few words, and an encouraging prayer. But sometimes he stopped, and bent his head to listen, then lifted his hand in absolution; and Mark knew he was shriving another poor soul.

Suddenly the same thought seemed to come to both Mark and Saunders. Quickly passing along the line of pain and death, they both looked for the same face. It was not there. Yet *she* had been in the wrecked coach. The light of a relief train was showing far down the straight track, as Mark turned to a brakeman.

"Are there any others?"

"Yes; two—across the track."

Mark and Saunders hastened to the other side. Two women were bending over the forms laid on the ground. One glance was enough. The whole world seemed to spin around Mark Griffin. Ruth and Madame Neuville were lying there—both dead.

The strange women who were standing around seemed to understand. They stepped back. Mark knelt beside the girl's body. He could not see through his tears—but they helped him. He tried to pray, but found that he could only weep. It seemed as though there were a flood within pushing to find exit and bring comfort to him. He could think of her now in but one setting—a great empty church at the end of springtime, crowds passing outside, a desolate man behind a closed door, and a little child, with the face of an angel, sitting alone in a carven pew. He could hear her answer him in her childish prattle, could feel her cool little hand slip into his as she asked about the lonely man within. Then he remembered the kiss. The floods dried up. Mark's sorrow was beyond the consolation of tears.

Saunders aroused him.

"Be careful, Griffin. The Padre will come. Don't let him see her yet. He was hurt, you know, and he couldn't stand it."

Slowly Mark arose. He couldn't look at her again. Saunders said something to the women, and they covered both bodies with blankets from the wrecked car, just as the priest came up.

"Are there others?" the priest asked.

Saunders looked at Mark as if begging him to be silent.

"No, Father, no others."

"But these—" he pointed to the blanket-covered bodies.

"They are—already dead, Father."

"God rest them. I can do no more."

The priest turned to cross the track, and almost fell. Mark sprang to support him. The relief train came in and another priest alighted, with a Protestant clergyman, and the surgeons and nurses.

"It's all right, Father," said Father Murray to his confrere. "I found them all and gave absolution. I'm afraid that I am tired. There are many of your people, too," he said, turning to the Protestant clergyman. "I wish I were able to go back and show—"

He was tired. They carried him into the relief train, unconscious. The young priest and the Protestant clergyman came frequently to look at him as the train sped on toward Baltimore. But there was no cause for alarm; Father Murray was only overcome by his efforts and the blow. In half an hour he was helping again, Mark and Saunders watching closely, in fear that he might lift the blanket that covered the face of Ruth Atheson.

When Father Murray came to where she had been placed in the train, Mark put his hand on the priest's arm.

"Don't, please, Father. She is dead—one of the two you saw lying on the other side when you came over."

"Yes, I know. But I should like to see." Father Murray started to raise the cloth, but again Mark stopped him.

"Please do not look, Father."

The deep sadness in Mark's voice caused the priest to stare at him with widely opened eyes. A look of fear came into them as he glanced at the covered body. For the first time he seemed afraid, and Saunders drew near to catch him. But he did not fall.

"I think—Mark—that I will look. I can drink of the chalice—if it must be—I am sure I can. Don't be afraid for me, my friend. Draw the blanket back."

But Mark could not.

Father Murray pushed him gently aside and lifted the covering reverently and slowly. He dropped it with a faint gasp as the face stood revealed. Then he leaned over the dead girl and searched the features for a full half minute, that

seemed an age to Mark. The priest's lips moved, but Mark caught only a few words: "I thank Thee for sparing me, Lord."

He caught the end of the blanket and once more covered the dead face. Then he turned and faced Mark and Saunders.

"God rest her. It is not Ruth."

"God rest her," Father Murray said after what seemed an age to Mark; "it is not Ruth!"

[Illustration: "God rest her," Father Murray said after what seemed an age to Mark; "it is not Ruth!"]

Mark stared bewildered. Had the priest's, mind been affected by the blow, and the subsequent excitement? Father Murray sensed what was going on in Mark's mind.

"Can't you trust me, Mark? I know that the likeness is marvelous—"

"Likeness?" gasped Mark. But there was a whole world of hope in his voice.

"Yes, my friend—likeness. I—" the priest hesitated—"I knew her well. It is not Ruth."

CHAPTER XV

"I AM NOT THE DUCHESS!"

A long, low-built limousine kept passing and repassing the Ministry, and taking excursions to the parks, in an evident effort to kill time. At last, the street being well clear of pedestrians and vehicles, the car drew up in front of the house, the door of which was quickly thrown open. The chauffeur descended and opened the door of the car, but said nothing. A man stepped out backward.

"We have arrived, Your Highness," he said to someone within. "Will you walk across the path to the door, or will you force us again to be disrespectful in carrying out our orders?"

From within a girl's voice answered:

"You need not fear; I shall make no outcry."

"The word of Your Highness is given. It would be painful for us to be disrespectful again. Come."

The girl who stepped out of the car was unmistakably Ruth Atheson. Behind her came a raw-boned, muscular woman, and a powerful-looking man.

As she was hurried between the tall stone gateposts and up the cement walk, Ruth had but little time to observe her surroundings; but her eyes were quick, and she saw that the house she was about to enter was set some twenty feet back in quiet roomy grounds bordered by an ornamental stone wall. Distinguishing the house from its neighbors was a narrow veranda extending for some distance across the front, its slender columns rising to such a height that the flat roof, lodged with stone, formed a balcony easily accessible from the second floor. To one side, between the wall and the house, was a large tree whose foliage, loath to leave the swaying boughs, defied the autumn breeze.

Before she had time to observe more, the party entered the Ministry; the door was closed quickly, and Ruth's companions stood respectfully aside. His Excellency was already coming down the steps, and met her at the foot of the

stairs. Bowing low, he kissed the white hand before Ruth could prevent.

"We are highly honored by the presence of Your Highness."

With another low bow he stood aside, and Ruth passed up the stairs. His Excellency conducted her into the room wherein the conference regarding her had been held only a few days before.

"Your Highness—" he began.

But Ruth interrupted him. "I do not understand your language."

The Minister rubbed his hands, smiled, and, still using the foreign language, said, "I am surprised that Your Highness should have forgotten your native tongue during such a short sojourn in America."

Ruth spoke somewhat haughtily.

"I think, Your Excellency, that I know who you are—and also why I am here. Permit me to tell you that you have made a serious blunder. I am not the Grand Duchess Carlotta."

The Minister smiled again, and started to speak. But Ruth again interrupted him.

"Pardon me, Your Excellency, but if you insist upon talking to me, I must again request that you speak a language I can understand. I have already told you that I do not understand what you say."

The Minister still kept his smile, and still rubbed his hands, but this time he spoke in English.

"It shall be as Your Highness wishes. It is your privilege to choose the language of conversation. We will speak in English, although your own tongue would perhaps be better."

"My own tongue," said Ruth, "is the language that I am using; and again I must inform Your Excellency that I am not the Grand Duchess. You have simply been guilty of abduction. You have taken the wrong person."

For answer the Minister went over to the mantel and picked up a portrait, which he extended toward the girl.

"I know," said Ruth, "I know. Many times in Europe I have been subjected to annoyance because of the resemblance. I know the Grand Duchess very well, but my name is Ruth Atheson."

The tolerant smile never left the face of the Minister.

"Your Highness shall have it as you wish. I am satisfied with the resemblance. Since you left San Sebastian there has been scarcely a minute that you have not been under surveillance. It is true that you were lost for a little while in Boston, but not completely. We traced you to Sihasset. We traced *him* there also finally—unfortunately for the poor fellow."

Ruth started: "You have not—"

The Minister looked sad. "Alas! Highness," he said, "he is no more—-an unfortunate accident. We do not even know where his body is. I fear he may have been drowned, or something worse. At any rate he will trouble you no more."

The face of the girl showed keen distress. "Poor child!" was all she could say.

"He was not, Highness, exactly a child, you know," suggested the Minister.

"I was not referring to *him*."

The Minister's smile returned.

"Then, Highness, perhaps you were referring to the Grand Duchess."

"I was referring to the Grand Duchess."

All this time His Excellency never lost his air of respect, but now a somewhat more familiar tone crept into his voice.

"Highness," he said, "you will pardon me, I know, if I issue orders in your regard. All is being done by your father's commands, given to me through His Majesty. You know as well as I do that your marriage to this Italian adventurer

was impossible. You know that you are next in line of succession, but you do not know something else. You do not know that your father is even now dangerously ill. Your escapade has been hushed up to avoid scandal, for you may be sitting on the throne within a month. You must return to Ecknor, and you must return at once. The easiest way, and the best way, would be to notify the Washington papers that you have arrived on a visit to America *incognito*, and that you are now a guest at the Ministry. Though it is already midnight, I have prepared such a statement. Here is it." The Minister pointed to a number of sealed envelopes on the desk. "If you consent to be reasonable, I shall have these dispatched by messenger at once, and to-morrow make arrangements for your entertainment. We shall send you to see some of the cities of the United States before you leave again for Europe. In this way your presence in America is explained. Nothing need ever be said about this unfortunate matter, and I can promise you that nothing will be said about it when you return home."

It was Ruth's turn to smile.

"You are overlooking one thing, Excellency, and that the most important. I am not the Grand Duchess."

"Of course, Highness. You have explained that before. It would not become me to contradict you, and yet you cannot blame me for carrying out my orders. If you do not agree to the plan I have suggested, I must put you under restraint. No one will be permitted to see you, and proper arrangements will be made to have you transferred secretly to one of our warships, which will be making a cruise—for your especial benefit—to America in the course of a month. A month, Highness, is a long time to wait in restraint, but you must see that there is nothing else for me to do."

Ruth was obliged to smile in spite of herself at the mixture of firmness and respect in the suave Minister's tones. He was encouraged by the smile.

"Ah," he said, "I see that Your Highness will be reasonable."

Ruth looked him straight in the eye.

"But what if I should convince Your Excellency that you have made a mistake, that I am telling you the truth when I say I am not the Grand Duchess Carlotta?"

The Minister bowed. "It would be easy to convince me, Highness, if you could produce for me one who is more likely to be the Grand Duchess than yourself. But, alas! could there be two such faces in the world?" Admiration shone out of the little man's eyes.

"There is no doubt, Excellency," said Ruth, still smiling, "that His Majesty was wise in appointing you a diplomat. We shall be good friends even though I have to stay. You are making a mistake, and I am afraid you will have to pay for it. I shall, however, be a model boarder, and possibly even enjoy my trip on the warship. But I certainly shall not receive your friends at a reception, nor will I permit you to give me the honors due the Grand Duchess. Neither can I produce her. She is probably far away by this time. I will tell you my story, and you may judge for yourself."

His Excellency bowed profoundly.

"Your Highness is most gracious," he said. "Will you permit me to be seated?"

"Certainly, Your Excellency."

The Minister drew up a chair and sat down, with a low bow, before his desk; but not before he had placed Ruth in a chair where the light would shine full on her face. He seemed now to be a changed man—almost a judge; and the fingers thrummed on the glass as they had done during the conference with Wratslav and Ivan.

With a half-amused smile, Ruth began.

"Excellency, my name is Ruth Atheson. You may easily verify that by sending for my uncle, Monsignore Murray, of Sihasset, with whom I made my home until he went to college in Rome to study for the priesthood. I was left in Europe to receive my education. Afterward I came to America to be near my uncle, but I made frequent trips to Europe to visit friends. It was during one of these visits that I first met the Grand Duchess Carlotta, four years ago, at San Sebastian. The remarkable likeness between us caused me, as I have already told you, a great deal of annoyance. Her Highness heard of it and asked to meet me.

"We became close friends, so close that in her trouble she turned to me. I was with relatives in England at the time. She wrote asking me to receive her there,

telling me that she intended to give up her claim to the throne and marry Luigi del Farno, whom she sincerely loved. I sent her a long letter warning her against the step—for I knew what it meant—and advising her that I was even then preparing to leave for America. Unfortunately, she knew my address and followed me to Sihasset, directing her lover to wait until she sent for him.

"I knew that the best means of concealing her would be to play upon the likeness between us, and never go out together. For extra precaution, when either of us went out, a veil was worn. She was taken for Ruth Atheson; and Ruth Atheson, by your detectives, was taken for the Grand Duchess Carlotta. Indeed," and here Ruth smiled, "she was very much taken—in an auto, and as far as Washington. You propose now to take her still farther. The Grand Duchess would know, ten minutes after it happened, of my abduction, and she would guess who was responsible. So you may be certain that she is no longer at Sihasset. The picture you have, Your Excellency, is the picture of the Grand Duchess, not of me. It happened that, as I was walking outside the gates of my home, your friends appeared. The mistake was quite natural."

The Minister had listened respectfully while Ruth spoke, but he was not convinced.

"It would be discourteous in me, Highness," he said, "to doubt your word. But it would be worse than discourteous were I to accept it. I am sorry; but you must offer me more than statements. My men could scarcely have been deceived. They followed you each time you came out. Two people do not look so much alike—especially outside of families—"

His Excellency's eyes opened as he flashed a keen look at Ruth. The name "Atheson" had suddenly commenced to bother him. What was it he should have remembered—and couldn't? The intentness of his gaze disconcerted Ruth. The Minister changed it to look down at his thrumming fingers, and continued in his suavest tones, following that scarcely perceptible pause.

"—as to deceive men trained in the art of spying. I can only repeat what I have already said: there are two courses open, and it is for you to determine which you prefer."

"You may be sure, then, Your Excellency," said Ruth, "that I shall not select the course that would put me in a false light before all the world. I am not the

Grand Duchess Carlotta, and I must refuse to be taken for her. My uncle will not be long in deciding who is responsible for my abduction, and I can assure you that you will have explanations to make before your warship arrives."

The Minister arose promptly as Ruth stood up, her hand resting lightly on the desk.

"I am tired, Your Excellency," she continued, "and—since you insist on my being the guest of your government—I will ask to be conducted to my apartments."

The Minister bowed. "If Your Highness will permit." He touched a bell. The raw-boned woman was in the room so quickly that Ruth wondered if she had been all the time just outside the door. At a signal from His Excellency, the woman picked up Ruth's wrap and gloves. His Excellency meanwhile, with a low bow, had opened the door. Ruth passed into the broad corridor and, accompanied by the Minister, proceeded to a handsome suite of rooms.

The Minister turned to Ruth. "I am sorry, Your Highness, but I have strict instructions in the event of your refusal to comply with my suggestion, that you are to remain in strict seclusion. I cannot permit you to see or speak to anyone outside, so I hope you will not embarrass me by making any such request." He pointed toward the windows. "You will notice, Highness, that there is a balcony in front of your apartments. In the next room, which also opens upon the balcony, is a guard. There will be a guard also at your door and another on the lawn below. Your windows will be under constant surveillance, though you will never see the guards unless you venture forth. Your guards will be changed constantly, and it will be—" the minister's pause was significant, the tone of his voice even more so "—unwise—to attempt to gain their friendship. They might find it—disastrous." Again the smooth significance of the voice. He paused for a moment, then spoke more lightly.

"If Your Highness will permit, Madam, my wife, will call on you and be at your disposal at any time, as also my daughters. Since you have no maid with you, Madame Helda," His Excellency called the raw-boned woman from the next room as he spoke, "will wait upon you. Everything to make your stay pleasant and comfortable has been arranged. But you are an important personage and if we are firm, Your Highness, it is not because we wish to be, but only because of duty to your country, and to yourself. If you decide, at any time, that

you should like to see America, you have only to summon me. Your Highness will permit me to retire?"

"Certainly, Your Excellency, and thank you."

With a profound bow His Excellency left the room. Ruth examined her apartments with a pleased smile of gratification—for they looked anything but a prison. The Minister knew how to make rooms pleasant.

The diplomat went slowly downstairs. He had lost his smile, and his face was contracted with worry. The girl's story had impressed him more than he had cared to own, and there was much of the human in him, in spite of the diplomat's veneer. Then the name "Atheson" sounded insistently in his ears and, momentarily, he felt that he was almost grasping the clue as he strove to remember.

As he entered the library, his secretary stood up, a yellow paper in his hands.

"I have been waiting to hand this to you personally, Excellency."

The Minister took the paper. It was a cablegram translated from code, which read:

"The Duke is dead. If Her Highness has arrived do everything possible to bring her to understand that there must be no scandal. Be absolutely firm and have her return at any risk without delay. The *Caspian* has been dispatched from the coast of France and should arrive in ten days. We have given out that the Duchess is traveling incognito, but has been notified to return."

The worry on the Minister's face deepened.

"This complicates matters, Wratslav," he said, "and makes it more imperative that Her Highness be kept most strictly secluded. Go to bed now. We shall have enough to keep us awake for the next ten days."

Wratslav left, but the Minister sat down at his desk. Morning found him there

asleep.

CHAPTER XVI

HIS EXCELLENCY IS WORRIED

At eleven o'clock, His Excellency the Minister was handed a card which read:

"RIGHT REV. DONALD MURRAY, D.D."

Touching a bell, His Excellency summoned Wratslav.

"There is a clergyman," he said, "who calls on me. I do not know him, and of course I cannot guess his business. Perhaps you will see him."

The secretary bowed and went out. As he entered the reception room, Father Murray arose. Before the priest could speak, the secretary began:

"You desire to see His Excellency?"

Father Murray bowed.

"I am sorry, but His Excellency is very much engaged. He has requested me to ascertain the nature of your business."

"I regret that I may not tell you the nature of my business." Father Murray's reply was instant. "I may speak only to the Minister himself."

"Then," answered the secretary, "I regret to say that he cannot receive you. A diplomat's time is not his own. I am in his confidence. Could you not give me some inkling as to what you desire?"

"Since I cannot see him without giving you the information, you might say to His Excellency that I have come to speak to him in reference to Miss Ruth Atheson—" Father Murray paused, then added coolly: "He will understand."

The secretary bowed courteously. "I will deliver your message at once," he said.

In exactly one minute the Minister himself was bowing to Father Murray.

"I beg your pardon for detaining you, Reverend Sir, but, as my secretary explained, I am extremely busy. You mentioned Miss Atheson and, at least so I understand from my secretary, seemed to think I would know of her. In deference to your cloth, I thought I would see you personally, though I do not recall knowing anyone by that name. Perhaps she wishes a *visé* for a passport?"

"That might explain it," answered Father Murray; "but I think she desires a passport without the *visé*. I have reason to believe that Your Excellency knows something of her—rather—unexpected departure from her home in Sihasset. In fact, my information on that point is quite clear. I am informed that she was mistaken for another, a visitor in her home. Possibly she is here now. The passport desired is your permission for her to return to her friends."

The Minister's face expressed blankness.

"You have been misinformed," he answered. "I know nothing of Miss Atheson. Would you kindly give me some of the facts? That is, if you think it necessary to do so. It is possible I might be able to be of service to you; if so, do not hesitate to command me."

"The facts are very easily stated," said the priest. "First, the young lady is my niece."

It was the Minister's boast—privately, understand—that he could always tell when a man believed himself to be telling the truth, and now—past master in the art of diplomacy though he was—he found it hard to conceal his shocked surprise at this confirmation of the girl's story.

"You say she left her home unexpectedly?"

"She was seized by two men and hurried to a waiting auto, Your Excellency."

"And this happened where?"

"At Sihasset. Your Excellency passed through there quite recently, and will probably remember it."

The half-closed eyes almost smiled.

"Had your niece lived there long?"

"Only a few months. She arrived less than a week before her visitor."

Outwardly the Minister was calm, unmoved; but underneath the cold exterior the lurking fear was growing stronger. He must know more—all.

"Before that—?"

"She came direct from England, where she was visiting relatives."

"She was educated there perhaps?"

"She received her education principally in Europe."

"She has traveled much, then?"

"She has spent most of her time in America since I came here; but she has many friends both in England and on the Continent, and visits them quite frequently. She has very special friends in San Sebastian."

"Ah!"

"Perhaps Your Excellency knows something about it now?"

"Nothing, I assure you. But I find your story very interesting, and regret that I can see no way of assisting you."

Father Murray perfectly understood the kind of man he was dealing with. He must speak more plainly, suggesting in some degree the extent of his knowledge.

"I see, Your Excellency, that it will be necessary for me to mention another name, or rather to mention a title. There are, in your Great Kingdom, dependent duchies, and therefore people called grand dukes, and others called grand duchesses. Does that help Your Excellency to understand?"

The Minister still had control of himself, though he was greatly worried.

"It does not, Reverend Sir," he answered, "unless you might possibly be able to introduce me to a grand duchess *in America*. I am always interested in my countrymen—and women. If a grand duchess were brought here—that is," he

corrected himself, smiling courteously, "if a grand duchess should call to see me, I should be glad to place my entire staff at your service to find the Ruth Atheson you speak of. Perhaps your Reverence understands?"

"Thoroughly," said Father Murray. "I could not fail to understand. But it would be difficult for me to bring a grand duchess to call on you, since the only one I have ever known is, unfortunately, dead."

At last the Minister lost his *sang froid*. His face was colorless.

"Perhaps you will tell me the name of this grand duchess whom you knew?"

"I think Your Excellency already knows."

"How did she die, and when?"

"I am sorry to say that she was killed in an accident."

"Where?"

"If Your Excellency will pick up this morning's paper—which you possibly have neglected to read—you will see a list of those killed in a railroad wreck which took place the night before last on a Washington-bound train. The list includes 'two women, unknown' and the pictures of both are printed. Their bodies are now in the morgue in Baltimore awaiting identification."

The Minister turned hastily to a table on which a number of newspapers had been carelessly laid. He picked up a Washington publication. On the front page was a picture of two women lying side by side—taken at the morgue in Baltimore. Despite the rigor of death on the features, the Minister could perceive in the face of the younger woman an unmistakable resemblance to the girl upstairs. Greatly agitated, he turned to the priest.

"How do I know," he asked, "that this—" pointing to the picture—"is not Ruth Atheson?"

"I think," said the priest, "that you will have to take my word for it—unless Your Excellency will verify my statement by an actual visit to the morgue. The body is still unburied."

"I shall send to the morgue."

"Then for the present I will bid Your Excellency good morning. Before going, however, I should like to emphasize that the lady now in your custody is my niece. And Baron Griffin, of the Irish peerage, is taking an active personal interest in the matter. Baron Griffin is now in Washington and requests me to state that he will give you until to-morrow morning to restore the lady to her friends. That will afford ample time for a visit to Baltimore. Unless Miss Atheson is with us by ten o'clock to-morrow morning the whole affair will be placed in the hands of the British Ambassador and of our own State Department —with all the details. I might add that I am stopping at the New Willard Hotel."

The priest looked at His Excellency, who again felt the insistent hammering of that "something" he should have remembered. The phrase, "all the details," bore an almost sinister significance.

His Excellency gave a sudden start. "Atheson—Atheson." His voice was tense and he spoke slowly. "What was her father's name?"

It was what the priest had been waiting for, had expected all along. Forgotten for years—yes. But where was the diplomat who did not have the information somewhere in his files? His face saddened as he answered.

"Edgar Atheson."

"Etkar—"

But the priest raised his hand.

"*Edgar Atheson*—if you *please*."

The Minister bowed. "And you are the brother of—"

"Alice Murray," the priest interrupted quietly, with a touch of dignified hauteur.

His Excellency was silent, and his visitor continued.

"I must also suggest to Your Excellency that the fate of the young Italian officer is known to others beside myself. It would make unfortunate state

complications if the occurrence should be made public. I wish Your Excellency good morning."

He turned to go, but the Minister stood between him and the door.

"One moment," he said. "I regret that it is necessary to request your Reverence to remain. You will pardon the necessity, I am sure. I cannot permit His Majesty's secrets to be made known to the public. State complications often oblige us to take stern measures, and—" he continued coldly—"you are now on the territory of my royal master."

But Father Murray did not seem at all afraid.

"Do not think of detaining me, Your Excellency," he said quietly. "I mentioned Baron Griffin. There is another. Both know where I am. Nor need you worry as to our discretion. We are well enough acquainted with state complications to know when silence is best. We shall not speak unless it becomes necessary; but in that event we shall not hesitate. Don't make matters more difficult for yourself. I shall insist on the release of my niece, and I warn you that neither you nor His Majesty may touch either of us and go unscathed. Kindly stand aside."

But His Excellency still barred the way.

"Your Reverence," he said, after a pause, "I shall stand aside on one condition: that you will again give me your word that you will keep silence. To-morrow morning you shall have your answer; but in the meantime not one syllable about this must pass your lips, and Baron Griffin must not approach the British Embassy on this matter. There may be no need of his doing so at all. Please understand my position. I must guard His Majesty's interests, and do my best under difficult circumstances. Whether the lady be the Duchess or your niece, no harm shall come to her. Have I your word?"

"You have my word. Unless Your Excellency makes it necessary to act, we shall keep silence."

"Then," said the Minister, stepping aside, "I will bid you good morning."

Father Murray bowed himself out. He met Mark and Saunders at the corner. As they walked away, they saw nothing of the spy upon their footsteps; but they

knew that the spy was there, for they had knowledge of the ways of diplomacy. As a matter of fact, inside of twenty minutes the Minister knew what room each man was occupying at the New Willard. An attache did not leave the hotel all night; and the next morning the same man found himself in the unusual surroundings of St. Patrick's Church where Father Murray said Mass.

When the Minister returned to the library his face was white. Wratslav was in his confidence, and did not have to wait long for information. For the first time in his diplomatic career of thirty years His Excellency was nonplussed.

"If she is dead, Wratslav," he said, "what will be said of us, and what new trouble will arrive? Who is next in line of succession?"

"The Duchy," said Wratslav, "will pass to the Grand Duke's brother."

"Not so bad, not so bad. The King would like that. I think, then, that the brother is the only one who will benefit by this unfortunate complication. The Salic law should be enforced throughout the whole world. When we have to deal with women, only the good God knows what's going to happen. I am afraid the girl above told the truth."

"But," objected Wratslav, "even if she did, Excellency, you cannot take the risk of letting her go without orders from His Majesty. The Grand Duchess was always clever. She knew she was tracked down. It would be easy for her to pretend that she did not know her native language. You cannot let her go until you are sure."

The Minister passed his hand wearily across his forehead and sighed.

"At any rate we can verify some of the details. You must go to Baltimore, Wratslav, and view the bodies. Arrange for the embalming. Say that the two are ladies of our country. Give any names you wish. Place both bodies in a vault until this thing is cleared up; and bring me half a dozen pictures of the young one, taken close to the face on every side. Note the hair, the clothes, any jewels she may have about her; but, above all, find out if there are any papers to be found. See also if there are identifying marks. Return to-night; for by to-morrow morning I must be ready to decide. I shall send no dispatches until then."

His Excellency turned to his papers, and Wratslav left the room.

CHAPTER XVII

THE OPEN DOOR

That night, Mark Griffin and Father Murray sat in the priest's room at the New Willard until very late. Father Murray was by far the more cheerful of the two, in spite of the strain upon him. Mark looked broken. He had come into a full knowledge of the fact that Ruth had not been false to him, and that no barrier existed to their union, but he could not close his eyes to the danger of the girl's situation. Father Murray, however, could see no dark clouds.

"My dear Mark," he said, "you don't understand the kind of a country you are in. Affairs of state here do not justify murder, and an elected public official cannot, even in the name diplomacy, connive at it. It is true that a Minister cannot very well be arrested, but a Minister can be disgraced, which is worse to his mind. You may be sure that our knowledge of the murder of the Italian will be quite sufficient to keep His Excellency in a painful state of suspense, and ultimately force him to yield."

"I could wish him," said Mark, "a *more* painful state of *suspense*."

Father Murray smiled at the grim jest. "He will never see the rope, Mark, you may be sure of that. But there will be no more murdering. The situation of the Ministry is bad enough as it is. His Excellency looked very much perturbed—for a diplomat—before I was done with him. There is nothing more certain than that he has had a messenger in Baltimore to-day, and, unless I mistake very much, he will be able to identify the body. Then they must free Ruth."

"I wish, Father," Mark's voice was very tense, "that I could look at things as you do. But I know how a court works, and how serious are the games of kings. Then I haven't religion to help me, as you have."

"I question a little," replied Father Murray, "if that last statement is true—that you have no religion. You know, Mark, I am beginning to think you have a great deal of religion. I wish that some who think that they have very much could learn how to make what is really their very little count as far as you have made

yours count. It dawned upon me to-night that there is a good reason why the most religious people never make the best diplomats. Now, you would have been a failure in that career."

"I think, Father Murray, that your good opinion of me is at least partly due to the fact that I may yet be your nephew. Ruth is like a daughter to you; and so I gain in your esteem because of her."

"Yes," answered the priest thoughtfully, "Ruth is like a daughter to me. And it is a strange feeling for a priest to have—that he has someone looking up to him and loving him in that way. Though a priest is constituted the same as other men, long training and experience have made his life and mental attitude different from those of men of more worldly aspirations. A priest is bound to his work more closely than is any other person in the world. Duty is almost an instinct with him. That is why he seldom shines in any other line, no matter how talented he may be. Cardinal Richelieu and Cardinal Mazarin almost had to unfrock themselves in order to become statesmen. Cardinal Wolsey left a heritage that at best is of doubtful value—not because he was a priest as well as a lord chancellor, but because as lord chancellor he so often forgot that he was a priest. There are many great priest-authors, but few of them are among the greatest. A priest in politics does not usually hold his head, because politics isn't his place. There are priest-inventors; but somehow we forget the priest in the inventor, and feel that the latter title makes him a little less worthy of the former—rather illogical, is it not? The Abbot Mendel was a scientist, but it is only now that he is coming into his own; and how many know him only as Mendel, forgetting his priestly office? Liszt was a cleric, but few called him Abbé. A priest as a priest can be nothing else. In fact, it is almost inevitable that his greatness in anything else will detract from his priesthood. Now the Church, my dear Mark, has the wisdom of ages behind her. She never judges from the exceptions, but always from the rule. She gets better service from a man who has sunk his temporal interests in the spiritual. She is the sternest mistress the ages have produced; she wants whole-hearted service or none at all. I like thinking of Ruth as my daughter; but I am not averse, for the good of my ministry, to having someone else take the responsibility from off my shoulders."

"But," said Mark, "how could a wife and children interfere with a priest's duties to his flock?"

"The church does not let them interfere," answered Father Murray. "She holds

a man to his sworn obligations taken in marriage. A husband must 'cleave to his wife.' How could a priestly husband do that and yet fulfill his vow to be faithful to his priesthood until death? His wife would come first. What of his priesthood? Besides, a father has for his children a love that would tend to nullify, only too often, the priest's obligations toward the children of his flock. A man who offers a supreme sacrifice, and is eternally willing to live it, must be supremely free. In theory, all clergymen must be prepared to sacrifice themselves for their people, for 'the Good Shepherd gives up his life for his sheep.' In practice, no one expects that except of the priest; but from him everyone expects it."

"Do you really think," asked Mark, "that those outside the Church expect such a sacrifice?"

Father Murray did not hesitate about his answer.

"Expect it? They demand it. Why, my dear Mark, even as a Presbyterian minister I expected it of the men I almost hated. I never liked priests then. Instinctively I classed them as my enemies, even as my personal enemies. Deep down in my heart I knew that, with the Catholic Church eliminated from Christianity, the whole fabric tottered and fell, and Christ was stamped with the mark of an impostor and a failure—His life, His wonders, and His death, shams. Instinctively I knew, too, that without the Catholic Church the Christian world would fall to the level of Rome at its worst, and that every enemy of Christ turned his face against her priests. I knew that every real atheist, every licentious man, most revolutionists, every anarchist, hated a priest. It annoyed me to think that they didn't hate me, the representative, as I thought, of a purer religion. But they did not hate me at all. They ignored the sacredness of my calling, and classed me with themselves because of what they thought was the common bond of enmity to the priest. I resented that, for, while I was against their enemy, I certainly was not with them. The anomaly of my position increased my bitterness toward priests until I came almost to welcome a scandal among them, even though I knew that every scandal reacted on my own kind. But each rare scandal served to throw into clearer relief the high honor and stern purity of the great mass of those men who had forsaken all to follow Christ. And my vague feeling of satisfaction was tempered by an insistent sense of my own injustice which would not be denied, for I knew that I was demanding of the Catholic priest greater things than I demanded of any other men. Even while I judged—and, judging, condemned—I knew that I was measuring him by his own magnificent standard, the very seeking of which made him worthy of honor. To

have sought the highest goal and failed is better than never to have sought at all. So long as life lasts, no failure is forever; it is always possible to arise and return to the path. And a fall should call forth the charity of the beholder, leading him closer to God. But there is no charity for the Catholic priest who stumbles—no return save in spaces hidden from the world. The most arrant criminals, the most dangerous atheists, the most sincere Protestants, demand of the priest not only literal obedience to his vows, but a sublime observance of their spirit. Why, Mark, you demand it yourself—you know you do."

For a moment Mark did not answer.

"Yes," he said, after a pause, "I do demand it. I only wondered if others felt as I do. This job of trying to analyze one's own emotions and thoughts is a difficult one. I have been trying to do it for years. Frankly, there are things I cannot grasp. Let me put one of them before you now."

"Go on," said Father Murray. "I am glad the conversation is off the worry."

"You remember, Father," said Mark, "the day I met you in your study that eventful Sunday in London?"

The priest nodded.

"I had decided then to go out of the church, as I told you, to get away from my faith. I thought that I had come to that decision with a clear conscience, but I know now that I had merely built up a false one and that that was why I sought you out—not to give up, but to defy you, and defy my own heart at the same time. I thought that if I could justify myself before such a man as you it would set things at rest within me for the remainder of my days. I did not justify myself. Ever since that day I have been attracted by the open doors of Catholic churches. I never pass one without seeing that open door. The minute I seriously think of religion the picture of an open church door is in front of me; it has become almost an obsession. I seem to see a hand beckoning from that door; some day I shall see more than the hand—my mother's face will be behind it. I can't get away from it—and I can't understand why."

Father Murray's eyes were serious.

"Why, my dear Mark," he answered, "you ought to know that you can't get away. Do you suppose anybody ever got away from God? Do you suppose any

man ever could close his eyes to the fact of His existence? Then how is it possible for you to get away from that which first told you of God, and which so long represented to you all that you knew about Him? There is in the Catholic faith a strange something which makes those who have not belonged to it vaguely uneasy, but which makes those who have once had it always unsatisfied without it. There is an influence akin to that of the magnetic pole, only it draws *everything*. It intrudes itself upon every life. There seems to be no middle course between loving it and hating it; but, once known, it cannot be ignored. It has had its chain around *you*, Mark, and you are only now realizing that you can't cast it off."

Mark Griffin was silent. For some minutes not a word was exchanged between the two men. Then Mark arose and, without looking at his friend, said good night and left the room.

A minute later he returned.

"Father," he said, "you are very hopeful about Ruth. I am trying to share your hope. If everything comes out right and she is not lost to me, will you—heretic or unfaithful son though I may still be, whichever you are pleased to call me—will you still be a friend and, should she accept me, join our hands?"

Father Murray walked over and put his hand on Mark's shoulders.

"I am afraid, Mark, that it is again the Faith instinct. Of course I will marry you—that I expected to do. I could not be a mere onlooker to give her away. When you get her, Mark, you will get her from me, not only with an uncle's blessing, but with another as strong as Mother Church can make it and as binding as eternity."

CHAPTER XVIII

SAUNDERS SCORES

It lacked but five minutes to the hour of ten next morning when the card of the Minister's secretary was handed to Father Murray. The priest sent down a polite request for the visitor to come to his room, and at once telephoned for Mark. Both men arrived at the same moment and were introduced at the door. Father Murray, at Saunders' own request, kept the detective in the background. Saunders had, in the meantime, been learning all he could about the Ministry and its interior—"for emergencies," he explained to Mark.

The secretary proceeded to business without delay.

"I have come on behalf of His Excellency," he said, "and to express his regrets."

"I scarcely expected regrets," answered the priest; "for at ten o'clock I was to have a definite answer."

"It is impossible, Reverend Sir, to give you that. His Excellency bade me offer full assurance that a definite answer will not long be delayed; but a somewhat unforeseen situation was found in Baltimore—a situation that was unforeseen by you, though rather expected by His Excellency."

"I cannot imagine," Father Murray spoke rather tartly, "what that situation could be."

"Let me explain then." The secretary talked as one sure of his ground. "I take it that neither Baron Griffin nor yourself, Reverend Sir, would be at all interested in the movements of the Grand Duchess?"

"Not particularly," answered the priest.

"Then I am sorry to say that the dead girl in Baltimore is surely your niece. The other—"

"At the Ministry—" Mark put in.

"Wherever she is," parried the secretary. "The other is the Grand Duchess."

"Perhaps, Mr. Secretary," quietly suggested Father Murray, "you will admit that I ought to know my own niece?"

"There is a great resemblance, Reverend Sir, between the two ladies. I have seen the dead girl, and have examined her belongings. Her apparel was made, it is true, in Paris; but your niece has recently been there. Her bag bears the initials, 'R.A.' The mesh bag is plainly marked in gold cut initials with the same letters. The dressing case is also marked 'R.A.' Even the handkerchiefs are thus marked."

"As she was a guest of my niece, and of course left Killimaga very hurriedly after the abduction," said Father Murray, "it is quite probable that the Grand Duchess took the first clothes and other effects that came to hand. She may even have purposely used things belonging to Miss Atheson in order not to have anything in her possession that might betray her identity."

"True, that is possible," the secretary admitted; "but it is not probable enough to satisfy His Excellency. Without a doubt, he ought to satisfy himself. In the meantime, while the doubt remains, it is clear that your answer cannot be given."

"Suppose we place this matter, then," said the priest, "where the answer will come in response to a demand? There is still the British Embassy and the Department of State."

"It will be plain to you, Reverend Sir," said the secretary, "that such a course would not be of assistance. Frankly, we do not want publicity; but, certainly, neither does your Department of State. In fact, I think that this affair might offer considerable embarrassment to the President himself at this time. And you? Would you wish the reporters to hear of it and have it published with all possible embellishments and sent broadcast? A few days will not be long in passing. I can vouch for the fact that the lady is quite comfortable. Why not see it from His Excellency's point of view?"

"Just what is that point of view?"

"I will be frank. You gentlemen know the situation. His Excellency's entire

career is at stake. If this lady is the Grand Duchess and she does not go back to her throne—"

"Her throne?" Mark broke out in astonishment.

"Her father is dead. She is the reigning Grand Duchess, though she does not know it yet. You see the situation? His Excellency must be sure."

"But how does he mean to arrive at certainty?" asked Father Murray.

"That will be our task."

"And in the meantime?"

"She is safe."

"And if we seek the Department of State?"

"It will be the word of the minister from a friendly power against yours—and they will not find the lady."

"You would not—"

"They will not find the lady."

"Then," Mark spoke fiercely. "You have not kept your word."

"We have. She is safe, and shall be safe. Patience, if you please, and all will be well."

"It looks," said Father Murray, "as though we had no other choice."

Mark glanced at the priest, astonished that he should acquiesce so easily, but Father Murray gave him a quick, meaning look.

"That, Reverend Sir," answered the secretary, "is true. Since you see it so, I will bid you good day—to meet you again, shortly."

Scarcely had the secretary left the room when Father Murray was at the telephone calling Saunders.

"Come down," he directed, "at once."

Saunders was with them before either Mark or the priest spoke again.

"Well?" Saunders lost no time.

Father Murray gave him an outline of what had passed. Mark said nothing. A picture of despair, he was sitting with his head bowed upon his breast.

"And now, Mr. Saunders," said Father Murray, "it is your business to counsel—to be a real detective. What do you suggest?"

"She is at the Ministry," said Saunders. "Let that be my first statement. She is occupying a room which opens on a balcony of the second floor. There is a guard in the next room, which also opens on the same balcony. She is well watched. But I was in front of that house three hours last night, and again this morning—rather, I was in the house across the way. I had a good chance to communicate the news of your arrival to her—"

"What!" Mark was on his feet now.

"It was simple. I did it this morning with a hand mirror. You remember how bright the sun was about nine o'clock? Well, it was shining right into the room where I was, and when I saw that she was probably alone I caught the light on my little mirror and flashed the reflection into her room. I juggled it about as oddly as I could, flashing it across the book she was reading. Then I tried to make it write a word on her wall. Perhaps you would like to know the word, Baron?" He turned to Mark with a smile. "You would? Well, I tried to write 'M-A-R-K.' I think she understood, for she turned toward the window and seemed about to give me some signal. Then she raised her hand in a quick motion of alarm and began reading again. I withdrew the light, just in time, for some woman entered the room."

"I am afraid, Mr. Saunders," said Father Murray, "that you are dangerous, being a very clever man."

"But how, in Heaven's name," asked Mark, "did you get into that house? It is the home of—"

"Sure it is," answered Saunders. "Sure it is. But the family is away, and they

left only the chauffeur at the residence. Chauffeurs are fine fellows—under certain circumstances. They have acquired the habit."

"The conditions," laughed Mark, "will, I suppose, appear in your accounts?"

"In my accounts? Yes… Now to the rest of the discussion. I do not believe this affair can be arranged as easily as you think. It looks to me as if they really believe they have the Grand Duchess, and that we are trying to help her get away. They think she has planned the whole thing and that we are part of the plan. Miss Ruth was with Madam Neuville when they caught her. That's one point in their favor. Then the Duchess had things belonging to Miss Ruth, and had them when killed. That's point two for them. The face of Miss Ruth is the face on the portraits of the Grand Duchess. There's point three for them; and it is a fact that the face of the dead girl was slightly disfigured, as you know. The Minister dare not make a slip. He is not going to make one if he can help it. He will do something without delay to avoid all danger of your interference. If you go to court, you'll have publicity. If you go to the Department of State, their delays would make interference too late. If you don't act quick you'll have no chance to act at all. My advice is, to get into better communication with the young lady and then—to do a bit of quiet abduction ourselves."

"That's easy to say, Saunders," said Mark. "But how carry it out?"

"I'll have to think on that. But I'm sure it can be done." Saunders spoke convincingly. "Let me work this thing out as best I can."

"We are in your hands, Mr. Saunders," said Father Murray, "and we trust you."

"Thanks, Father, I'll do my best. Now let us go on—"

But at this moment the telephone bell rang. Father Murray answered the call.

"It's for you, Mark."

Mark took the receiver, and listened for a moment.

"All right; send him up."

He turned to his companions. "A colored man who insists on seeing me

personally."

They had but a few minutes to wait. He came up with a bellboy and stood before them, bowing low—a typical Southern darkey, his hair whitened by age.

"Well, uncle, what can I do for you?" It was Mark who spoke.

"Well, sah, seein' as how I found a lettah addressed to you—"

"A letter?"

"Yes, sah." The old darkey was fumbling with his hat, trying to withdraw the letter he had put away so carefully.

"I found it down the street, sah, neah one of them thar big for'n houses."

"Where?" The word was almost shouted as Mark jumped to his feet.

But the trembling fingers had at last grasped and now held forth the precious letter. Mark tore it open, and with a cry of glad surprise began to devour its contents. When he had finished, he handed the letter to Father Murray without a word, and turned to the darkey.

"Thank you, uncle. I am very glad you brought it."

"Yes, sah. I thought as how you might want to get it, seein' as how it was a pretty young lady that threw it out."

"You saw her?"

"Yes, sah. I was right across the street, and she suah is pretty, sah." The old man smiled and bowed as Mark gave him a bill. "Thank you, sah; thank you, sah." And with a broad grin he left the room.

Father Murray was still reading the letter and Mark motioned to Saunders to come to his side. Looking over the priest's shoulder, Mark read the lines again:

"My Dear Mark: His Excellency isn't a very good housekeeper; I have found an envelope in one of the books, and a tiny slip of blue-corded pencil in the

drawer of my dressing-table. I should like to pension the man who first put fly-leaves in a book. Fortunately, my maid isn't with me much, and the man in the yard can't see my front window because of the tree. So I have only to listen to the guard in the next room. He is always walking up and down, and when he reaches the uncarpeted space near the door I know he is at the end and ready to turn back. For that one second I can chance throwing this letter out into the street. I shall load it with a cut-glass ball I found on my desk. It is a beautiful little paper-weight, but its beauty won't save it this time. Someone will surely take the letter to you. Where to find you is my worry. But I know that the signal flashes could only mean that you are in the city, so I am risking the New Willard.

"A warship has been sent to take the Grand Duchess home. I cannot convince them that I am only Ruth Atheson. I am sure they are going to send me away. You must get me out of this house quickly, or it will be too late.

"Give me this special signal and I will be ready: At ten-thirty any morning flash the light and keep it still on the top of the gate pillar. Leave it there a moment; then flash it once across the top if you are coming that day, or twice for night. If you receive this letter, answer it by flashing the light into my room to-morrow morning. I shall pray for friendly sunlight.

"Thank you for coming. I don't know how you found out, but somehow I felt that you would. Love to the dear Father, if he is with you. I feel pretty sure he is.

"Ruth."

Saunders was the first to speak.

"I think, Father," he said, "that you have a clever niece. This makes things easy."

The Padre smiled. But Mark was not smiling—one can't do so little a thing to show unbounded joy.

CHAPTER XIX

CAPITULATION

It was early next morning when Saunders knocked at Mark Griffin's door. His knock was soft, for Mark's room adjoined Father Murray's. When Mark rose to let him in, the detective entered on tiptoe.

"I came down to see you early," he said, "because I wanted to dodge the Padre, and I thought perhaps he'd be over in the church for his Mass."

"A good Yankee guess," said Mark. "I heard him leave a few minutes ago, so you can talk as loud as you like. What is the matter? Anything gone wrong?"

"It's just this," said the detective. "We must make our attempt to get Miss Atheson without the Padre's knowing anything about it. I have been thinking about the thing, and I have a plan I believe will work. It's out of the question to get that guard off the watch in any ordinary way. If we attempt it, the house will be alarmed and we shall be taken for burglars."

"What difference if we are?" said Mark, very warmly. "If the Ministry can stand publicity, we can. I am in favor of taking strong measures right now."

"Not on your life, Griffin. Not on your life," said Saunders. "You don't seem to realize that the Padre cannot stand strong measures. Arrest as burglars would mean publicity, and there would be all sorts of fierce stories in the press. He is a priest—and then some."

"Well, what of it?"

"Sure, I know," soothed Saunders. "But the papers aren't in the journalistic game for dignity, and they'd play the Padre up for all he was worth; the more yellow the story, the better. The lady must be gotten out of the Ministry quietly. Once we have her, it will be up to the Ministry to make the next move. I have a hunch that His Excellency won't make it."

"Well," said Mark grudgingly, "I suppose the quiet way is the better way.

What is your plan? Why not let Father Murray know?"

"I can't let him know, because he'd want to be in on it. At all risks, he's got to be kept out. What I propose to do is to start up such a trouble in the rear of the house that, for five minutes at least, there'll be no guard in the front."

"You would have to set it on fire to do that."

Saunders put his finger impressively upon a button of Mark's pajamas.

"You've guessed it, first shot out of the box. That's just what I'm going to do. Rather, that's what *we're* going to do."

Mark looked at him in solemn silence.

"Saunders, what did you have to put you in this condition?"

"Plain water and a cold bath," answered Saunders promptly.

"Then perhaps you'll explain."

"It'll be easy. They can put the fire out after the lady has gotten away. The Minister is going to dinner to-night. Madame Minister—or whatever you call her—will be with him; so will his flock of girls, and so, of course, will His Excellency's secretary. The rest of his staff don't live there. I figure that the guards, and the servants, and Miss Atheson will be the only ones in the house. The fire will bring all but Miss Atheson to the back. A rope ladder skillfully thrown will do the rest. Now you see why I can't mix the Padre up in that. We may be arrested, though I don't think we shall. The Minister doesn't want anything of that kind. This morning I'll flash the night escape signal to Miss Atheson. She'll be ready to leave, and you may be sure she'll find a way to warn us if the guard is still around. To-night you make an excuse to the Padre and slip away. He's going to see a friend anyhow at the University out in Brookland. I heard him say so. Tell him not to worry if you happen to be out when he comes back. Fix it up any way you like, and we'll make the play and win."

"Who's to do the 'skillful throwing' of the ladder?"

"A friend of mine who used to be a fireman."

"Do you think you can get him?"

"I've engaged him already."

"H-m." Mark stared at the detective, then burst forth with, "What time did you get up?"

"I didn't have to get up. I haven't gone to bed yet."

Mark sat down in his chair to think. After a while he put out his hand to the detective.

"I believe you've got it, Saunders. I'll do it—but you'd better get some rest"

"Me for my little trundle bed." And Saunders, in high spirits, waved his hand as he went out the door.

Left alone, Mark proceeded to dress, but awaited Father Murray's return before going down to breakfast. The time seemed long after breakfast, but at length the priest prepared to leave the hotel.

Mark spoke nonchalantly. "Oh, Father, I'm going out in the country with some friends, and may not get back till quite late to-night."

"All right, Mark. I hope you have a pleasant trip."

It was so easy that Mark felt a trifle worried. His device was crude, and the priest had never before been so easily deceived.

It was midnight when a big automobile containing Saunders, his ex-fireman friend and Mark, drew up cautiously on a side street near the Ministry. The men at first walked quietly past the house. They saw a light in the apartment occupied by Ruth, but there seemed to be no other light within. They then walked around the block, passing a policeman at the corner, and entered the alley behind the Ministry on the other side, out of the bluecoat's sight. There was no one in the back yard, and Saunders easily effected an entrance into the garage, which was not far from the house. Taking from his pocket an ordinary hot-water bag, he knocked the lock off the gasoline tank and proceeded to fill the bag with gasoline. Then he turned to Mark.

"That's all back here for you. Leave the rear work to me. Go around, you two, and get the ladder. In fifteen minutes I'll have a fire at the back door. You'll probably see the light. As soon as you hear cries from the house, listen well and you'll know whether or not the guard has rushed back. The big door-window on the balcony is always left open so that the guard can command the window of Miss Atheson's room, and you can easily hear him open and close the inside door. If he doesn't leave, the game's up. As soon as you are sure he's gone, throw up the ladder. If you get Miss Atheson, don't wait for me. Rush her to the automobile and back to the hotel. I'll take care of myself. Now go on, and wait for the big noise."

The three men moved toward the door, but fell back when they saw a dark figure plainly outlined against the dim light behind him. Saunders said something under his breath. The ex-fireman turned pale, for he thought it was a policeman.

"The country is beautiful in the autumn, isn't it, Mark?"

Mark was as embarrassed as any small boy caught in truancy.

"I thought you took things rather quietly, Father—I might have known it was too good to be true. What did you come here for? You surely knew it was something we could not have you concerned in."

The priest laughed at Mark's rueful tone.

"You should have known better, Mark, than to think I could be so easily deceived. I am going to be mixed up in anything that concerns the welfare of Ruth. Besides," he added, with another quiet laugh, "I heard everything you two said this morning. I saw Saunders coming down the hall as I was leaving, and, as it was rather early for a casual visit, I came back to see what he was up to."

"Then why in—I beg your pardon, Father—why in all common sense," blurted out Saunders, "did you come here? You can't help, and we are taking the only possible way."

"Happily," rejoined Father Murray, "it is not the only way. Come out of this, and I will tell you something you will be very glad to hear. Let us get back to your automobile. We must not go very far away, for we have yet to call at the Ministry, when His Excellency returns."

"To-night?"

"This morning," gently corrected the priest. It was now well on toward one o'clock.

The three men obeyed him. The ex-fireman got into the automobile, while Mark and Saunders walked with Father Murray a short distance off. When they were out of earshot, the priest turned to his companions.

"You two have been working your own plans while I have been working mine. When you had finished your little secret conference, I went to St. Patrick's and said Mass. When I returned to the hotel, Mark didn't seem to appreciate my company, so I left rather early. Before going to Brookland, I called at the State Department. Happily, I know someone quite high up, so I had no trouble. I told him the whole story, and he promised to help me. A few hours ago he sent for me again and—" the priest smiled at his hearers' evident anxiety to hear the details—"and everything will be all right now. We are to see the Minister as soon as he returns from the banquet. He will probably be back by one o'clock, and he will listen—and listen well—to what I have to say. The guard will be off before we leave, and Ruth will be at the hotel before noon."

"But, Father," said Mark, "how can you do it? The State Department cannot get into this thing officially—cannot interfere at all. It is too delicate. To-morrow morning Ruth will be on her way to the seacoast, as sure as fate. She will be kept hidden there until that warship comes."

"The warship will not come," answered Father Murray. "His Majesty's warships will be engaged very busily for some time to come. My information—information which so far has not leaked out to the public—is that the Big Kingdom is on the verge of war. There will be no warship flying that flag on this side of the water for a long time."

"War!" said Saunders. "But how does that help us?"

Before Father Murray could reply, an automobile passed swiftly.

"That is the Minister," remarked Saunders.

The priest looked up. "We must hurry. Leave everything to me."

Walking hastily, the trio approached the Minister, who had stopped at the curb to give some order to his chauffeur. The ladies of the party had already entered the house, accompanied by the secretary.

It was Father Murray who spoke.

"Pardon us, Your Excellency, for intruding on you at this hour, but it is necessary that we should speak to you at once. With your permission, we will go inside."

The Minister looked disturbed.

"Surely you know the hopelessness of it? I must warn you that you can secure nothing through violence. My guard would not hesitate to take forcible measures."

"There is no need to worry about that, Your Excellency," replied the priest. "No need at all. We shall not resort to violence. It will not be necessary. But the matter is important, and we must speak to you at once."

The words were spoken sharply. His Excellency hesitated for a moment longer, then threw out his hand and motioned them toward the house.

"Very well, gentlemen. Come."

The unwelcome guests were shown into the drawing-room and the lights switched on. His Excellency put his hat aside and turned to face his callers.

"It is already late, gentlemen, and I will ask you to be as brief as possible. What is it you wish?"

"We shall not detain you any longer than is absolutely necessary," said Father Murray. "Yesterday I received a visit from your secretary, who informed me that the probabilities were so strong that it was my niece who had been killed in the railroad accident that you would be obliged to decide against my claims for the present."

"That is exactly the case," replied His Excellency. "Permit me to say, Reverend Sir, that I can do nothing else. The Grand Duke is dead, and His Majesty has taken charge of the matter. The Grand Duchess is a ruler herself, at

the present time. It is true she is only a foolish girl, who ran away to marry a nonentity—but affairs of state are greater than affairs of the heart. At all risks she must return to Ecknor. I must be certain of her identity before I can make another move. I appreciate the delicacy of the situation. I know that I have practically kidnaped the girl. But I am certain your State Department will want no trouble about it, nor will mine. If you are right, and the girl is your niece, you have no cause to fear for her; she will be returned to this country at once. If, on the contrary, she is the Grand Duchess, there is no reason why you should seek to have her taken away from us."

"Her own wishes—" began Saunders.

"Pardon me, sir. Her own wishes have nothing to do with the matter. I confess that it is embarrassing that she does not want to go, but it is more embarrassing that she ever went away. She must return to her country, wishes or no wishes. I will consider nothing else. I have my orders, and I shall obey them." The Minister turned toward the door, evidently desirous that his visitors should leave. "I will ask you to excuse me now, gentlemen."

But matters had not been arranged to Father Murray's satisfaction. He made no move to go, and looked straight into His Excellency's face as he spoke.

"Your Excellency has of course been informed of the critical condition of affairs in Europe?"

"I do not understand."

Though somewhat surprised, the priest could not doubt the sincerity of the speaker. He hesitated but a moment, then spoke quietly.

"Before the conversation proceeds farther, may I suggest that it might be well for Your Excellency to see if there are any late dispatches from your home government?" Noticing the Minister's haughty astonishment, he added, "I have come from the Department of State."

The Minister was startled, and turned to leave the room. "Pardon me a moment, gentlemen."

Mark turned to the priest. "What have you up your sleeve, Father?"

Father Murray only smiled. "I think, Mark," he said, "that you are certainly improving in the American brand of English. 'Up your sleeve' is decidedly good United States. You will want to stay with us—even though you are a Baron."

Mark could get no more out of the priest.

In a few minutes His Excellency returned, his face showing signs of extreme annoyance.

"I thank you, Reverend Sir," he said courteously. "I cannot understand why my dispatches were not delivered to me at the banquet. I can only express my regret." Father Murray bowed, and the Minister went on:

"The lady is probably asleep now, but I think I may safely promise that in a few hours she will be with you. It is more than probable that I shall relinquish all claims upon her."

Father Murray smiled and picked up his hat which was lying on a table.

"We may expect the lady before noon?"

"Yes."

"I thank Your Excellency. Permit us to bid you good morning."

With a courteous bow, Father Murray took his leave, followed by Mark and Saunders. The last they saw of His Excellency was the top of his head as he bowed them out.

Father Murray chuckled all the way back to the hotel—and kept his counsel. When they arrived at his bedroom door, Mark stopped him.

"Great Heavens, Father! You're not going to leave us in the dark like this?"

"'In the dark' is *very* good United States, Mark."

"But what does it mean? What card did you play?"

Father Murray's hand was on the doorknob, his eyes dancing with merriment.

"They say, Mark, that a royal flush beats everything. Well, I played that."

Mark tried to catch him but, with a low chuckle, he slipped into the room and closed the door.

CHAPTER XX

THE "DUCHESS" ABDICATES

A few hours later—about ten o'clock—an automobile stopped in front of the New Willard Hotel, and the Minister and his secretary alighted. The visitors were shown at once into Father Murray's room where Mark, Saunders and the priest waited. His Excellency took the chair offered him and, with some hesitation in his choice, of words, opened the conversation.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I first wish to congratulate you on your persistence. That persistence led me to think that there was some justice in your case. You can scarcely blame me, however, for not granting your wish immediately, especially since, as my secretary informed you, the effects of the dead lady seemed to indicate that it was Miss Atheson who had been killed. I find that I was mistaken. It was the Grand Duchess. There is absolutely no question about that now. As soon as you are ready to receive Miss Atheson, she shall leave the Ministry where, as you understand, she has been an honored guest."

The impetuous Saunders broke out: "Your Excellency means an honored prisoner."

But Father Murray stepped into the breach.

"Not at all, Saunders," he said, "not at all." Then he turned to the Minister. "Miss Atheson has been an honored guest at the Ministry. That is perfectly understood, Your Excellency, *perfectly* understood."

The Minister bowed. "I thank you, Reverend Sir. I am glad you do understand. Miss Atheson was a friend of the Grand Duchess Carlotta. She had known her in Europe. Why should she not have been a guest at the Ministry of the nation which exercises a protectorate over the domains of her late Royal Highness? I should wish to have that known to the public. This afternoon we shall give to the press the sad story of the visit to America of Her Royal Highness, under strict incognito. Her friend, Miss Atheson, was of course awaiting the arrival of the Grand Duchess, having come down in advance. Miss

Atheson will, I am sure, be kind enough, and considerate enough of the memory of Her Highness, not to deny any of these statements."

"I am sure, Your Excellency," said the priest, "that Miss Atheson will keep strict silence as to the past. She would not wish to embarrass the situation nor in any way stain the memory of her dead friend. Of that you may rest assured."

"I beg your pardon," said His Excellency, "but—I trust I may rely upon the discretion of these gentlemen?"

Mark and Saunders bowed their assurance.

"Certainly."

"Your Excellency may rely on our discretion."

"It is needless for me to say," continued the Minister, "that the situation is most embarrassing. But there is no reason why the Grand Duchess should not have visited her friend—no reason why she should not have come to Washington on her way back to her own country. She would naturally wish to avoid publicity and, of course, the Ministry was constantly in touch with her moves. All this is a reasonable explanation of what has occurred. As to the body's having lain neglected in the Baltimore morgue for some hours, something must be assumed by the telegraph company. The body has already been embalmed, and arrangements have been made for its shipment to Europe. I shall myself go to Baltimore this afternoon. Do you, Reverend Sir, wish it known that the friend of the Grand Duchess is your niece?"

"Yes; but I wish it put to the world in the proper form. Since Your Excellency is preparing copy for the papers, may I ask if you will permit me to revise it?"

"That I shall be glad to do," said the Minister, his face all smiles.

As His Excellency was about to depart, Saunders stopped him.

"One word, Your Excellency. Baron Griffin and myself were witnesses to a very sad occurrence in Sihasset—"

The Minister turned hurriedly.

"You are mistaken, my friend," he said, significantly. "You are mistaken. You saw nothing—remember that. It will be better for all concerned. Your State Department would not thank you for making embarrassing statements. Things have come out happily for you, if not for the unfortunate Duchess. Yet, after all, perhaps the best thing that could have happened for her was what you believed—until you were corrected—happened in Sihasset. Baron Griffin will tell you that I speak the truth when I say that the next best thing was her own death."

Mark inclined his head, for he had heard something of the reputation of Luigi del Farno, when he was in Florence.

And then for the moment the Minister was forgotten in the man, and tears glistened in His Excellency's eyes.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I never saw Her Royal Highness. But I have heard a great deal of her, and I have followed her career. She was not born to be a Duchess. She had all my sympathy, for she was just a woman—beautiful, sentimental, loving. She was just the kind to do the rash things which courts will not tolerate. She was the kind to follow her own heart and not the dictates of kings. She was unhappy at court, and that unhappiness was increased when she fell in love with the Italian. She was the kind who would love until death—and then beyond the grave. She was one who would make any sacrifice to her devotion. But she fought against the solid rock of princely customs and prejudices, and there was nothing for her but to break upon it. Her love ruined that young officer. He was doomed from the moment she went away and he followed her. No earthly power could have saved him. But—believe me—she is better dead than married to him. We had his life investigated. He has had his just deserts. The Grand Duchess was not the first. It is well that she was the last, poor girl. The most merciful thing that could have happened to a woman of her character was the thing that did happen. She never knew of his fate. She died thinking that she should meet him again—that she had successfully broken down all barriers—that she and her lover could live their lives in peace, here in America. She never learned that there could be no happiness for her with a man like him. Let them rest in their graves—for graves are better than courts. As Minister I could not say these things; but I trust you, gentlemen, and I am talking to you now as a man who has known love himself. Good-bye."

The little man stiffened up and became the Minister again.

"When, gentlemen, will you be ready to receive Mademoiselle Atheson?"

Father Murray bowed. "Whenever Your Excellency is pleased to send her."

"Perhaps, Reverend Sir, you will honor me by your presence at luncheon?" As Father Murray hesitated, he added, "It will be better that you should accompany Mademoiselle Atheson to the hotel. Besides," and he smiled good-humoredly, "we can get together and revise those statements properly."

Father Murray bowed his acceptance and His Excellency took his leave. "Luncheon is at one," he remarked, as he left the room. "I should be pleased if you would come a little early. I know you will desire to talk with Mademoiselle."

Shortly after twelve Father Murray was admitted to the Ministry, where Ruth greeted him affectionately.

"How do you like being a Grand Duchess, Ruth?"

She made a little moue. "I don't like it at all. I'm abdicating to-day."

He laughed, and they chatted together for some time, being finally joined by His Excellency's daughters, who stayed with them until luncheon was served. The meal proved to be a merry one, and after it was over the two gentlemen withdrew to the library, followed by Wratslav. Then, accompanied by Ruth, Father Murray returned to the hotel—in a long, low-built limousine.

The Bishop hurriedly pushed aside his almost untouched breakfast and hastened to his study. The time was short, and there was much to be done. His secretary, always prompt, handed him the morning papers, but the Bishop pushed them aside.

"No, I haven't time now. Put them in my grip."

The secretary started to speak, but the Bishop was already giving his instructions, and his subordinate waited, perforce, for a more opportune time—which never came.

On the train, the Bishop's breviary first claimed his attention. As he paused to rest his eyes, his idle glance was suddenly arrested by the flaring headlines of a

paper across the aisle. Quickly he opened his grip and brought forth his own papers. Ah, here it was—on the first page.

MISS RUTH ATHESON TO WED BARON GRIFFIN
Former Vicar-General Announces
the Engagement of His Niece.

And, in the next column:

GRAND DUCHESS CARLOTTA VICTIM OF WRECK
Ruler of Ecknor Killed While
on Her Way to Washington.

The story was skillfully written. No one had "remembered," or at least influence had been able to suppress unpleasant comment. But for the Bishop the mere juxtaposition of words was enough. In fancy he was back in the Seminary at Rome where he had first met Donald Murray. He saw the tall young Englishman at his desk, in front of him the portrait of a charming child.

"My niece," he had said. "She's a winsome little thing. I miss her sorely."

He recalled, too, how someone had related the romance of Edgar Atheson, who had later become Grand Duke of Ecknor. Donald Murray had been strangely silent, he remembered. And—yes, it was just after that that the picture had disappeared from his desk. "It is best," had been Donald Murray's only comment.

The Bishop remembered now. And he knew why Monsignore had looked so surprised and reproachful when asked to give his "full" confidence regarding Ruth Atheson. He understood, now, the meaning of the quiet, "My Lord, there are some things I cannot discuss even with you."

The Bishop bowed his head. "Blind, blind," he murmured, "to have known so much, to have understood so little. Can you ever forgive me, my friend?"

CHAPTER XXI

THE BECKONING HAND

The autumn tints were full on the trees in Sihasset, but the air was still balmy enough to make the veranda of Father Murray's residence far more pleasant than indoors. The Pastor had returned. Pipe in hand, wearing his comfortable old cassock, and with a smile of ineffable peace on his face, he sat chatting with Saunders. The detective was evidently as pleased as Father Murray. He was leaning on "Old Hickory" and puffing at a cigar, with contentment in every line of his countenance.

"No job I ever did, Father, gave me more satisfaction than this one," he was saying. "It was well worth while, even though I'll have to go out now and look for another one."

"I do not believe, Mr. Saunders," said Father Murray, "that you will have to look for another position. In fact, I do not believe you would care for the same kind of position you had before—would you? I suppose I shall have to let you into a little secret. Mark is not going to stay all the time on his Irish estate. He has bought Killimaga and expects to be here for at least part of each year. I heard him say that he would try to influence you to become his intendent."

"Well, that sounds pretty big, Father. But what does an intendent intend to do? It's a new one on me."

"An intendent, my dear Mr. Saunders," said Father Murray, "is quite a personage on the other side. He is the man who runs the business affairs of a castle. He has charge of all the property. It is quite a good position; better, in fact, than that of a private detective. Then, you see, his care of the servants and continued watchfulness over the property makes detective experience somewhat valuable. If the salary suits you, by all means I would advise you to accept the offer. Besides, you know, Mr. Saunders, we have all gotten to like you very much. Apart from the fact that you are what Mrs. O'Leary would call 'a black Protestant,' I look upon you as one of my own."

Saunders laughed. "'A black Protestant' indeed! A lot of difference that makes with you. Why, you were 'a black Protestant' yourself, Father Murray, and in some ways I believe they only whitewashed you."

"Now, Mr. Saunders," reproved Father Murray, "that is not very complimentary. There is no whitewash or veneer about my Catholicity."

Despite the quizzical good-humor of the priest, there was a touch of seriousness in his voice, and Saunders hastened to explain.

"I didn't mean it quite that way, Father—only it strikes me that there is always a difference between what I call the 'simon-pure Catholic' and the one that wasn't born a Catholic."

"Well, Mr. Wise Man," said the priest, "perhaps you'll explain the difference."

Saunders looked puzzled. "It is a hard thing to explain, Father," he said, and then hesitated; "but I'll try to do it. In the first place—but this doesn't go for you—I think that the convert is more bigoted than the other kind. Now, honestly, don't you?"

Father Murray was amused. "I am glad, Mr. Saunders," he replied, "that you leave me out of it. That is a *real* compliment. Now, let us put it this way: If you had been the possessor of a million dollars from the time of your birth, it would be a matter of course with you, would it not?"

"Certainly."

"But if you should suddenly acquire a million dollars, you would naturally feel very much elated about it. Is that not true?"

"Yes—but what then?"

"That is the way it is with converts to anything. They suddenly acquire what to them is very precious and, like the newly-made millionaire, they are fearful of anything that threatens their wealth. They become enthusiasts about what they have—and I must confess that some of them even become a bit of a nuisance. But it is a good sign. It is a sign of sincerity, and you cannot overlook sincerity. There is too little of it in the world."

"I am mighty glad now," said Saunders, "that you haven't got it."

"What? The sincerity?"

"Oh, Lord, no!—the bigotry. Anyhow, if I stay here, you won't have much trouble with me for, like a certain man I once read about, the church I *don't* go to is the Methodist."

"Then I will have to give you up," said Father Murray. "If the Methodist were the one you actually *did* go to, I might have half a chance to make you a convert; but since you do not go to *any*, I am afraid that my counsels would fall upon stony ground. But you will always be welcome to the rectory, even if you do not bother the church," he added.

"But surely, Father," said Saunders, "you are not going to stay here? Hasn't the Bishop made you his Vicar-General again? And doesn't he want you to go back to the Cathedral?"

"That is true," answered the priest, his face becoming grave. "But I have grown very fond of Sihasset, and the Bishop has kindly given me permission to remain in charge of the parish here."

"I don't quite understand that," said the visitor in an urging way. "I should hate to lose you, Father—for of course I shall stay if the Baron offers me the position, and I'm going to bring the wife and kiddies, too—I like the place, and I like the people—but when I was a common soldier, I wanted to be a sergeant, and when I became sergeant I wanted to be a lieutenant. I suppose if I had gotten the lieutenancy, I should have wanted a captaincy, and then I shouldn't have been satisfied until I had charge of a battalion—and so on up the line. It takes all the ginger out of a man if he has no ambitions. Why shouldn't a priest have them, too?"

"Some of them have," answered Father Murray, "when they are young. But when they 'arrive' they begin to find out the truth of what they were told in the seminary long before—that 'arriving' does not make them any happier. In the Catholic Church, position means trouble and worry, because it means that you become more of a servant yet assume greater responsibilities. If a man can center his ambitions in the next world, it makes him a great deal happier in this. I have had my ambitions—and I have had them realized, too. But I found means to transplant them where they belonged. Having transplanted them, I do not

propose to take them out of good heavenly soil and put them back on the earth again. As they are quite well grown now in the garden of God, I am not going to risk losing them by making a change, if I can help it. I shall stay in Sihasset if I am permitted to do so. Should I be called away, that is a different matter. Please God, when I go out—to quote my friend, Father Daly—I'll go out feet first."

"I suppose you're right, Father," said Saunders, "I suppose you're right. Anyhow, I'm glad that you're going to stay. By the way, now that you've told me one secret, won't you tell me another?"

Father Murray became very cheerful again. "I bet I can guess what you want to know now, Saunders."

"Well, I'll give you one guess," answered the detective.

"You want to know," said Father Murray, "why the Minister gave up so easily."

"I do," replied Saunders. "That's just what I want to know. You must have told the Baron, but you have never told me. I want to know what magic you worked."

"I suppose I shall have to tell you. Being a detective, you have learned to keep your mouth shut. Here is the whole story: As I told you, I had a friend in the State Department. Well, I went to him and, for old times' sake, he tried to help, and did. When I told him my story, he believed me, but he very frankly informed me that the matter was a delicate one and that, officially, he could do nothing. He wasn't entirely ignorant of the young Italian, but he said that would probably have to be 'forgotten.' He pointed out that the body had disappeared, that the man was absolutely unknown here, and that to prove murder would be practically impossible. Still, he agreed that our knowledge of the murder would be a powerful help toward making His Excellency reasonable. He outlined how that game should be played, and before I left he had arranged for someone to meet the Minister at the banquet that night, and delicately suggest that the State Department had had some inquiry regarding the disappearance of a brilliant young Italian officer. Knowing what would happen at the banquet, I was ready to meet the Minister. But it wasn't necessary to rely wholly on that. Late that night—after my return from Brookland—my friend sent for me to come to him at once. I went, and he showed me the translation of a cipher-dispatch which had

just been received from Europe. That dispatch gave information concerning a dangerous situation which might lead to war. It was very long, and dwelt also on the situation in a certain Grand Duchy, the ruler of which had just died. The next in line, a girl, had disappeared. The King was worried. With war almost on his hands, he did not want the girl to take the throne, but rather desired the succession of her uncle, who was a strong soldier and just the man for the emergency. The dispatch left it plainly to be understood that the girl was in America, and that the King would be glad if she remained here permanently—in other words, that she be allowed quietly to disappear. It was a cold-blooded proposition to deprive her of her rights, or to find some means of doing it. Our own military attache at the royal capital secured the information; and, since America had been mentioned, thought it his duty to forward the dispatch to our State Department. As soon as my friend had read it, he sent for me. He put me under a pledge of secrecy until the matter was settled. It has been settled now; but there is no need of the story going any farther than yourself. 'Since the girl has died,' said my friend, 'the wishes of the King may easily be obeyed. The uncle will ascend the throne, and the Duchy will remain an ally of the Kingdom. This information should be in the hands of the Minister now and, instead of trying to prove that the lady is the Grand Duchess, he will probably be only too anxious to be rid of her.' I had all that information," continued Father Murray, "when I went to find you gentlemen and save you from getting into mischief."

"We would have had a glorious time, Father," sighed Saunders, regretfully. Then he leaned back and whistled softly as his mind grasped the full significance of the priest's words. "The detective business, Father," he said energetically, "has many angles, and few of them are right angles; but I think that the number of obtuse and other kind of angles is much larger in diplomacy. But I rather like that Minister," he added. "He isn't heartless."

"No," replied Father Murray, as he contemplatively lighted a cigar. "He was mighty human when he came to see us at the New Willard. Don't you remember how he forgot himself—even had tears in his eyes when he referred to the dead Duchess and the fact that she was better off in her grave than she would have been at court? His wife had taken a genuine liking to Ruth, and the man himself was more than half convinced that she was all she claimed to be, but he wasn't free to release her. He now wants to make reparation—but he wants also to support the idea that Ruth Atheson was only the *friend* of the dead Duchess and, therefore, that the Duchess is really dead. It would be very unfortunate, if, later on, it should prove that he had been deceived. He would find it difficult to

explain matters to His Majesty if a Grand Duchess, supposedly dead, should suddenly prove very much alive and demand possession of a throne already occupied by her successor. So His Excellency wants the lady married as 'Ruth Atheson' with due solemnity and with proper witness. There is method, Mr. Saunders, even in his kindness."

Saunders whistled again. "It beats me, Father," he said. "I own up. They know more than detectives."

At this moment Mark came striding over the lawn.

"Hello, Saunders," he called. "I've been looking for you. Now that I've got you, I might as well have it out and be done with it. Ruth wants you to stay here. She wants to make you one of us. We are going to Ireland for six months, and then we're coming back to live here part of each year. We want you to take charge of Killimaga. I've bought it. A good salary—no quarreling or dickering about it. What do you say?"

"This is certainly a surprise," said Saunders, winking at the Padre. "Have you room for an extra family?"

"You're married?"

"Very much so."

"The bigger the family the better. But," he added, as an afterthought, "I'll have to tell Ruth, or she'll be trying to marry you off. You'll come, then?"

"Yes," said Saunders, "I guess I'll take you up on that."

Mark shook hands with him. "Done. You're a good old chap. I thought you would stay."

Then, turning to Father Murray, Mark spoke more seriously. "Don't you think, Father, that it is almost time to meet the Bishop? He is coming on the next train, you know." He paused and seemed momentarily embarrassed. Then he straightened up and frankly voiced his thought. "Before he comes, will you not step into the church with me? I have a lot of things to straighten out."

The priest stood up and put his hand on Mark's shoulder. "Do you mean that,

my boy?"

"I do," replied Mark. "I told you in Washington that I never passed an open church door that my mind did not conjure up a beckoning hand behind it, and that I knew that some day I should see my mother's face behind the hand. I have seen the face. It was imagination, perhaps—in fact, I know it must have been—but it was mother's face—and I am coming home."

The last words were spoken softly, reverently, and together the priest and the penitent entered the church.

CHAPTER XXII

RUTH'S CONFESSION

Late that afternoon Mark sat alone in the great library at Killimaga, his head thrown back, his hands grasping the top of his chair. His thoughts were of the future, and he did not hear the light footsteps behind him. Then—two soft arms stole lightly around his neck, and Ruth's beautiful head was bowed until her lips touched his forehead. It was a kiss of benediction, speaking of things too holy for words.

He covered her hands with his own. "Ruth." The tones breathed a world of love.

"I am so happy," she murmured.

He started to rise, but one small hand, escaping from his grasp, rested on his head and held him firmly.

"I have a great deal to tell you, Mark. But first I want you to know how happy I am that you have come back to Mother Church. I have been praying so hard, Mark, and I should have been miserable had you refused to return. Our union would never have been perfect without full harmony of thought, and we might have drifted apart. But I am happy now." Lightly her fingers stroked his brow and twined among his curls.

He arose and, clasping her hands in both his own, he gazed down into her eyes.

"And I too am happy, dear one. You have brought me two blessings: I have found not only love, but peace at last after many years." Tenderly he raised her hands to his lips. "But come, dear; it is too glorious a day to remain in the house. Shall we go outside?"

It was but a moment till she returned ready for a walk, and together they sauntered toward the bluff, where she seated herself on a great rock. Sitting at her feet, his head resting against the rock, his hand raised to clasp hers, he was

content. For a while they sat in silence, gazing far out over the sea into the glory of the sunset. At last she loosed her hand from his grasp and rested it lightly on his head.

"Mark, dear, you know that there are to be no secrets between us two now, don't you?"

He looked up and answered promptly. "Not one—not a single one, for all the days of the future, my darling. But," he added, "I have none that are unrevealed."

"I am not so fortunate, dear. I have a great one, and now I am going to tell it all to you."

"But—"

"No, let me do all the talking until you hear it to the end, and let me tell it in my own way."

"All right," and he pressed her hand lovingly.

"I never knew my father, Mark," she went on, "and yet I heard of his death only a short time ago—in Washington. His name was not 'Atheson.' He was a very great personage, no less than the Grand Duke of Ecknor, Prince Etkar."

Mark started, but Ruth put up her hand. "You promised. Let me go on."

"My mother married my father, who then called himself Edgar Atheson, in London. He was the younger son of the then reigning Grand Duke and had left home for political reasons, expecting never to return. But his father and his elder brother were both killed by a bomb a few days after his marriage to my mother. He returned to Ecknor, and she went with him. In six months he had married, legally but not legitimately, a princess of the protecting kingdom. Under the laws of the kingdom the princess was his legal mate, the Grand Duchess of Ecknor, but my mother was his wife before God and the Church. The Grand Duke gave her a large fortune, and she had a beautiful home near the palace. Everyone knew and pitied her, but they respected her. The Grand Duke soon ceased to care for his morganatic wife, but he never deserted her. Then, a year after the court marriage, I was born. It was given out that the Grand Duchess had also given birth to a daughter, Carlotta."

Mark patted her hand, but kept his promise of silence. Ruth went on.

"After that, the Grand Duke seemed to lose all interest in his English wife. My mother was very unhappy and wanted to return to England. She finally escaped, with me, in a closed carriage. My uncle met us as we crossed the frontier, and it was only then that mother understood why her escape had been so easy—the Grand Duke had wanted her away. She saw England only to die heart-broken, for she had loved her husband devotedly. My uncle kept me with him until he became a Catholic and went to Rome to study. Then I was sent to school in Europe. Later I came to America. But I had many friends in Europe and visited them frequently. It was on one of these visits that I met Carlotta. She knew, and we became fast friends, as well as sisters."

"But not full sisters," Mark said, thinking that the story was over.

"Wait," cautioned Ruth. "There is more. Mother died thinking I was her only child. But two girls were born to mother, and a dead child to the Grand Duchess. Mother never saw one of her babies. She never knew. And it was years before the Grand Duchess learned that her child had died. Carlotta was my full sister. She was stolen to replace the dead child. Now do you see?"

"But how did you come to know all this?" asked Mark.

"Carlotta told me. The Grand Duchess never seemed to care for Carlotta; Carlotta's old nurse resented this and one day, after a worse storm than usual, told Carlotta that the Duchess was not her mother. There was a terrible scene in the palace. The old nurse was all but banished, but Carlotta saved her. She was sworn to secrecy by the Grand Duke. The Duchess died later as a result of the affair—of apoplexy. Then the nurse disappeared, no one knew how or where, but not before she had told Carlotta all about the twins that were born to the Grand Duke's English wife. Carlotta had the secret and ruled her father with it. She was allowed her own way, and it was not always a good way. Her last escapade was the one you already know. Poor girl, she was as good as a court would let her be; and here in Sihasset she repented. But she believed in her lover, which I never did. I knew his reputation, but she would not listen to a word against him. Now you have the whole story."

"And you," Mark managed to say, "you are the real Grand Duchess now. What a misfortune!"

"No," she replied, "I could never make such a claim; for my mother's marriage was never admitted by the court as a royal marriage. It was considered morganatic. Her children were legitimate, but could never succeed to the throne."

"But, even so," insisted Mark, "you are the Grand Duchess."

Ruth put her hand gently over his mouth. "I am to be more than a grand duchess, dear. I am to be your wife—to-morrow."

The sun was below the horizon now. For a while longer they watched its banners of flaming red and yellow flung across the sky. Then, hand in hand, they retraced their steps to Killimaga, where Mark left her with a whispered, "Sweet dreams, dear," and went his way toward the rectory.

As he sauntered aimlessly along, his thoughts were all of her. Never once had she lectured him on religious matters, yet she was splendidly sincere, and her faith of the greatest. And she had been praying for him all the time! Yet what need of speech? Her very self, her every action, her nice sense of right, were greater than any sermon he had ever heard from mortal lips. She was a woman whom any man might well love—and honor.

Reluctantly Mark at last sought the rectory, where the Bishop and Monsignore awaited him. And almost desperately he sought to evade Ann, whose dinner had been kept waiting. Seeing the attempt was vain, he threw up his hands.

"Both hands up, Ann. I claim the protection of the Bishop."

And Ann, not displeased, went on her way.

CHAPTER XXIII

CHARRED WOOD

All Sihasset was in the little church next morning. Mrs. O'Leary, grand even in her widow's weeds, had a front seat before St. Joseph's altar, where she could see everything, and crowded into the pew with her were all the little O'Leary's. The old lady had had some misgivings about attending a wedding so soon after her husband's death; but the misgivings were finally banished for—as she confided to the eldest of her grandchildren—"Sure, 'tis Miss Ruth who is gettin' married, and himself would want me there."

So Mrs. O'Leary arrived two hours ahead of time and secured her point of vantage. Under more ordinary circumstances she would have had a hard time to quiet the energetic youngsters, but now they had enough to occupy their minds, for when had they seen such gorgeous flowers, such wonderful ferns? The sanctuary was massed with them, the little altar standing out in vivid relief against their greenness. And then there was that wonderful strip of white canvas down the center aisle, that white strip that was so tempting to little feet, but which must not be stepped upon. And what were those kneeling benches for—the two draped in white—one on each side of the open gateway, just inside the communion railing? And over on the left was a platform bearing a great chair, and over it hung a canopy—only the children didn't call it so—of purple.

They had never seen the sanctuary look like this before! And then their attention was attracted by the strains of the new organ, hurriedly bought for the occasion. The choir from the city was practising before the service. Truly, the little O'Learys were glad that "Grandma" had ignored their cries and had insisted on coming early. And what would Miss Wilson say at not being permitted to play for the wedding? That thought alone was enough to keep the little minds busy.

Outside, Main Street was decorated with flags; and the people, keenly expectant, were watching for His Excellency. Never before had they known the Minister of a Kingdom to step within the boundaries of Sihasset. Bishops had been seen there before, but Ministers were new, and international weddings had

never come nearer than the great metropolis. Barons, too, were scarce, and who loves a baron—provided he is not an American "baron"—any more than the simon-pure Yankee? So the decorations were up by order of the selectmen, and the merchants vied with one another in making their own ornamentations as gorgeous as possible. And the people—with the sole exception of the O'Learys—waited outside, each anxious to catch the first glimpse of the great man who to-day was to honor them by his presence.

His Excellency arrived at last—in a low, swift-running automobile, the chauffeur of which seemed to know the road very well, and seemed also to be acquainted with every turn in the village. There was no one to notice that, when he passed the gates of Killimaga, he laughed quietly.

At Killimaga the gardens had never looked lovelier. Autumn was kind and contributed almost a summer sun.

Father Murray tore himself away from his guests at the rectory—and who should those guests be but the old friends who had for so long neglected him—to run up before the ceremony to see Ruth. She was already arrayed in her bridal finery, but she rushed out to meet him when she heard that he had arrived.

Holding her off at arm's length, he looked at her and said, "I think, dearie, that I am going to die very soon."

"Die! Why, you old love, how could you get that notion into your head?"

"Because," he answered, "I am so very, very happy—too happy. I have had a great deal more, dear, than I was ever entitled to in this life. When I sent you away and went to Rome, I feared I had given you up forever; and, behold, here I am, with the silver hairs coming—a priest with all the consolations that a priest can have, and yet I have a daughter, too." And smiling in his own winning way, he added, "And such a daughter!—even if she is really only a niece."

Ruth laughed softly and drew his arm around her as she laid hers lightly on his shoulder.

"I am afraid," she said, "that the daughter never deserved the kind of a daddy she has had—the only one she ever knew. If Carlotta—"

But Father Murray interrupted hastily as he observed the touch of sorrow in

her voice.

"Do not think of her to-day, my dear," he said. "Put her out of your mind. You have prayed for her, and so have I. It is all we can do, and we can always pray. Forget her until to-morrow and then—never forget."

Seeing that the sad look had not been entirely chased away, he added, cheerfully:

"Now, before I go back to the Bishop and my friends, I want to ask you one serious question."

Ruth looked up with sudden interest. "As many as you like."

He took her hands in his and looked keenly into her face. "It was always a mystery to me," he said, "how you and Mark fell in love with each other so promptly. He saw you coming out of the tree-door, then he met you once or twice, and after that he lost his head; and you—minx!—you lost yours. I have often heard of love at first sight, but this is the only example I have ever seen of it. Explain, please, for the ways of youth are strange, and even yet—old as I am—I have not learned to understand them."

"Why," she answered, "I had met him long before. Don't you remember that day in London when you said good-bye to your congregation? Have you forgotten that Ruth was there?" she asked archly, half reproachfully.

Father Murray's eyes lit up. "You remembered, then! Yes, yes. He told me of the little girl. And you really remembered?"

He was standing in front of her now, holding her at arm's length and looking straight at her glowing face.

"I remembered. I knew that day that you were suffering, and though I was only eight years old, I cried for you while I was sitting all alone in the big pew. He passed me, and smiled. When he came out again, he saw that I was still crying. I asked him about you, and he said something that went straight to my little girl's heart: he praised you. To soothe me, he took me in his arms and—well," she added blushing, "he kissed me. I fell in love with that big man right there; I never lost the memory of him or that kiss. When I saw him here at Killimaga, and when he told me what I wanted so badly to hear, I knew he was

worth waiting for. If you want to know more about the ways of youth, daddy dear," she continued saucily, "only know that I would have waited a century—if I could have lived so long, and if I had had to wait."

"Tell me, Ruth, what shall I give you? I alone have sent nothing," he said. "'Ask and you shall receive,' you know. What is to be my poor offering for the wedding feast?"

"Will you promise beforehand to grant it?"

"If I can, dear, I will grant it."

"Goody!" she cried, in almost childish glee. Then she stepped lightly away, her hands behind her, and, like a mischievous child, she leaned slightly forward as she spoke. "Here it is: Wear your purple to-day—I like it."

"But, child, I don't want—"

One white hand was raised in protest, and he seemed once more to be in London, a tiny figure before him, the blue eyes open wide and the graceful head nodding emphasis to each word:

"You—*promised*—uncle."

Even so the child had spoken. Monsignore was learning more of the ways of youth. He sighed.

"All right," he granted, "I will wear the purple."

"Thank you—and God bless you, Monsignore."

"And God bless you, my child." Monsignore lifted his hand in blessing, then hurried to the church to prepare for the Mass.

The church was already crowded as he stepped from the sanctuary, clad in rich white vestments—a present from Mark. Leaning on the arm of the minister, Ruth came slowly up the aisle, her filmy lace veil flowing softly around her and far down over the delicate satin of her sweeping train. As they neared the altar where Monsignore stood waiting, her maids, friends who had come hurriedly from England, stepped aside and Mark took his stand at her right. Her small

hand trembled in his as the words of the nuptial service were pronounced, but her eyes spoke volumes of love and trust. Then each sought a prie-dieu and knelt to pray, while the service went on and from the choir rang the beautiful tones of the *Messe Solennelle*. The voices softened with the *Agnus Dei*, then faded into silence. Together the bride and groom approached the linen cloth held by the surpliced altar boys, and together they received the greatest of sacraments, then returned to their prie-dieux.

The service over, Mark arose and joined his wife. Slowly the bridal party went down the aisle and out to the waiting car which bore them swiftly to Killimaga. When the time came to part, Monsignore and his guests accompanied Baron Griffin and his bride to the train, then once more sought the quiet of the ivy-clad rectory.

But even the most pleasant of days must end. The happy group broke up as the guests departed, and at last Monsignore sat alone before the blazing fire which Ann had builded in the study, for the chill of the autumn evening was in the air.

Mark and Ruth by this time were in Boston making ready to sail on the morrow. Ann had suggested a "cup of tay because you're tired, Monsignore," but Monsignore wanted to be alone with his thoughts and would have none of it. He wondered why he was not lonely, for he had dreaded the hours to follow his good-bye to Mark and Ruth. But lonely he was not, for he was happy. It seemed to him as if some mysterious and forbidding gates had been suddenly flung open, and a flood of happiness loosed upon him. His last guest of the day had been the Bishop, who had let all go before him that for an hour he might be alone with the friend who once had had all his love and all his trust. Now both love and trust were again his friend's, and the Bishop's pleasure was even greater than the priest's.

"I would gladly give you both cross and crozier if I could, my friend," His Lordship had said.

"I will gladly take what I can of your cross, my dear Bishop," Father Murray had answered, very simply; "but I am happier to see the crozier in more worthy hands. God has been good to me. I am satisfied."

"You will come to the cathedral as of old?" Though voiced as a request, the

words were a command.

"Let me stay here, I beg of you," pleaded the priest. "I am no longer young —"

"Age is not counted by years."

"I love it here and—"

But the Bishop raised his hand, and the priest was silent.

"You may stay for the present. That much I grant you."

But Monsignore's heart was too full for long silence, his fears too great. He spoke hurriedly, pleadingly.

"Will you not protect me?"

"I may not be able to protect you."

"I am tired, my dear Bishop—tired, but contented. Here is rest, and peace. And when *they* come back, you know I want to be near them. Let me stay."

"Yes, I know," said the Bishop, and his voice forbade further plea. "You may stay—for the present."

Then the Bishop, too, had left; and now Monsignore was alone. He sat in his great armchair and watched the flames of the fire dancing and playing before him. He marveled at his pleasure in them, as he marveled at his pleasure now in the little things that were for the future to be the great things for him. Before his vision rose the cathedral he had builded, with its twin towers piercing the sky; but somehow the new organ of the little church gave him greater pleasure. "The people were so happy about having it," he had that day explained to Father Darcy. His wonderful seminary on the heights had once seemed the greatest thing in the world to him, but now it was less than the marble altars Mark had ordered for the little church only yesterday. He remembered the crowds that had hung upon his eloquence in the city, but now he knew that his very soul was mirrored in the simple discourses to his poor in Sihasset.

"I couldn't go back," he said to the burning log, "I couldn't be great again

when I know how much true happiness there is in being little."

Then he lifted his eyes to where, from above the fireplace, there smiled down at him the benign face of Pius the Tenth. "Poor Pope," he said. "He has to be great, but this is what he would love. He never could get away from it quite. Doesn't he preach to the people yet, so as to feel the happiness of the pastor, and thus forget for an hour the fears and trials of the ruler?"

The fire was dying, but he did not stoop to replenish it. His thoughts were too holy and comforting to be broken in upon. But they were broken by Ann's knock.

"That McCarthy is sick ag'in," she said. "'Tis a nice time for the likes of him to be botherin' yer Riverence. Will I tell them ye'll go in the mornin'?"

"No, Ann, tell them I'll go now."

"Can't ye have wan night in peace?"

"McCarthy *is* peace, Ann. You don't understand."

No, Ann didn't understand. She only saw more labor. She didn't understand that it was only this that the priest needed to crown the glory of his day.

So Father Murray took his coat and hat and, with a light step, went out—a father going to the son who needed him.

He was not a bit tired when he came back to the blazing logs; but now he was perturbed, borne down by a prescience of coming change. From one point to another he walked—slowly, uneasily, pausing now and then. Finally he stood by his desk. Above it hung a large crucifix. His lips moved in prayer as he gazed on the crucified Christ. Then idly he picked up a book. It fell open in his hand, and he gazed thoughtfully at the oft-scanned page. How many times had he pondered those two lines,

> "I fear to love thee, sweet, because
> Love's the ambassador of loss."

Thus read the priest who felt that peace was no longer possible. For a little while, perhaps—but not for long. The call would come again, and he would have to answer. He read once more, changing one word as he spoke the lines softly to himself,

> "I fear to love thee, 'peace,' because Love's the ambassador of loss."

Yet, even in his vague unrest, this prelate who through humility had found the greater love, recalled his own words to Mark Griffin: "No one has lost what he sincerely seeks to find." Was not the past merely a preparation for the future? Peace might be found in any kind of duty. He looked up into the face of the sculptured Christ, and a swiftly-receding wave of agony swept across his mobile features, while his hand clenched tightly. "A soldier of the Cross," he murmured, and the hand was raised in quick salute. "Thy will be done." It was his final renunciation of self.

Sinking into the chair before the desk, he sat there with bowed head. At last he arose and, the book still in his hand, went back to his chair by the fire. As he sat looking into the flames, his old dreams of greater works rose up before him —those things that had been quite forgotten in his days of sorrow. They were coming back to life, and he began to be half afraid of these, his dream children. Already they seemed too real.

Ann, all unconscious of his presence, opened the door; she paused, hesitatingly silent.

"Well, Ann?" The voice was gentle, resigned.

"A telegram, Father."

He took the envelope which somehow reminded him of the yellow flames of his fire and seemed reaching out to grasp him. With a murmured prayer he tore it open. It was a message from the Bishop. The words were few, but only too easily understood by the priest who sought obscurity:

"Forgive me, my friend. I had not the heart to tell you the truth. I need you now, and then, perhaps, those greater than I. You may stay but a very little while. Come to me immediately after Christmas."

The flame-colored message went to its kind amid the great logs of the fireplace. Father Murray picked up his book again, turned its pages, and read softly to himself:

"Ah! is Thy love indeed
A weed, albeit an amaranthine weed,
Suffering no flowers except its own to mount?
  Ah! must—
  Designer Infinite—
Ah! must Thou char the wood ere Thou canst limn with it?"

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