Seven Miles to Arden

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SEVEN MILES TO ARDEN

BY

RUTH SAWYER

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The Primrose Ring

ILLUSTRATED

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SEVEN MILES TO ARDEN

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illustration1

(See page 220)

“Where twin oaks rustle in the wind
There waits a lad for Rosalind”

TO

HIMSELF

It leads away, at the ring o’ day,
On to the beckoning hills;
And the throstles sing by the holy spring
Which the Blessed Virgin fills.

White is the road and light is the load,
For the burden we bear together.
Our feet beat time on the upward climb
That ends in the purpling heather.

There is spring in the air and everywhere
The throb of a life new-born,
In mating thrush and blossoming brush,
In the hush o’ the glowing morn.

Our hearts bound free as the open sea;
Where now is our dole o’ sorrow?
The winds have swept the tears we’ve wept—
And promise a braver morrow.

But this I pray as we go our way:
To find the Hills o' Heather,
And, at hush o' night, in peace to light
Our roadside fire together.

CONTENTS

SEVEN MILES TO ARDEN

THE WAY OF IT

Patsy O'Connell sat on the edge of her cot in the women's free ward of the City Hospital. She was pulling on a vagabond pair of gloves while she mentally gathered up a somewhat doubtful, ragged lot of prospects and stood them in a row before her for contemplation, comparison, and a final choice. They strongly resembled the contents of her steamer trunk, held at a respectable boarding-house in University Square by a certain Miss Gibb for unpaid board, for these were made up of a jumble of priceless and worthless belongings, unmarketable because of their extremes.

She had time a-plenty for contemplation; the staff wished to see her before she left, and the staff at that moment was consulting at the other end of the hospital.

Properly speaking, Patsy was Patricia O'Connell, but no one had ever been known to refer to her in that cold-blooded manner, save on the programs of the Irish National Plays—and in the City Hospital's register. What the City Hospital knew of Patsy was precisely what the American public and press knew, what the National Players knew, what the world at large knew—precisely what Patricia O'Connell had chosen to tell—nothing more, nothing less. They had accepted her on her own scanty terms and believed in her implicitly. There was one thing undeniably true about her—her reality. Having established this fact beyond a doubt, it was a simple matter to like her and trust her.

No one had ever thought it necessary to question Patsy about her nationality; it was too obvious. Concerning her past and her family she answered every one alike: "Sure, I was born without either. I was found by accident, just, one morning hanging on to the thorn of a Killarney rose-bush that happened to be growing by the Brittany coast. They say I was found by the Physician to the King, who was traveling past, and that's how it comes I can speak French and King's English equally pure; although I'm not denying I prefer them both with a bit of brogue." She always thought in Irish—straight, Donegal Irish—with a dropping of final g's, a bur to the r's, and a "ye" for a "you." Invariably this was her manner of speech with those she loved, or toward whom she felt the kinship of sympathetic understanding.

To those who pushed their inquisitiveness about ancestry to the breaking-point

Patsy blinked a pair of steely-blue eyes while she wrinkled her forehead into a speculative frown: “Faith! I can hearken back to Adam the same as yourselves; but if it’s some one more modern you’re asking for—there’s that rascal, Dan O’Connell. He’s too long dead to deny any claim I might put on him, so devil a word will I be saying. Only—if ye should find by chance, any time, that I’d rather fight with my wits than my fists, ye can lay that to Dan’s door; along with the stubbornness of a tinker’s ass.”

People had been known to pry into her religion; and on these Patsy smiled indulgently as one does sometimes on overcurious children. “Sure, I believe in every one—and as for a church, there’s not a place that goes by the name—synagogue, meeting-house, or cathedral—that I can’t be finding a wee bit of God waiting inside for me. But I’ll own to it, honestly, that when I’m out seeking Him, I find Him easiest on some hilltop, with the wind blowing hard from the sea and never a human soul in sight.”

This was approximately all the world and the press knew of Patsy O’Connell, barring the fact that she was neighboring in the twenties, was fresh, unspoiled, and charming, and that she had played the ingénue parts with the National Players, revealing an art that promised a good future, should luck bring the chance. Unfortunately this chance was not numbered among the prospects Patsy reviewed from the edge of her hospital cot that day.

The interest of the press and the public approval of the National Irish Players had not proved sufficient to propitiate that iron-hearted monster, Financial Success. The company went into bankruptcy before they had played half their bookings. Their final curtain went down on a bit of serio-comic drama staged, impromptu, on a North River dock, with barely enough cash in hand to pay the company’s home passage. On this occasion Patsy had missed her cue for the first time. She had been left in the wings, so to speak; and that night she filled the only vacant bed in the women’s free ward of the City Hospital.

It was pneumonia. Patsy had tossed about and moaned with the racking pain of it, raving deliriously through her score or more of rôles. She had gone dancing off with the Faery Child to the Land of Heart’s Desire; she had sat beside the bier in “The Riders to the Sea”; she had laughed through “The Full o’ Moon,” and played the Fool while the Wise Man died. The nurses and doctors had listened with open-eyed wonder and secret enjoyment; she had allowed them to peep into a new world too full of charm and lure to be denied; and then of a sudden she had settled down to a silent, grim tussle with the “Gray Brother.”

This was all weeks past. It was early June now; the theatrical season was closed for two months, with no prospects in the booking agencies until August. In the mean time she had eight dollars, seventy-six cents, and a crooked sixpence as available collateral; and an unpaid board bill.

Patsy felt sorry for Miss Gibb, but she felt no shame. Boarding-house keepers, dressmakers, bootmakers, and the like must take the risk along with the players themselves in the matter of getting paid for their services. If the public—who paid two dollars a seat for a performance—failed to appear, and box-office receipts failed to margin their salaries, it was their misfortune, not their fault; and others had to suffer along with them. But these debts of circumstance never troubled Patsy. She paid them when she could, and when she could not—there was always her trunk.

The City Hospital happened to know the extent of Patsy's property; it is their business to find out these little private matters concerning their free patients. They had also drawn certain conclusions from the facts that no one had come to see Patsy and that no communications had reached her from anywhere. It looked to them as if Patsy were down and out, to state it baldly. Now the Patsys that come to free wards of city hospitals are very rare; and the superintendent and staff and nurses were interested beyond the usual limits set by their time and work and the professional hardening of their cardiac region.

"She's not to leave here until we find out just who she's got to look after her until she gets on her feet again, understand"—and the old doctor tapped the palm of his left hand with his right forefinger, a sign of important emphasis.

Therefore the day nurse had gone to summon the staff while Patsy still sat obediently on the edge of her cot, pulling on her vagabond gloves, reviewing her prospects, and waiting.

"My! but we'll miss you!" came the voice from the woman in the next bed, who had been watching her regretfully for some time.

"It's my noise ye'll be missing." And Patsy smiled back at her a winning, comrade sort of smile.

"You kind o' got us all acquainted with one another and thinkin' about somethin' else but pains and troubles. It'll seem awful lonesome with you gone," and the woman beyond heaved a prodigious sigh.

“Don’t ye believe it,” said Patsy, with conviction. “They’ll be fetching in some one a good bit better to fill my place—ye see, just.”

“No, they won’t; ’twill be another dago, likely—”

“Whist!” Patsy raised a silencing finger and looked fearsomely over her shoulder to the bed back of her.

Its inmate lay covered to the cheek, but one could catch a glimpse of tangled black hair and a swarthy skin. Patsy rose and went softly over to the bed; her movement disturbed the woman, who opened dumb, reproachful eyes.

“I’ll be gone in a minute, dear; I want just to tell you how sorry I am. But—sure—Mother Mary has it safe—and she’s keeping it for ye.” She stooped and brushed the forehead with her lips, as the staff and two of the nurses appeared.

“Faith! is it a delegation or a constabulary?” And Patsy laughed the laugh that had made her famous from Dublin to Duluth, where the bankruptcy had occurred.

“It’s a self-appointed committee to find out just where you’re going after you leave here,” said the young doctor.

Patsy eyed him quizzically. “That’s not manners to ask personal questions. But I don’t mind telling ye all, confidentially, that I haven’t my mind made yet between—a reception at the Vincent Wanderlusts’—or a musicale at the Ritz-Carlton.”

“Look here, lassie”—the old doctor ruffled his beard and threw out his chest like a mammoth pouter pigeon—“you’ll have to give us a sensible answer before we let you go one step. You know you can’t expect to get very far with that—in this city,” and he tapped the bag on her wrist significantly.

Patsy flushed crimson. For the first time in her life, to her knowledge, the world had discovered more about her than she had intended. Those humiliating eight dollars, seventy-six cents, and the crooked sixpence seemed to be scorching their way through the leather that held them. But she met the eyes looking into hers with a flinty resistance.

“Sure, ’twould carry me a long way, I’m thinking, if I spent it by the ha’penny bit.” Then she laughed in spite of herself. “If ye don’t look for all the world like a parcel of old mother hens that have just hatched out a brood o’ wild turkeys!”

She suddenly checked her Irish—it was apt to lead her into compromising situations with Anglo-Saxon folk, if she did not leash her tongue—and slid into English. “You see, I really know quite a number of people here—rather well—too.”

“Why haven’t they come to see you, then?” asked the day nurse, bluntly.

Patsy eyed her with admiration. “You’d never make a press agent—or a doctor, I’m afraid; you’re too truthful.”

“You see,” explained the old doctor, “these friends of yours are what we professional people term hypothetical cases. We’d like to be sure of something real.”

One of Patsy’s vagabond gloves closed over the doctor’s hand. “Bless you all for your goodness! but the people are more real than you think. Everybody believes I went back with the company and I never bothered them with the truth, you see. I’ve more than one good friend among the theatrical crowd right here; but—well, you know how it is; if you are a bit down on your luck you keep away from your own world, if you can. There is a girl—just about my own age—in society here. We did a lot for her in the way of giving her a good time when she was in Dublin, and I’ve seen her quite a bit over here. I’m going to her to get something to do before the season begins. She may need a secretary or a governess—or a—cook. Holy Saint Martin! but I can cook!” And Patsy clasped her hands in an ecstatic appreciation of her culinary art; it was the only one of which she was boastful.

“I’ll tell you what,” said the old doctor, gruffly, “we will let you go if you will promise to come back if—if no one’s at home. It’s against rules, but I’ll see the superintendent keeps your bed for you to-night.”

“Thank you,” said Patsy. She waved a farewell to the staff and the ward as she went through the door. “I don’t know where I’m going or what I shall be finding, but if it’s anything worth sharing I’ll send some back to you all.”

The staff watched her down the corridor to the elevator.

“Gee!” exclaimed the youngest doctor, his admiration working out to the surface. “When she’s made her name I’m going to marry her.”

“Oh, are you?” The voice of the old doctor took on its habitual tartness. “Acute touch of philanthropy, what—eh?”

Patricia O’Connell swung the hospital door behind her and stepped out into a blaze of June sunshine. “Holy Saint Patrick! but it feels good. Now if I could be an alley cat for two months I could get along fine.”

She cast a backward look toward the granite front of the City Hospital and her eyes grew as blue and soft as the waters of Killarney. “Sure, cat or human, the world’s a grand place to be alive in.”

II

A SIGN-POST POINTS TO AN ADVENTURE

Marjorie Schuyler sat in her own snug little den, her toy ruby spaniel on a cushion at her feet, her lap full of samples of white, shimmering crêpes and satins. She fingered them absent-mindedly, her mind caught in a maze of wedding intricacies and dates, and whirled between an ultimate choice between October and June of the following year.

The world knew all there was to know about Marjorie Schuyler. It could tell to a nicety who her paternal and maternal grandparents were, back to old Peter Schuyler's time and the settling of the Virginian Berkeleys. It could figure her income down to a paltry hundred of the actual amount. It knew her age to the month and day. In fact, it had kept her calendar faithfully, from her coming-out party, through the periods of mourning for her parents and her subsequent returns to society, through the rumors of her engagements to half a dozen young leaders at home and abroad, down to her latest conquest.

The last date on her calendar was the authorized announcement of her engagement to young Burgeman. Hence the shimmering samples and the relative values of October and June for a wedding journey.

And the world knew more than these things concerning Marjorie Schuyler. It knew that she was beautiful, of regal bearing and distinguished manner. An aunt lived with her, to lend dignity and chaperonage to her position; but she managed her own affairs, social and financial, for herself. If the world had been asked to choose a modern prototype for the young, independent American girl of the leisure class, it is reasonably safe to assume it would have named Marjorie Schuyler.

As for young Burgeman, the world knew him as the Rich Man's Son. That was the best and worst it could say of him.

"I think, Toto," said Marjorie Schuyler to her toy ruby spaniel, "it will be June. There is only one thing you can do with October—a church wedding, chrysanthemums, and oak leaves. But June offers so many possible variations. Besides, that gives us both one last, untrammeled season in town. Yes, June it is; and we'll not have to think about these yet awhile." Whereupon she dropped the shimmering samples into the waste-basket.

A maid pushed aside the hangings that curtained her den from the great Schuyler library. “There’s a young person giving the name of O’Connell, asking to see you. Shall I say you are out?”

“O’Connell?” Marjorie Schuyler raised a pair of interrogatory eyebrows. “Why—it can’t be. The entire company went back weeks ago. What is she like—small and brown, with very pink cheeks and very blue eyes?”

The maid nodded ambiguously.

“Bring her up. I know it can’t be, but—”

But it was. The next moment Marjorie Schuyler was taking a firm grip of Patsy’s shoulders while she looked down with mock disapproval at the girl who reached barely to her shoulder.

“Patsy O’Connell! Why didn’t you go home with the others—and what have you done to your cheeks?”

Patsy attacked them with two merciless fists. “Sure, they’re after needing a pinch of north-of-Ireland wind, that’s all. How’s yourself?”

Marjorie Schuyler pushed her gently into a great chair, while she herself took a carved baronial seat opposite. The nearness of anything so exquisitely perfect as Marjorie Schuyler, and the comparison it was bound to suggest, would have been a conscious ordeal for almost any other girl. But Patsy was oblivious of the comparison—oblivious of the fact that she looked like a wood-thrush neighboring with a bird of paradise. Her brown Norfolk suit was a shabby affair—positively clamoring for a successor; the boyish brown beaver—lacking feather or flower—was pulled down rakishly over her mass of brown curls, and the vagabond gloves gave a consistent finish to the picture. And yet there was that about Patsy which defied comparison even with Marjorie Schuyler; moreover—a thrush sings.

“Now tell me,” said Marjorie Schuyler, “where have you been all these weeks?”

Patsy considered. “Well—I’ve been taking up hospital training.”

“Oh, how splendid! Are you going over with the new Red Cross supply?”

Patsy shook her head. “You see, they only kept me until they had demonstrated all they knew about lung disorders—and fresh-air treatment, and then they

dismissed me. I'm fearsome they were after finding out I hadn't the making of a nurse."

"That's too bad! What are you going to do now?"

An amused little smile twitched at the corners of Patsy's mouth; it acted as if it wanted to run loose all over her face. "Sure, I haven't my mind made—quite. And yourself?"

"Oh—I?" Marjorie Schuyler leaned forward a trifle. "Did you know I was engaged?"

"Betrothed? Holy Saint Bridget bless ye!" And the vagabond gloves clasped the slender hands of the American prototype and gave them a hard little squeeze. "Who's himself?"

"It's Billy Burgeman, son of *the* Burgeman."

"Old King Midas?"

"That's a new name for him."

"It has fitted him years enough." Patsy's face sobered. "Oh, why does money always have to mate with money? Why couldn't you have married a poor great man—a poet, a painter, a thinker, a dreamer—some one who ought not to be bound down by his heels to the earth for bread-gathering or shelter-building? You could have cut the thongs and sent him soaring—given the world another 'Prometheus Unbound.' As for Billy Burgeman—he could have married—me," and Patsy spread her hands in mock petition.

Marjorie Schuyler laughed. "You! That is too beautifully delicious! Why, Patsy O'Connell, William Burgeman is the most conventional young gentleman I have ever met in my life. You would shock him into a semi-comatose condition in an afternoon—and, pray, what would you do with him?"

"Sure, I'd make a man of him, that's what. His father's son might need it, I'm thinking."

Marjorie Schuyler's face became perfectly blank for a second, then she leaned against the baronial arms on the back of her seat, tilted her head, and mused aloud: "I wonder just what Billy Burgeman does lack? Sometimes I've wondered if it was not having a mother, or growing up without brothers or sisters, or living

all alone with his father in that great, gloomy, walled-in, half-closed house. It is not a lack of manhood—I'm sure of that; and it's not lack of caring, for he can care a lot about some things. But what is it? I would give a great deal to know."

"If the tales about old King Midas have a thruppence worth of truth in them, it might be his father's meanness that's ailing him."

Marjorie Schuyler shook her head. "No; Billy's almost a prodigal. His father says he hasn't the slightest idea of the value of money; it's just so much beans or shells or knives or trading pelf with him; something to exchange for what he calls the real things of life. Why, when he was a boy—in fact, until he was almost grown—his father couldn't trust Billy with a cent."

"Who said that—Billy or the king?"

"His father, of course. That's why he has never taken Billy into business with him. He is making Billy win his spurs—on his own merits; and he's not going to let him into the firm until he's worth at least five thousand a year to some other firm. Oh, Mr. Burgeman has excellent ideas about bringing up a son! Billy ought to amount to a great deal."

"Meaning money or character?" inquired Patsy.

Marjorie Schuyler looked at her sharply. "Are you laughing?"

"Faith, I'm closer to weeping; 'twould be a lonesome, hard rearing that would come to a son of King Midas, I'm thinking. I'd far rather be the son of his gooseherd, if I had the choosing."

She leaned forward impulsively and gathered up the hands of the girl opposite in the warm, friendly compass of those vagabond gloves. "Do ye really love him, *cailin a'sthore*?" And this time it was her look that was sharp.

"Why, of course I love him! What a foolish question! Why should I be marrying him if I didn't love him? Why do you ask?"

"Because—the son of King Midas with no mother, with no one at all but the king, growing up all alone in a gloomy old castle, with no one trusting him, would need a great deal of love—a great, great deal—"

"That's all right, Ellen. I'll find her for myself." It was a man's voice, pitched overhigh; it came from somewhere beyond and below the inclosing curtains and

cut off the last of Patsy's speech.

"That's funny," said Marjorie Schuyler, rising. "There's Billy now. I'll bring him in and let you see for yourself that he's not at all an object of sympathy—or pity."

She disappeared into the library, leaving Patsy speculating recklessly. They must have met just the other side of the closed hangings, for to Patsy their voices sounded very near and close together.

"Hello, Billy!"

"Listen, Marjorie; if a girl loves a man she ought to be willing to trust him over a dreadful bungle until he could straighten things out and make good again—that's true, isn't it?"

"Billy Burgeman! What do you mean?"

"Just answer my question. If a girl loves a man she'll trust him, won't she?"

"I suppose so."

"You know she would, dear. What would the man do if she didn't?"

The voice sounded strained and unnatural in its intensity and appeal. Patsy rose, troubled in mind, and tiptoed to the only other door in the den.

"'Tis a grand situation for a play," she remarked, dryly, "but 'tis a mortial poor one in real life, and I'm best out of it." She turned the knob with eager fingers and pulled the door toward her. It opened on a dumbwaiter shaft, empty and impressive. Patsy's expression would have scored a hit in farce comedy. Unfortunately there was no audience present to appreciate it here, and the prompter forgot to ring down the curtain just then, so that Patsy stood helpless, forced to go on hearing all that Marjorie and her leading man wished to improvise in the way of lines.

"... I told you, *forged*—"

Patsy was tempted to put her fingers in her ears to shut out the sound of his voice and what he was saying, but she knew even then she would go on hearing; his voice was too vibrant, too insistent, to be shut out.

"... my father's name for ten thousand. I took the check to the bank myself, and

cashed it; father's vice-president.... Of course the cashier knew me.... I tell you I can't explain—not now. I've got to get away and stay away until I've squared the thing and paid father back."

"Billy Burgeman, did you forge that check yourself?"

"What does that matter—whether I forged it or had it forged or saw it forged? I tell you I cashed it, knowing it was forged. Don't you understand?"

"Yes; but if you didn't forge it, you could easily prove it; people wouldn't have to know the rest—they are hushing up things of that kind every day."

A silence dropped on the three like a choking, blinding fog. The two outside the hangings must have been staring at each other, too bewildered or shocked to speak. The one inside clutched her throat, muttering, "If my heart keeps up this thumping, faith, he'll think it's the police and run."

At last the voice of the man came, hushed but strained almost to breaking. To Patsy it sounded as if he were staking his very soul in the words, uncertain of the balance. "Marjorie, you don't understand! I cashed that check because—because I want to take the responsibility of it and whatever penalty comes along with it. I don't believe father will ever tell. He's too proud; it would strike back at him too hard. But you would have to know; he'd tell you; and I wanted to tell you first myself. I want to go away knowing you believe and trust me, no matter what father says about me, no matter what every one thinks about me. I want to hear you say it—that you will be waiting—just like this—for me to come back to when I've squared it all off and can explain.... Why, Marjorie—Marjorie!"

Patsy waited in an agony of dread, hope, prayer—waited for the answer she, the girl he loved, would make. It came at last, slowly, deliberately, as if spoken, impersonally, by the foreman of a jury:

"I don't believe in you, Billy. I'm sorry, but I don't believe I could ever trust you again. Your father has always said you couldn't take care of money; this simply means you have got yourself into some wretched hole, and forging your father's name was the only way out of it. I suppose you think the circumstances, whatever they may be, have warranted the act; but that act puts a stigma on your name which makes it unfit for any woman to bear; and if you have any spark of manhood left, you'll unwish the wish—you will unthink the thought—that I would wait—or even want you—ever—to come back."

A cry—a startled, frightened cry—rang through the rooms. It did not come from either Marjorie or her leading man. Patsy stood with a vagabond glove pressed hard over her mouth—quite unconscious that the cry had escaped and that there was no longer need of muzzling—then plunged headlong through the hangings into the library. Marjorie Schuyler was standing alone.

“Where is he—your man?”

“He’s gone—and please don’t call him—that!”

“Go after him—hurry—don’t let him go! Don’t ye understand? He mustn’t go away with no one believing in him. Tell him it’s a mistake; tell him anything—only go!”

While Patsy’s tongue burred out its Irish brogue she pushed at the tall figure in front of her—pushed with all her might. “Are ye nailed to the floor? What’s happened to your feet? For Heaven’s sake, lift them and let them take ye after him. Don’t ye hear? There’s the front door slamming behind him. He’ll be gone past your calling in another minute. Dear heart alive, ye can’t be meaning to let him go—this way!”

But Marjorie Schuyler stood immovable and deaf to her pleading. Incredulity, bewilderment, pity, and despair swept over Patsy’s face like clouds scudding over the surface of a clear lake. Then scorn settled in her eyes.

“I’m sorry for ye, sorry for any woman that fails the man who loves her. I don’t know this son of old King Midas; I never saw him in my life, and all I know about him is what ye told me this day and scraps of what he had to say for himself; but I believe in him. I know he never forged that check—or used the money for any mean use of his own. I’d wager he’s shielding some one, some one weaker than he, too afeared to step up and say so. Why, I’d trust him across the world and back again; and, holy Saint Patrick! I’m going after him to tell him so.”

For the second time within a few seconds Marjorie Schuyler listened and heard the front door slam; then the goddess came to life. She walked slowly, regally, across the library and passed between the hangings which curtained her den. Her eyes, probably by pure chance, glanced over the shimmering contents of the waste-basket. A little cold smile crept to the corners of her mouth, while her chin stiffened.

“I think, Toto,” she said, addressing the toy ruby spaniel, “that it will not be even a June wedding,” and she laughed a crisp, dry little laugh.

III

PATSY PLAYS A PART

Patsy ran down the steps of the Schuyler house, jumping the last four. As her feet struck the pavement she looked up and down the street for what she sought. There it was—the back of a fast-retreating man in a Balmacaan coat of Scotch tweed and a round, plush hat, turning the corner to Madison Avenue. Patsy groaned inwardly when she saw the outlines of the figure; they were so conventional, so disappointing; they lacked simplicity and directness—two salient life principles with Patsy.

“Pshaw! What’s in a back?” muttered Patsy. “He may be a man, for all his clothes;” and she took to her heels after him.

As she reached the corner he jumped on a passing car going south. “Tracking for the railroad station,” was her mental comment, and she looked north for the next car following; there was none. As far as eye could see there was an unbroken stretch of track—fate seemed strangely averse to aiding and abetting her deed.

“When in doubt, take a taxi,” suggested Patsy’s inner consciousness, and she accepted the advice without argument.

She raced down two blocks and found one. “Grand Central—and drive—like the devil!”

As the door clicked behind her her eye caught the jumping indicator, and she smiled a grim smile. “Faith, in two-shilling jumps like that I’ll be bankrupt afore I’ve my hand on the tails of that coat.” And with a tired little sigh she leaned back in the corner, closed her eyes, and relaxed her grip on mind and will and body.

A series of jerks and a final stop shook her into a thinking, acting consciousness again; she was out of the taxi in a twinkling—with the man paid and her eyes on the back of a Balmacaan coat and plush hat disappearing through a doorway. She could not follow it as fast as she had reckoned. She balanced corners with a stout, indeterminate old gentleman who blocked her way and insisted on wavering in her direction each time she tried to dodge him. In her haste to make up for those precious lost seconds she upset a pair of twins belonging to an already overburdened mother. These she righted and went dashing on her way.

Groups waylaid her; people with time to kill sauntered in front of her; wandering, indecisive people tried to stop her for information; and she reached the gate just as it was closing. Through it she could see—down a discouraging length of platform—a Balmacaaned figure disappearing into a car.

“Too late, lady; train’s leaving.”

It was well for Patsy that she was ignorant of the law governing closing gates and departing trains, for the foolish and the ignorant can sometimes achieve the impossible. She confronted the guard with a look of unconquerable determination. “No, ’tisn’t; the train guard is still on the platform. You’ve got to let me through.”

She emphasized the importance of it with two tight fists placed not overgently in the center of the guard’s rotundity, and accompanied by a shove. In some miraculous fashion this accomplished it. The gate clanged at Patsy’s back instead of in her face, as she had expected. A bell rang, a whistle tooted, and Patsy’s feet clattered like mad down the platform.

A good-natured brakeman picked her up and lifted her to the rear platform of the last car as it drew out. That saved the day for Patsy, for her strength and breath had gone past summoning.

“Thank you,” she said, feebly, with a vagabond glove held out in proffered fellowship. “That’s the kindest thing any one has done for me since I came over.”

“Are ye—”

“Irish—same as yourself.”

“How did ye know?”

“Sure, who but an Irishman would have had his wits and his heart working at the same time?” And with a laugh Patsy left him and went inside.

Her eye ran systematically down the rows of seats. Billy Burgeman was not there. She passed through to the next car, and a second, and a third. Still there was no back she could identify as belonging to the man she was pursuing.

She was crossing a fourth platform when she ran into the conductor, who barred her way. “Smoking-car ahead, lady; this is the last of the passenger-coaches.”

Patsy had it on the end of her tongue to say she preferred smoking-cars, intending to duck simultaneously under the conductor's arm and enter, willy-nilly. But the words rolled no farther than the tongue's edge. She turned obediently back, re-entering the car and taking the first seat by the door. For this her memory was responsible. It had spun the day's events before her like a roulette wheel, stopping precisely at the remark of Marjorie Schuyler's concerning William Burgeman: "He's the most conventional young gentleman I ever saw in my life. Why, you would shock—"

A strange young woman doling out consolation to him in a smoking-car would be anything but a dramatic success; Patsy felt this all too keenly. He was decidedly not of her world or the men and women she knew, who gave help when the need came regardless of time, place, acquaintanceship, or sex.

"Faith, he's the kind that will expect an introduction first, and a month or two of tangoing, tea-drinking, and tennis-playing; after which, if I ask his permission, he might consider it proper—" Patsy groaned. "Oh, I hate the man already!"

"Ticket!"

"Ticket? What for?"

"What for? Do you think this is a joy ride?" The conductor radiated sarcasm.

Patsy crimsoned. "I haven't mine. I—I was to—meet my—aunt—who had the ticket—and—she must have missed the train."

"Where are you going?"

"I—I—Why, I was telling—My aunt had the tickets. How would I know where I was going without the tickets?"

The conductor snorted.

Patsy looked hard at him and knew the time had come for wits—good, sharp O'Connell wits. She smiled coaxingly. "It sounds so stupid, but, you see, I haven't an idea where I am going. I was to meet my aunt and go down with her to her summer place. I—I can't remember the name." Her mouth drooped for the fraction of a second, then she brightened all over. "I know what I can do—very probably she missed the train because she expects to be at the station to meet me—I can look out each time the train stops, and when I see her I can get off. That makes it all right, doesn't it?" And she smiled in open confidence as a sacrificial

maiden might have propitiated the dragon.

But it was not reciprocated. He eyed her scornfully. “And who pays for the ticket?”

“Oh!” Patsy caught her breath; then she sent it bubbling forth in a contagious laugh. “I do—of course. I’ll take a ticket to—just name over the stations, please?”

The conductor growled them forth: “Hampden, Forestview, Hainsville, Dartmouth, Hudson, Arden, Brambleside, Mayberry, Greyfriars—”

“What’s that last—Greyfriars? I’ll take a ticket to Greyfriars.” She said it after the same fashion she might have used in ordering a mutton chop at a restaurant, and handed the conductor a bill.

When he had given her the change and passed on, still disgruntled, Patsy allowed herself what she called a “temporary attack of private prostration.”

“Idiot!” she groaned in self-address. “Ye are the biggest fool in two continents; and the Lord knows what Dan would be thinking of ye if he were topside o’ green earth to hear.” Whereupon she gripped one vagabond glove with the other —in fellow misery; and for the second time that afternoon her eyes closed with sheer exhaustion.

The train rumbled on. Each time it stopped Patsy watched the doorway and the window beside her for sight of her quarry; each time it started again she sighed inwardly with relief, glad of another furlough from a mission which was fast growing appalling. She had long since ceased to be interested in Billy Burgeman as an individual. He had shrunk into an abstract sense of duty, and as such failed to appeal or convince. But as her interest waned, her determination waxed; she would get him and tell him what she had come for, if it took a year and a day and shocked him into complete oblivion.

She was saying this to herself for the hundredth time, adding for spice—and artistic finish—“After that—the devil take him!” when the train pulled away from another station. She had already satisfied herself that he was not among the leaving passengers. But suddenly something familiar in a solitary figure standing

at the far end of the gravel embankment caught her eye; it was back toward her, and in the quick passing and the gathering dusk she could make out dim outlines only. But those outlines were unmistakable, unforgetable.

“A million curses on the house of Burgeman!” quoth Patsy. “Well, there’s naught for it but to get off at the next station and go back.”

The conductor watched her get off with a distinct feeling of relief. He had very much feared she was not a responsible person and in no mental position to be traveling alone. Her departure cleared him of all uneasiness and obligation and he settled down to his business with an unburdened mind. Not so Patsy. She blinked at the vanishing train and then at her empty hands, with the nearest she had ever come in her life to utter, abject despair. She had left her bag in the car!

When articulate thinking was possible she remarked, acridly, “Ye need a baby nurse to mind ye, Patricia O’Connell; and I’m not sure but ye need a perambulator as well.” She gave a tired little stretch to her body and rubbed her eyes. “I feel as if this was all a silly play and I was cast for the part of an Irish simpleton; a low-comedy burlesque—that ye’d swear never happened in real life outside of the county asylums.”

A headlight raced down the track toward her and the city, and she gathered up what was left of her scattered wits. As the train slowed up she stepped into the shadows, and her eye fell on the open baggage-car. She smiled grimly. “Faith! I have a notion I like brakemen and baggagemen better than conductors.”

And so it came to pass as the train started that the baggageman, who happened to be standing in the doorway, was somewhat startled to see a small figure come racing toward it out of the dusk and land sprawling on the floor beside him.

“A girl tramp!” he ejaculated in amazement and disgust, and then, as he helped her to her feet, “Don’t you know you’re breaking the law?”

She laughed. “From the feelings, I thought it was something else.” She sobered and turned on him fiercely. “I want ye to understand I’ve paid my fare on the train out, which entitled me to one continuous passage—*with my trunk*. Well, I’m returning—*as my trunk*, I’ll take up no more room and I’ll ask no more privileges.”

“That may sound sensible, but it’s not law,” and the man grinned broadly. “I’m sorry, miss, but off you go at the next station.”

“All right,” agreed Patsy; “only please don’t argue. Sure, I’m sick entirely of arguing.”

She dropped down on a trunk and buried her face in her hands. The baggageman watched her, hypnotized with curiosity and wonder. At the next station he helped her to drop through the opening she had entered, and called a shamefaced “good-by” after her in the dusk.

She hunted up the station-agent and received scanty encouragement: Very likely he had seen such a man; there were many of that description getting off every day. They generally went to the Inn—Brambleside Inn. The season was just open and society people were beginning to come. No, there was no conveyance. The Inn’s ’buses did not meet any train after the six-thirty from town, unless ordered especially by guests. Was she expected?

Patsy was about to shake her head when a roadster swung around the corner of the station and came to a dead stop in front of where she and the station-master were standing.

The driver peered at her through his goggles in a questioning, hesitating manner. “Is this—are you Miss St. Regis?” he finally asked.

“Miriam St. Regis?” Patsy intended it for a question, realizing even as she spoke the absurdity of inquiring the name of an English actress at such a place.

But the driver took it for a statement of identity. “Yes, of course, Miss Miriam St. Regis. Mr. Blake made a mistake and thought because your box came from town you’d be coming that way. It wasn’t until your manager, Mr. Travis, telephoned half an hour ago that he realized you’d be on that southbound train. Awfully sorry to have kept you waiting. Step right in, please.”

Whereupon the driver removed himself from the roadster, assisted her to a seat, covered her with a rug—for early June evenings can be rather sharp—and the next moment Patsy found herself tearing down a stretch of country road with the purr of a motor as music to her ears.

“Sure, I don’t know who wrote the play and starred me in it,” she mused, dreamily, “but he certainly knows how to handle situations.”

For the space of a few breaths she gave herself over completely to the luxury of bodily comfort and mental inertia. It seemed as if she would have been content to keep on whirling into an eternity of darkness—with a destination so remote,

and a mission so obscure, as not to be of the slightest disturbance to her immediate consciousness. All she asked of fate that moment was the blessedness of nothing; and for answer—her mind was jerked back ruthlessly to the curse of more complexities.

The lights of a large building in the distance reminded her there was more work for her wits before her and no time to lose. “I must think—think—think, and it grows harder every minute. If Miriam St. Regis is coming here, it means, like as not, she’s filling in between seasons, entertaining. Well, until she comes, they’re all hearty welcome to the mistake they’ve made. And afterward—troth! there’ll be a corner in her room for me the night, or Saint Michael’s a sinner; either way, ’tis all right.”

The driver unbundled her and helped her out as courteously as he had helped her in. He led the way across a broad veranda to the main entrance, and there she fell behind him as he pushed open the great swinging door.

“Oh, that you, Masters? Did Miss St. Regis come?”

“Sure thing, sir; she’s right here.”

The next moment Patsy stood in a blaze of lights between a personally conducting chauffeur and a pompous hotel manager, who looked down upon her with distrustful scrutiny. She was wholly aware of every inch of her appearance —the shabbiness of her brown Norfolk suit, the rakishness of her boyish brown beaver hat, and the vagabond gloves. But of what value is the precedent of having been found hanging on the thorn of a Killarney rose-bush by the Physician to the King, of what value is the knowledge of past kinship with a certain Dan O’Connell, if one allows a little matter of clothes to spoil one’s entrance and murder one’s lines?

The blood came flushing back into Patsy’s cheeks, turning them the color of thorn bloom, and her eyes deepened to the blue of Killarney, sparkling as when the sun goes a-dancing. She smiled—a fresh, radiant, witching smile upon that clay lump of commercialism—until she saw his appraisement of her treble its original figure.

Then she said, sweetly: “I have had rather a hard time getting here, Mr. Blake; making connections in your country is not always as simple as one might expect. My room, please.” And with an air of a grand duchess Patsy O’Connell, late of the Irish National Players, Dublin, and later of the women’s free ward of the City

Hospital, led the way across one of the most brilliant summer hotel foyers in America.

As she entered the elevator a young man stepped out—a young man with a small, blond, persevering mustache, a rather thin, esthetic, melancholy face, and a myopic squint. He wore a Balmacaan of Scotch tweed and carried a round, plush hat.

Patsy turned to the bell-boy. “Did that man arrive to-night?”

“Yes, miss; I took him up.”

“What is his name—do you know?”

“Can’t say, miss. I’ll find out, if you like.”

“There is no need. I rather think I know it myself.” And under her breath she ejaculated, “Saint Peter deliver us!”

IV

THE OCCUPANT OF A BALMACAAN COAT

Safe in her room, with the door closed and locked, Patsy stood transfixed before a trunk—likewise closed and locked.

“Thank Heaven for many blessings!” she said, fervently. “Thank Heaven Miriam St. Regis has worn wigs of every conceivable color and style on the stage, so there is small chance of any one here knowing the real color of her hair. Thank Heaven she’s given to missing her engagements and not wiring about it until the next day. Thank Heaven I’ve played with her long enough to imitate her mannerisms, and know her well enough to explain away the night, if the need ever comes. Thank Heaven that George Travis is an old friend and can help out, if I fail. Thank Heaven for all of these! But, holy Saint Patrick! how will I ever be getting inside that box?”

On the heels of her fervor came an inspiration. Off came her gloves and hat, off came coat and skirt, blouse and shoes, and into the closet they all went. For, whereas Patsy could carry off her shabbiness before masculine eyes, she had neither the desire nor the fortitude to brave the keener, more critical gaze of her own sex. It was always for the women that Patsy dressed, and above all else did she stand in awe of the opinion of the hotel chambermaid, going down in tottering submission before it. Unlocking her door, she rang the bell; then crept in between the covers of her bed, drawing them up about her.

The chambermaid came and Patsy ordered the housekeeper. The housekeeper came and Patsy explained to her the loss of her bag—the loss of the keys was only implied; it was a part of Patsy’s creed of life never to lie unless cornered. She further implied that she was entertaining no worry, as a well-appointed hotel always carried a bunch of skeleton trunk keys for the convenience of their guests.

Patsy’s inspiration worked to perfection. In a few minutes the Inn had proved itself a well-appointed hostelry, and the trunk stood open before her. Alone again, she slipped out of bed—to lock the door and investigate. A wistaria lounging-robe was on in a twinkling, with quilted slippers to match. Then Patsy’s eager fingers drew forth a dark emerald velvet, with bodice and panniers of gold lace, and she clasped it ecstatically in her arms.

“Miriam always had divine taste, but the faeries must have guided her hand for the choosing of this. Sure, I’d be feeling like a king’s daughter if I wasn’t so weak and heartsick. I feel more like a young gosling that some one has coaxed out of its shell a day too soon. Is it the effect of Billy Burgeman, I wonder, or the left-overs from the City Hospital, or an overdose of foolishness—or hunger, just?”

“Miss St. Regis” dined in her own room, and she dined like a king’s daughter, with an appetite whetted by weeks of convalescing, charity fare. Even the possible appearance at any minute of her original self offered no terrors for her in the presence of such a soul-satisfying, hunger-appeasing feast.

At nine-thirty that evening, when the manager sent the hall-boy to call her, she looked every inch the king’s daughter she had dined. The hall-boy, accustomed to “creations,” gave her a frank stare of admiration, which Patsy noted out of the tail of her eye.

She was ravishing. The green and gold brought out the tawny red glint of her hair, which was bound with two gold bands about the head, ending in tiny emerald clasps over the barely discoverable tips of her ears; little gold shoes twinkled in and out of the clinging green as she walked.

“Faith! I feel like a whiff of Old Ireland herself,” was Patsy O’Connell’s subconscious comment as “Miss St. Regis” crossed the stage; and something of the feeling must have been wafted across the footlights to the audience, for it drew in its breath with a little gasp of genuine appreciation.

She heard it and was grateful for the few seconds it gave her to look at the program the manager had handed her as she was entering. It had never occurred to her that Miss St. Regis might arrange her program beforehand, that the audience might be expecting something definite and desired in the form of entertainment. It took all the control of a well-ordered Irish head to keep her from bolting for the little stage door after one glance at the paper. Her eye had caught the impersonation of two American actresses she had never seen, the reading of a Hawaiian love poem she had never heard of, and scenes from two plays she had never read. It was all too deliciously, absurdly horrible for words; and then Patsy O’Connell geared up her wits, as any true kinswoman of Dan’s

should.

In a flash there came back to her what the company had done once when they were playing one-night stands and the wrong scenery had come for the play advertised. It was worth trying here.

“Dear people,” said Patsy O’Connell-St. Regis, smiling at the audience as one friend to another, “I have had so many requests from among you—since I made out my program—to give instead an evening of old Irish tales, that I have—capitulated; you shall have your wish.”

The almost unbelievable applause that greeted her tempted her to further wickedness. “Very few people seem ever to remember that I had an Irish grandfather, Denis St. Regis, and that I like once in a while to be getting back to the sod.”

There was something so hypnotic in her intimacy—this taking of every one into her confidence—that one budding youth forgot himself entirely and naïvely remarked, “It’s a long way to Tipperary.”

That clinched her success. She might have chanted “Old King Cole” and reaped a houseful of applause. As it was, she turned faery child and led them all forth to the Land of Faery—a world that neighbored so close to the real with her that long ago she had acquired the habit of carrying a good bit of it about with her wherever she went. It was small wonder, therefore, that, at the end of the evening, when she fixed upon a certain young man in the audience—a man with a persevering mustache, an esthetic face, and a melancholy, myopic squint—and told the last tale to him direct, that he felt called upon to go to her as she came down the steps into the ball-room and express his abject, worshipful admiration.

“That’s all right,” Patsy cut him short, “but—but—it would sound so much nicer outside, somewhere in the moonlight—away from everybody. Wouldn’t it, now?”

This sudden amending of matter-of-factness with arch coquetry would have sounded highly amusing to ears less self-atuned than the erstwhile wearer of the Balmacaan. But he heard in it only the flattering tribute to a man chosen of men; and the hand that reached for Patsy’s was almost masterful.

“Oh, would you really?” he asked, and he almost broke his melancholy with a smile.

“It must be my clothes,” was her mental comment as he led her away; “they’ve gone to my own head; it’s not altogether strange they’ve touched his a bit. But for a man who’s forged his father’s name and lost the girl he loved and then plunged into mortal despair, he’s convalescing terribly fast.”

They had reached a quiet corner of the veranda. Patsy dropped into a chair, while her companion leaned against a near-by railing and looked down at her with something very like a soulful expression.

“I might have known all along,” Patsy was thinking, “that a back like that would have a front like this. Sure, ye couldn’t get a real man to dress in knee-length petticoats.” And then, to settle all doubts, she faced him with grim determination. “I let you bring me here because I had something to say to you. But first of all, did you come down here to-night on that five-something train from New York?”

The man nodded.

“Did you get to the train by a Madison Avenue car, taken from the corner of Seventy-seventh Street, maybe?”

“Why, how did you know?” The melancholy was giving place to rather pleased curiosity.

“How do I know!” Patsy glared at him. “I know because I’ve followed you every inch of the way—followed you to tell you I believed in you—you—you!” and her voice broke with a groan.

“Oh, I say, that was awfully good of you.” This time the smile had right of way, and such a flattered, self-conscious smile as it was! “You know everybody takes me rather as a joke.”

“Joke!” Patsy’s eyes blazed. “Well, you’re the most serious, impossible joke I ever met this side of London. Why, a person would have to dynamite his sense of humor to appreciate you.”

“I don’t think I understand.” He felt about in his waistcoat pocket and drew forth a monocle, which he adjusted carefully. “Would you mind saying that again?”

Patsy’s hands dropped helplessly to her lap. “I couldn’t—only, after a woman has trailed a man she doesn’t know across a country she doesn’t know to a place she doesn’t know—and without a wardrobe trunk, a letter of credit, or a maid,

just to tell him she believes in him, he becomes the most tragically serious thing that ever happened to her in all her life."

"Oh, I say, I always thought they were pretty good; but I never thought any one would appreciate my poetry like that."

"Poetry! Do you—do that, too?"

"That's all I do. I am devoting my life to it; that's why my family take me a little —flippantly."

A faint streak of hope shot through Patsy's mind. "Would you mind telling me your name?"

"Why, I thought you knew. I thought you said that was why you wanted to—to —Hang it all! my name's Peterson-Jones—Wilfred Peterson-Jones."

Patsy was on her feet, clasping her hands in a shameless burst of emotion while she dropped into her own tongue. "Oh, that's a beautiful name—a grand name! Don't ye ever be changing it! And don't ye ever give up writing poetry; it's a beautiful pastime for any man by that name. But what—what, in the name of Saint Columkill, ever happened to Billy Burgeman!"

"Billy Burgeman? Why, he came down on the train with me and went back to Arden."

Patsy threw back her head and laughed—laughed until she almost feared she could not stop laughing. And then she suddenly became conscious of the pompous manager standing beside her, a yellow sheet of paper in his hand.

"Will you kindly explain what this means?" and he slapped the paper viciously.

"I'll try to," said Patsy; "but will you tell me just one thing first? How far is it to Arden?"

"Arden? It's seven miles to Arden. But what's that got to do with this? This is a wire from Miss St. Regis, saying she is ill and will be unable to fill her engagement here to-night! Now, who are you?"

"I? Why, I'm her understudy, of course—and—I'm—so happy—" Whereupon Patricia O'Connell, late of the Irish National Players and later of the women's free ward of the City Hospital, crumpled up on the veranda floor in a dead faint.

A TINKER POINTS THE ROAD

The Brambleside Inn lost one of its guests at an inconceivably early hour the morning after Patsy O'Connell unexpectedly filled Miss St. Regis's engagement there. The guest departed by way of the second-floor piazza and a fire-escape, and not even the night watchman saw her go. But it was not until she had put a mile or more of open country between herself and the Inn that Patsy indulged in the freedom of a long breath.

"After this I'll keep away from inns and such like; 'tis too wit-racking to make it anyways comfortable. I feel now as if I'd been caught lifting the crown jewels, instead of giving a hundred-guinea performance for the price of a night's bed and board and coming away as poor as a tinker's ass."

A smile caught at the corners of her mouth—a twitching, memory smile. She was thinking of the note she had left folded in with the green-and-gold gown in Miriam St. Regis's trunk. In it she had stated her payment of one Irish grandfather by the name of Denis—in return for the loan of the dress—and had hoped that Miriam would find him handy on future public occasions. Patsy could not forbear chuckling outright—the picture of anything so unmitigatedly British as Miriam St. Regis with an Irish ancestor trailing after her for the rest of her career was too entrancing.

An early morning wind was blowing fresh from the clover-fields, rose-gardens, and new-leafed black birch and sassafras. Such a well-kept, clean world of open country it looked to Patsy as her eye followed the road before her, on to the greening meadows and wooded slopes, that her heart joined the chorus of song-sparrow and meadow-lark, who sang from the sheer gladness of being a live part of it all.

She sighed, not knowing it. "Faith! I'm wishing 'twas more nor seven miles to Arden. I'd like to be following the road for days and days, and keeping the length of it between Billy Burgeman and myself."

Starting before the country was astir, she had met no one of whom she could inquire the way. A less adventuresome soul than Patsy might have sat herself down and waited for direction; but that would have meant wasting minutes—precious minutes before the dawn should break and she should be no longer sole

possessor of the road and the world that bounded it. So Patsy chose the way for herself—content that it would lead her to her destination in the end. The joy of true vagabondage was rampant within her: there was the road, urging her like an impatient comrade to be gone; there was her errand of good-will giving purpose to her journey; and the facts that she was homeless, penniless, breakfastless, a stranger in a strange country, mattered not a whit. So thoroughly had she always believed in good fortune that somehow she always managed to find it; and out of this she had evolved her philosophy of life.

“Ye see, ’tis this way,” she would say; “the world is much like a great cat—with claws to hide or use, as the notion takes it. If ye kick and slap at it, ’twill hump its back and scratch at ye—sure as fate; but if ye are wise and a bit patient ye can have it coaxed and smoothed down till it’s purring to make room for ye at any hearthside. And there’s another thing it’s well to remember—that folks are folks the world over, whether they are wearing your dress and speaking your tongue or another’s.”

And as Patsy was blessed in the matter of philosophy—so was she blessed in the matter of possessions. She did not have to own things to possess them.

There was no doubt but that Patsy had a larger share of the world than many who could reckon their estates in acreage or who owned so many miles of fenced-off property. She held a mortgage on every inch of free roadway, rugged hilltop, or virgin forest her feet crossed. She claimed squatters’ rights on every bit of shaded pasture, or sunlit glade, or singing brook her heart rejoiced in. In other words, everything outside of walls and fences belonged to her by virtue of her vagabondage; and she had often found herself pitying the narrow folk who possessed only what their deeds or titles allotted to them.

And yet never in Patsy’s life had she felt quite so sure about it as she did this morning, probably because she had never before set forth on a self-appointed adventure so heedless of means and consequences.

“Sure, there are enough wise people in the world,” she mused as she tramped along; “it needs a few foolish ones to keep things happening. And could a foolish adventuring body be bound for a better place than Arden!”

She rounded a bend in the road and came upon a stretch of old stump fencing. From one of the stumps appeared to be hanging a grotesque figure of some remarkable cut; it looked both ancient and romantic, sharply silhouetted against the iridescence of the dawn.

Patsy eyed it curiously. “It comes natural for me to be partial to anything hanging to a thorn, or a stump; but—barring that—it still looks interesting.”

As she came abreast it she saw it was not hanging, however. It was perched on a lower prong of a root and it was a man, clothed in the most absolute garment of rags Patsy had ever seen off the legitimate stage.

“From an artistic standpoint they are perfect,” was Patsy’s mental tribute. “Wouldn’t Willie Fay give his Sunday dinner if he could gather him in as he is, just—to play the tinker! Faith! those rags are so real I wager he keeps them together only by the grace of God.”

As she stopped in front of the figure he turned his head slowly and gazed at her with an expression as far away and bewildered as a lost baby’s.

In the half-light of the coming day he looked supernatural—a strange spirit from under the earth or above the earth, but not of the earth. This was borne in upon Patsy’s consciousness, and it set her Celtic blood tingling and her eyes a-sparkling.

“He looks as half-witted as those back in the Old Country who have the second sight and see the faeries. Aye, and he’s as young and handsome as a king’s son. Poor lad!” And then she called aloud, “’Tis a brave day, this.”

“Hmm!” was the response, rendered impartially.

Patsy’s alert eyes spied a nondescript kit flung down in the grass at the man’s feet and they set a-dancing. “Then ye *are* a tinker?”

“Hmm!” was again the answer. It conveyed an impression of hesitant doubt, as if the speaker would have avoided, if he could, the responsibility of being anything at all, even a tinker.

“That’s grand,” encouraged Patsy. “I like tinkers, and, what’s more, I’m a bit of a vagabond myself. I’ll grant ye that of late years the tinkers are treated none too hearty about Ireland; but there was a time—” Patsy’s mind trailed off into the far past, into a maze of legend and folk-tale wherein tinkers were figures of romance and mystery. It was good luck then to fall in with such company; and Patsy, being more a product of past romance than present civilization, was pleased to read into this meeting the promise of a fair road and success to her quest.

Moreover, there was another appeal—the apparent helpless bewilderment of the

man himself and his unreality. He was certainly not in possession of all his senses, from whatever world he might have dropped; and helplessness in man or beast was a blood bond with Patsy, making instant claim on her own abundant sympathies and wits.

She held the tinker with a smile of open comradeship while her voice took on an alluring hint of suggestion. “Ye can’t be thinking of hanging onto that stump all day—now what road might ye be taking—the one to Arden?”

For some minutes the tinker considered her and her question with an exaggerated gravity; then he nodded his head in a final agreement.

“Grand! I’m bound that way myself; maybe ye know Arden?”

“Maybe.”

“And how far might it be?”

“Seven miles.”

Patsy wrinkled her forehead. “That’s strange; ’twas seven miles last night, and I’ve tramped half the distance already, I’m thinking. Never mind! What’s behind won’t trouble me, and the rest of the way will soon pass in good company. Come on,” and she beckoned her head in indisputable command.

Once again he considered her slowly. Then, as if satisfied, he swung himself down from his perch on the stump fence, gathered up his kit, and in another minute had fallen into step with her; and the two were contentedly tramping along the road.

“The man who’s writing this play,” mused Patsy, “is trying to match wits with Willie Shakespeare. If any one finds him out they’ll have him up for plagiarizing.”

She chuckled aloud, which caused the tinker to cast an uneasy glance in her direction.

“Poor lad! The half-wits are always suspicious of others’ wits. He thinks I’m fey.” And then aloud: “Maybe ye are not knowing it, but anything at all is likely to happen to ye to-day—on the road to Arden. According to Willie Shakespeare—whom ye are not likely to be acquainted with—it’s a place where philosophers and banished dukes and peasants and love-sick youths and lions and serpents all

live happily together under the ‘Greenwood Tree.’ Now, I’m the banished duke’s own daughter—only no one knows it; and ye—sure, ye can take your choice between playing the younger brother—or the fool.”

“The fool,” said the tinker, solemnly; and then of a sudden he threw back his head and laughed.

Patsy stopped still on the road and considered him narrowly. “Couldn’t ye laugh again?” she suggested when the laugh was ended. “It improves ye wonderfully.” An afterthought flashed in her mind. “After all’s said and done, the fool is the best part in the whole play.”

After this they tramped along in silence. The tinker kept a little in advance, his head erect, his hands swinging loosely at his sides, his eyes on nothing at all. He seemed oblivious of what lay back of him or before him—and only half conscious of the companion at his side. But Patsy’s fancy was busy with a hundred things, while her eyes went afield for every scrap of prettiness the country held. There were meadows of brilliant daisies, broken by clumps of silver poplars, white birches, and a solitary sentinel pine; and there was the roadside tangle with its constant surprises of meadowsweet and columbine, white violets—in the swampy places—and once in a while an early wild rose.

“In Ireland,” she mused, “the gorse would be out, fringing the pastures, and on the roadside would be heartsease and faery thimbles, and perhaps a few late primroses; and the meadow would be green with corn.” A faint wisp of a sigh escaped her at the thought, and the tinker looked across at her questioningly. “Sure, it’s my heart hungering a bit for the bogland and a whiff of the turf smoke. This exile idea is a grand one for a play, but it gets lonesome at times in real life. Maybe ye are Irish yourself?”

“Maybe.”

It was Patsy’s turn to glance across at the tinker, but all she saw was the far-away, wondering look that she had seen first in his face. “Poor lad! Like as not he finds it hard remembering where he’s from; they all do. I’ll not pester him again.”

He looked up and caught her eyes upon him and smiled foolishly.

Patsy smiled back. “Do ye know, lad, I’ve not had a morsel of breakfast this day. Have ye any money with ye, by chance?”

The tinker stopped, put down his kit, and hunted about in his rags where the pocket places might be; but all he drew forth were his two empty hands. He looked down the stretch of road they had come with an odd twist to his mouth, then he burst forth into another laugh.

“Have ye been playing the pigeon, and some one plucked ye?” she asked, and went on without waiting for his answer. “Never mind! We’ll sharpen up our wits afresh and earn a breakfast. Are ye handy at tinkering, now?”

“You bet I am!” said the tinker. It was the longest speech he had made.

At the next farm Patsy turned in, with a warning to the tinker to do as he was told and to hold his tongue. It was a thoroughly well-kept-looking farm, and she picked out what she decided must be the side door, and knocked. A kindly-faced, middle-aged woman opened it, and Patsy smiled with the good promise of her looks.

“We are two—down on our luck, and strangers hereabouts. Have ye got any tinkering jobs for my man there? He’s a bit odd and says little; but he can solder a broken pot or mend a machine with the best. And we’ll take out our pay in a good, hearty meal.”

“There be a pile of dishes in the pantry I’ve put by till we was goin’ to town—handles off and holes in the bottom. He can mend them out on the stoop, if he likes. I’ve got to help with berry-pickin’; we’re short-handed this season.”

“Are ye, just? Then I’m thinking I’ll come in handy.” Patsy smiled her smile of winning comradeship as she stooped and picked up a tray of empty berry-boxes that stood by the door; while the woman’s smile deepened with honest appreciation.

“My! but you are willing folks; they’re sometimes scarce ’round here.”

“Faith, we’re hungry folks—so ye best set us quickly to work.”

They left the tinker on the stoop, surrounded by a heterogeneous collection of household goods. Patsy cast an anxious backward glance at him, but saw that he was rolling up the rags that served for sleeves, thereby baring a pair of brawny, capable-looking arms, while he spread his tools before him after the manner of a

man who knows his business.

“Fine!” commented Patsy, with an inner satisfaction. “He may be foolish, but I bet he can tinker.”

They picked berries for an hour or more, and then Patsy turned too and helped the woman get dinner. They bustled about in silence to the accompanying pounding and scraping of the tinker, who worked unceasingly. When they sat down to dinner at last there was a tableful—the woman and her husband, Patsy, the tinker, and the “hands,” and before them was spread the very best the farm could give. It was as if the woman wished to pay their free-will gift of service with her unstinted bounty.

“We always ask a blessin’,” said the farmer, simply, folding his hands on the table, about to begin. Then he looked at Patsy, and, with that natural courtesy that is common to the true man of the soil, he added, “We’d be pleased if you’d ask it.”

Patsy bowed her head. A little whimsical smile crept to her lips, but her voice rang deep with feeling: “For food and fellowship, good Lord, we thank Thee. Amen!” And she added under her breath, “And take a good grip of the Rich Man’s son till we get him.”

The late afternoon found them back on the road once more. They parted from the farmer and his wife as friend parts with friend. The woman slipped a bundle of food—bread, cheese, and meat left from the dinner, with a box of berries—into Patsy’s hand, while the man gave the tinker a half-dollar and wished him luck.

Patsy thanked them for both; but it was not until they were well out of earshot that she spoke to the tinker: “They are good folk, but they’d never understand in a thousand years how we came to be traveling along together. What folks don’t know can’t hurt them, and ’tis often easier holding your tongue than trying to explain what will never get through another’s brain. Now put that lunch into your kit; it may come in handy—who knows? And God’s blessing on all kind hearts!”

Whereupon the tinker nodded solemnly.

They had tramped for a mile or more when they came to a cross-roads marked by a little white church. From the moment they sighted it Patsy's feet began to lag; and by the time they reached the crossing of the ways she had stopped altogether and was gazing up at the little gold cross with an odd expression of whimsical earnestness.

"Do ye know," she said, slowly, clasping the hands long shorn of the vagabond gloves—"do ye know I've told so many lies these last two days I think I'll bide yonder for a bit, and see can Saint Anthony lift the sins from me. 'Twould make the rest o' the road less burdensome—don't ye think?"

The tinker looked uncomfortably confused, as though this sudden question of ethics or religion was too much for his scattered wits. He dug the toe of his boot in the gravel of the church path and removed his cap to aid the labor of his thinking. "Maybe—" he agreed at last. "An' will I be waitin' for you—or keepin' on?"

"Ye'll wait, of course," commanded Patsy.

She had barely disappeared through the little white door, and the tinker thrown himself down with his back to the sign-post which marked the roads, when a sorrel mare and a runabout came racing down the road over which they had just come. There were two men in the runabout, both of them tense and alert, their heads craned far in advance of the rest of them, their eyes scanning the diverging roads.

"I cal'ate she's gone that way." The driver swung the whip, indicating the road that ran south.

"Wall—I cal'ate so, too," agreed the other. "But then again—she mightn't."

They reined in and discovered the tinker. "Some one passed this way sence you been settin' there?" they inquired almost in unison.

"I don't know"—the tinker's fingers passed hurriedly across his eyes and forehead, by way of seeking misplaced wits—"some one might be almost any one," he smiled, cheerfully.

"Look here, young feller, if you're tryin' to be smart—" the driver began, angrily; but his companion silenced him with a nudge and a finger tapped significantly on the crown of his hat. He moderated his tone:

“We’re after a girl in a brown suit and hat—undersized girl. She was asking the way to Arden. Seen any one of that description?”

“What do you want with her?”

“Never mind,” growled the first man.

But the second volunteered meager information, “She’s a suspect. Stayed last night in the Inn and this morning a couple of thousand dollars’ worth of diamonds is missin’; that’s what we want her for.”

The tinker brightened perceptibly. “Guess she went by in a wagon half an hour ago—that way. I think I saw her,” and as the men turned southward down the road marked Arden he called after them, “Better hurry, if you want to catch her; the wagon was going at a right smart pace.”

He waited for their backs to be turned and for the crack of the whip that lifted the heels of the sorrel above the dashboard before she plunged, then, with amazing speed, of mind as well as of body, he wrenched every sign from the post and pitched them out of sight behind a neighboring stone wall.

The dust from departing wheels still filled the air when Patsy stepped out of the cross-roads church, peacefully radiant, and found the tinker sitting quietly with his back against the post.

“So ye are still here. I thought ye might have grown tired of my company, after all, and gone on.” Patsy laughed happily. “Now do ye know which road goes to Arden?”

“Sure,” and the tinker joined in her laugh, while he pointed to the straight road ahead, the road that ran west, at right angles to the one the runabout had taken.

“Come on, then,” said Patsy; “we ought to be there by sundown.” She stopped and looked him over for the space of a second. “Ye are improving wonderfully. Mind! ye mustn’t be getting too keen-witted or we’ll have to be parting company.”

“Why?”

“That’s the why!” And with this satisfactory explanation she led the way down the road the tinker had pointed.

VI

AT DAY'S END

Their road went the way of the setting sun, and Patsy and the tinker traveled it leisurely—after the fashion of those born to the road, who find their joy in the wandering, not in the making of a distance or the reaching of a destination. Since they had left the cross-roads church behind Patsy had marked the tinker casting furtive glances along the way they had come; and each time she marked, as well, the flash of a smile that lightened his face for an instant when he saw that the road still remained empty of aught but themselves.

"It's odd," she mused; "he hasn't the look of a knave who might fear a trailing of constables at his heels; and yet—and yet his wits have him pestered about something that lies back of him."

Once it was otherwise. There was a rising of dust showing on one of the hills they had climbed a good half-hour before. When the tinker saw it he reached of a sudden for Patsy's hand while he pointed excitedly beyond pasture bars ahead to a brownish field that lay some distance from the road.

"See, lass, that's sorrel. If you'll break the road along with me I'll show you where wild strawberries grow, lots of 'em!"

Her answer was to take the pasture bars at a run as easily as any country-bred urchin. The tinker swung himself after her, an odd wisp of a smile twisting the corners of his mouth, just such a smile as the fool might wear on the road to Arden. The two raced for the sorrel-tops—the tinker winning.

When Patsy caught up he was on his knees, his head bare, his eyes sparkling riotously, running his fingers exultantly through the green leaves that carpeted the ground. "See," he chuckled, "the tinker knows somethin' more 'n solder and pots."

Patsy's eyes danced. There they were—millions of the tiny red berries, as thick and luscious as if they had been planted in Elysian fields for Arcadian folk to gather. "The wee, bonnie things!" she laughed. "Now, how were ye afther knowing they were here?"

The tinker cocked his head wisely. "I know more 'n that; I know where to find

yellow lady’s-slippers ’n’ the yewberries ’n’ hummin’-bird nests.”

She looked at him joyfully; he was turning out more and more to her liking. “Could ye be showing them to me, lad?” she asked.

The tinker eyed her bashfully. “Would you—care, then?”

“Sure, and I would;” and with that she was flat on the ground beside him, her fingers flying in search of strawberries.

So close they lay to the earth, so hidden by the waving sorrel and neighboring timothy, that had a whole county full of constables been abroad they could have passed within earshot and never seen them there.

With silence between them they ate until their lips were red and the cloud of dust on the hill back of them had whirled past, attendant on a sorrel mare and runabout. They ate until the road was quite empty once more; and then the tinker pulled Patsy to her feet by way of reminding her that Arden still lay beyond them.

“Do ye know,” said Patsy, after another silence and they were once more afoot, “I’m a bit doubtful if the banished duke’s daughter ever tasted anything half as sweet as those berries on her road to Arden; or, for that matter, if she found her fool half as wise. I’m mortial glad ye didn’t fall off that stump this morning afore I came by to fetch ye off.”

The tinker doffed his battered cap unexpectedly and swept her an astounding bow.

“Holy Saint Christopher!” ejaculated Patsy. “Ye’ll be telling me ye know Willie Shakespeare next.”

But the tinker answered with a blank stare, while the far-away, bewildered look of fear came back to his eyes. “Who’s he? Does he live ’round here?” he asked, dully.

Patsy wrinkled a perplexed forehead. “Lad, lad, ye have me bursting with wonderment! Ye are a rare combination, even for an Irish tinker; but if ye are a fair sample of what they are over here, sure the States have the Old Country beaten entirely.”

And the tinker laughed as he had laughed once before that day—the free,

untrammeled laugh of youth, while he saucily mimicked her Irish brogue. “Sure, ’tis the road to Arden, ye were sayin’, and anythin’ at all can happen on the way.”

The girl laughed with him. “And ye’ll be telling me next that this is three hundred years ago, and romance and Willie Shakespeare are still alive.” Her mind went racing back to the “once-upon-a-time days,” the days when chivalry walked abroad—before it took up its permanent residence between the covers of story-books—when poets and saints, kings’ sons and—tinkers journeyed afar to prove their manhood in deeds instead of inheritances; when it was no shame to live by one’s wits or ask hospitality at any strange door. Ah—those were the days! And yet—and yet—could not those days be given back to the world again? And would not the world be made a merrier, sweeter place because of them? If Patsy could have had her way she would have gone forth at the ring of each new day like the angel in the folk tale, and with her shears cut the nets that bound humanity down to petty differences in creed or birth or tongue.

“Faith, it makes one sick,” she thought. “We tell our children the tales of the Red Branch Knights—of King Arthur and the Knights of the Grail—and rejoice afresh over the beauty and wonder of them; we stand by the hour worshiping at the pictures of the saints—simple men and women who just went about doing kindness; and we read the Holy Book—the tales of Christ with his fishermen, wandering about, looking for some good deed to do, some helpfulness to give, some word of good cheer to speak; and we pray, ‘Father, make us good—even as Thou wert.’ And what does it all mean? We hurry through the streets afeared to stop on the corner and succor a stranger, or ashamed to speak a friendly word to a troubled soul in a tram-car; and we go home at night and lock our doors so that the beggar who asked for a bit of bread at noon can’t come round after dark and steal the silver.” Patsy sighed regretfully—if only this were olden times she would not be dreading to find Arden now and the man she was seeking there.

The tinker caught the sigh and looked over at her with a puzzled frown. “Tired?” he asked, laconically.

“Aye, a bit heart-tired,” she agreed, “and I’m wishing Arden was still a good seven miles away.”

Whereupon the tinker turned his head and grinned sheepishly toward the south.

The far-away hills had gathered in the last of the sun unto themselves when the two turned down the main street of a village. It was unquestionably a self-respecting village. The well-tarred sidewalks, the freshly painted meeting-house neighboring the engine-house “No. 1,” the homes with their well-mowed lawns in front and the tidily kept yards behind—all spoke of a decency and lawfulness that might easily have set the hearts of the most righteous of vagabonds a-quaking.

Patsy looked it carefully over. “Sure, Arden’s no name for it at all. They’d better have called it Gospel Center—or New Canaan. ’Twould be a grand place, though, to shut in all the Wilfred Peterson-Joneses, to keep them off the county’s nerves—and the rich men’s sons, to keep them off the public sympathy. But ’tis no place for us, lad.”

The tinker shifted his kit from one shoulder to the other and held his tongue.

Their entrance was what Patsy might have termed “fit.” The dogs of the village were on hand; that self-appointed escort of all doubtful characters barked them down the street with a lusty chorus of growls and snarls and sharp, staccato yaps. There were the children, too, of course; the older ones followed hot-foot after the dogs; the smaller ones came, a stumbling vanguard, sucking speculative thumbs or forefingers, as the choice might be. The hurly-burly brought the grown-ups to windows and doors.

“‘Hark! hark! the dogs do bark, the beggars are coming to town,’” quoted Patsy, with a grim little smile, and glanced across at the tinker. He was blushing fiercely. “Never mind, lad. ’Tis better being barked into a town than bitten out of it.”

For answer the tinker stopped and folded his arms sullenly. “I’m not such a fool I can’t feel somethin’. Don’t you reckon I know the shame it is to be keepin’ a decent woman company with these rags—and no wits?”

“If I’ve not misplaced my memory, ’twas myself that chose the company, and ’twas largely on account of those very things, I’m thinking. Do ye guess for a minute that if ye had been a rich man’s son in grand clothes—and manners to match—I’d ever have tramped a millimeter with ye?” She smiled coaxingly. “Faith! there’s naught the matter with those rags; a king’s son might be proud o’ them. As for foolishness, I’ve known worse faults in a man.”

The tinker winced imperceptibly, and all unconsciously Patsy went on: “’Tis the

heart of a man that measures him, after all, and not the wits that crowd his brain or the gold that lines his pockets. Oh, what do the folks who sit snug by their warm hearthsides, knitting their lives into comfortables to wrap around their real feelings and human impulses, ever know about their neighbors who come in to drink tea with them? And what do the neighbors in turn know about them? If I had my way, I'd tumble the whole sit-by-the-fire-and-gossip world out of doors and set them tramping the road to somewhere; 'tis the surest way of getting them acquainted with themselves and the neighbors. For that matter, all of us need it—just once in so often. And so—to the road, say I, with a fair greeting to all alike, be they king's son or beggar, for the road may prove the one's the other afore the journey's done."

"Amen!" said the tinker, devoutly, and Patsy laughed.

They had stopped in the middle of the street, midway between the church and the engine-house, Patsy so absorbed in her theories, the tinker so absorbed in Patsy, that neither was aware of the changed disposition of their circling escort until a cold, inquisitive nose and a warm, friendly tongue brought them to themselves. Greetings were returned in kind; heads were patted, backs stroked, ears scratched—only the children stood aloof and unconvinced. That is ever the way of it; it is the dogs who can better tell glorious vagabondage from inglorious rascality.

"Sure, ye can't fool dogs; I'd be taking the word of a dog before a man's anywhere when it comes to judging human beings." Patsy looked over her shoulder at the children. "Ye have the creatures won over entirely; 'tis myself might try what I could do with the wee ones. If we had the dogs and the childther to say a good word for us—faith! the grown-ups might forget how terribly respectable they were and make us welcome for one night." A sudden thought caught her memory. "I was almost forgetting why I had come. Hunt up a shop for me, lad, will ye? There must be one down the street a bit; and if ye'll loan me some of that half-crown the good man paid for your tinkering, I'd like to be having a New York News—if they have one—along with the fixings for a letter I have to be writing. While ye are gone I'll bewitch the childther."

And she did.

When the tinker returned she was sitting on the church steps, the children huddled so close about her that she was barely distinguishable in the encircling mass of shingled heads, bobby curls, pigtails and hair-ribbons. Deaf little ears

were being turned to parental calls for supper—a state of affairs unprecedented and unbelievable; while Patsy was bringing to an end the tale of Jack, the Irish hero of a thousand and one adventures.

“And he married the king’s daughter—and they lived happier than ye can tell me—and twice as happy as I can tell ye—in a castle that had a window for every day in the year.”

“That would make a fine endin’ for any lad’s story,” said the tinker, soberly. “‘A window for every day in the year’ would mean a whole lot of cheerfulness and sunshine, wouldn’t it?”

Patsy nodded. “But don’t those who take to the road fetch that castle along with them? Sure, there it is”—and her hand swept toward the skyline an encompassing circle about them—“with the sun flooding it from dawn to day’s end.” She turned to the eager faces about her, waiting for more. “Are ye still there? Faith! what have I been hearing this half-hour but hungry childther being called for tea. ’Twas ‘Joseph’ from the house across the way, and ‘Rebecca’ from off yonder, and ‘Susie May’ from somewhere else. Away with yez all to your mothers!” And Patsy scattered them as if they had been a flock of young sheep, scampering helter-skelter in all directions.

But one there was who lagged behind, a little boy with an old, old face, who watched the others go and then crept closer, held by the spell of the tale. He pulled at Patsy’s sleeve to gain attention. “I’m—I’m Joseph. Was it true—most of it?”

She nodded a reply as solemn as his question, “Aye, as true as youth and the world itself.”

“And would it come true for another boy—any boy—who went a-tramping off like that? Would he find—whatever he was wishin’ for?” And even as he spoke his eyes left hers and went searching for the far-away hills—and what might lie beyond.

“Come here, little lad.” Patsy drew him to her and put two steadying hands on his shoulders. She knew that he, too, had heard the call of the road and the longing to be gone—to be one with it, journeying to meet the mysterious unknown—was upon him. “Hearken to me: ’Tis only safe for a little lad to be going when he has three things to fetch with him—the wish to find something worth the bringing home, the knowledge of what makes good company along the

way, and trust in himself. When ye are sure of these, go; but ye'll no longer be a little lad, I'm thinking. And remember first to get the mother's blessing and 'God-speed,' same as Jack; a lad's journey ends nowhere that begins without that."

He went without a word, but content; and his eyes brimmed with visions.

Patsy watched him tenderly. "Who knows—he may find greatness on his road. Who knows?"

The tinker dropped the bundle he had brought back from the store into her lap, but she scarcely heeded him. Her eyes were looking out into the gathering dusk while her voice sank almost to a whisper.

"*Ochone!* but I've always envied that piper fellow from Hamelin town. Think of being able to gather up all the childther hereabouts, eager, hungry-hearted childther with mothers too busy or deaf to heed them, and leading them away to find their fortunes! Wouldn't that be wonderful, just?"

"What kind of fortunes?" asked the tinker.

"What but the best kind!" Patsy thought for a moment, and smiled whimsically while her eyes grew strangely starry in that early twilight. "Wouldn't I like to be choosing those fortunes, and wouldn't they be an odd lot, entirely! There'd be singing hearts that had learned to sing above trouble; there'd be true fellowship —the kind that finds brotherhood in beggars as well as—as prime ministers; there'd be peace of soul—not the kind that naps by the fire, content that the wind doesn't be blowing down his chimney, but the kind that fights above fighting and keeps neighbor from harrying neighbor. Troth, the world is in mortial need of fortunes like the last."

"And wouldn't you be choosin' gold for a fortune?" asked the tinker.

Patsy shook her head vehemently.

"Why not?"

"That's the why!" Suddenly Patsy clenched her hands and shook two menacing fists against the gathering dark. "I hate gold, along with the meanness and the lying and the thieving and the false judgment it brings into the world."

"But the world can't get along without it," reminded the tinker, shrewdly.

“Aye, but it can. It can get along without the hoarded gold, the inherited gold, the cheating, bribing, starving gold—that’s the kind I mean, the kind that gets into a man’s heart and veins until his fingers itch to gild everything he touches, like the rich man in the city yonder.”

“What rich man? I thought the—I thought the city was full o’ rich men.”

“Maybe; but there’s just one I’m thinking of now; and God pity him—and his son.”

The tinker eyed her stupidly. “How d’you know he has a son?”

Patsy laughed. “I guessed—maybe.” Then she looked down in her lap. “And here’s the news—with no light left to read it by; and I’m as hungry as an alley cat—and as tired as two. Ye’d never dream, to hear me talking, that I’d never had much more than a crooked sixpence to my name since I was born; and here I am, with that gone and not a slither to buy me bed or board for the night.”

The tinker looked down at her with an altogether strange expression, very different from anything Patsy had seen on his face all day. Had she chanced to catch it before it flickered out, it might have puzzled even her O’Connell wits to fathom the meaning of it. For it was as if the two had unexpectedly changed places, and the tender pity and protectiveness that had belonged to her had suddenly become his.

“Never mind, lass; there’s board in the kit for to-night—what the farm wife put up; and there’s this left, and I’ll—I’ll—” He did not finish; instead he dropped a few coins in her hand, the change from the half-dollar. Then he set about sweeping the dust from the step with his battered cap and spreading their meager meal before her.

They ate in silence, so deep in the business of dulling their appetites that they never noticed a small figure crossing the street with two goblets and a pitcher hugged tight in his arms. They never looked up until the things were set down beside them and a voice announced at their elbow, “Mother said I could bring it; it’s better ’n eatin’ dry.”

It was Joseph; and the pitcher held milk, still foamy from a late milking. He looked at Patsy a moment longingly, as if there was more he wanted to ask; but, overcome with a sudden bashful confusion, he took to his heels and disappeared around the corner of the meeting-house before they had time even to give thanks.

The tinker poured the goblets full, handed Patsy's to her with another grave bow, and, touching his to hers, said, soberly, "Here's to a friendly lass—the first I ever knew, I reckon."

For an instant she watched him, puzzled and amused; then she raised her glass slowly in reply. "And here's to tinkers—the world over!"

When everything but the crumbs were eaten she left him to scatter these and return Joseph's pitcher while she went to get "the loan of a light from the shopkeeper, and hunt up the news."

The store was store, post-office, and general news center combined. The news was at that very moment in process of circulation among the "boys"—a shirt-sleeved quorum from the patriarchs of the town circling the molasses-keg—the storekeeper himself topped it. They looked up as Patsy entered and acknowledged her "Good evening" with that perfect indifference, the provincial cloak in habitual use for concealing the most absolute curiosity. The storekeeper graciously laid the hospitality of his stool and counter and kerosene-lamp at her feet; in other words, he "cal'ated she was welcome to make herself t' home." All of which Patsy accepted. She spread out the newspaper on the counter in front of her; she unwrapped a series of small bundles—ink, pen, stamped envelope, letter-pad, and pen-holder, and eyed them with approval.

"The tinker's a wonder entirely," she said to herself; "but I would like to be knowing, did he or did the shopkeeper do the choosing?" Then she remembered the thing above all others that she needed to know, and swung about on the stool to address the quorum. "I say—can you tell me where I'd be likely to find a—person by the name of Bil—William Burgeman?"

"That rich feller's boy?"

Patsy nodded. "Have you seen him?"

The quorum thumbed the armholes of their vests and shook an emphatic negative. "Nope," volunteered the storekeeper; "too early for him or his sort to be diggin' out o' winter quarters."

"Are you sure? Do you know him?"

“Wall, can’t say exactly ef I know him; but I’d know ef he’d been hangin’ round, sartin. Hain’t been nothin’ like him loose in these parts. Has there, boys?”

The quorum confirmed the statement.

Patsy wrinkled up a perplexed forehead. “That’s odd. You see, he should have been here last night, to-day at the latest. I had it from somebody who knew, that he was coming to Arden.”

“Mebby he was,” drawled the storekeeper, while the quorum cackled in appreciation; “but this here is a good seven miles from Arden.”

Patsy’s arms fell limp across the counter, her head followed, and she sat there a crumpled-up, dejected little heap.

“By Jack-a-diamonds!” swore the storekeeper. “She ’ain’t swoomed, has she, boys?”

The quorum were on the verge of investigating when she denied the fact—in person. “Where am I? In the name of Saint Peter, what place is this?”

“This? Why, this is Lebanon.”

She smiled weakly. “Lebanon! Sounds more like it, anyhow. Thank you.”

She turned about and settled down to the paper while the “boys” reverted to their original topic of discussion. There were two items of news that interested her: Burgeman, senior, was critically ill; he had been ill for some time, but there had been no cause for apprehension until the last twenty-four hours; and Marjorie Schuyler had left for San Francisco—on the way to China. She was to be gone indefinitely.

“The heathen idols and the laundrymen are welcome to her,” growled Patsy, maliciously. “If they’d only fix her with the evil eye, or wish such a homesickness and lovesickness on her that ’twould last for a year and a day, I’d forgive her for what she’s made me wish on myself.”

Having relieved her mind somewhat, she was able to attend to the business of the letter with less inward discomfort. The letter was written to George Travis, already known as the manager of Miss St. Regis. He was the head of a well-known theatrical managerial firm in New York, and an old friend and well-wisher of Patsy’s. In it she explained, partly, her continued sojourn in America,

and frankly confessed to her financial needs. If he had anything anywhere that she could do until the fall bookings with her own company, she would be most humbly grateful. He might address her at Arden; she had great hopes of reaching there—some day. There was a postscript added in good, pure Donegal:

> And don’t ye be afeared of hurting my pride by offering anything too small. Just at present I’m like old Granny Donoghue’s lean pig—hungry for scrapings.

As she sealed the envelope a shadow fell athwart the counter. Patsy looked up to find the tinker peering at her sharply.

“You look clean tuckered out,” he announced, baldly; then he laid a coaxing hand on her arm. “I want you to come along with me. Will you, lass? I’ve found a place for you—a nice place. I’ve been talkin’ to Joseph’s mother, an’ she’s goin’ to look after you for the night.”

Patsy’s face crinkled up all over; the tinker could not have told—even if he had been in possession of all his senses—whether she was going to laugh or cry. As it turned out, she did neither; she just sighed, a tired, contented little sigh, slipping off the stool and dropping the letter into the post-box.

When she faced the tinker again her eyes were misty, and for all her courage she could not keep the quivering from her lips. She reached up impulsive, trusting hands to his shoulders: “Lad—lad—how were ye ever guessing that I’d reached the end o’ my wits and was needing some one to think for me? Holy Saint Michael! but won’t I be mortial glad to be feeling a respectable, Lebanon feather-bed under me!”

As the tinker led her out of the store the quorum eyed her silently for a moment. For a brief space there was a scraping of chairs and clearing of throats, indicative of some important comment.

“What sort of a lookin’ gal did that Green County sheriff say he was after?” inquired the storekeeper at last.

“Small, warn’t it?” suggested one of the quorum.

“Yep, guess it was. And what sort o’ clothes did he say she wore?”

“Brown!” chorused the quorum.

“Wall, boys”—the storekeeper wagged an accusing thumb in the direction of the

recently vacated stool—“she was small, warn’t she? An’ she’s got brown clothes, hain’t she? An’ she acts queer, doan’t she?”

The quorum nodded in solemn agreement.

“But she doan’t look like no thief,” interceded the youngest of the “boys.” He couldn’t have been a day over seventy, and it was more than likely that he was still susceptible to youth and beauty!

The rest glowered at him with plain disapproval, while the storekeeper shifted the course of his thumb and wagged it at him instead. “Si Perkins, that’s not for you to say—nor me, neither. That’s up to Green County; an’ I cal’ate I’ll ’phone over to the sheriff, come mornin’, an’ tell him our suspicions. By Jack-a-diamonds! I’ve got to square my conscience.”

The quorum invested their thumbs again and cleared their throats.

VII

THE TINKER PLAYS A PART

There is little of the day's happenings that escapes the ears of a country boy. Every small item of local interest is so much grist for his mill; and there is no more reliable method for a stranger to collect news than a sociable game of "peg" interspersed with a few casual but diplomatic questions. The tinker played "peg" the night after he and Patsy reached Lebanon—on the barn floor by the light of a bleary-eyed lantern with Joseph and his brethren, and thereby learned of the visit of the sheriff.

Afterward he sawed and split the apportioned wood which was to pay for Patsy's lodging, and went to sleep on the hay in a state of complete exhaustion. But, for all that, Patsy was wakened an hour before sun-up by a shower of pebbles on the tin roof of the porch, just under her window. Looking out, she spied him below, a silencing finger against his lips, while he waved a beckoning arm toward the road. Patsy dressed and slipped out without a sound.

"What has happened ye?" she whispered, anxiously, looking him well over for some symptoms of sickness or trouble.

His only reply was a mysterious shake of the head as he led the way down the village street, his rags flapping grotesquely in the dawn wind.

There was nothing for Patsy to do except to follow as fast as she could after his long, swinging strides. Lebanon still slept, close-wrapped in its peaceful respectability; even the dogs failed to give them a speeding bark. They stole away as silently as shadows, and as shadows went forth upon the open road to meet the coming day.

A mile beyond the township stone the tinker stopped to let Patsy catch up with him; it was a very breathless, disgruntled Patsy.

"Now, by Saint Brendan, what ails ye, lad, to be waking a body up at this time of day? Do ye think it's good morals or good manners to be trailing us off on a bare stomach like this—as if a county full of constables was at our heels? What's the meaning of it? And what will the good folk who cared for us the night think to find us gone with never a word of thanks or explanation?"

The tinker scratched his chin meditatively; it was marked by a day's more growth than on the previous morning, which did not enhance his comeliness or lessen his state of vagabondage. There was something about his appearance that made him out less a fool and more an uncouth rascal; one might easily have trusted him as well as pitied him yesterday—but to-day—Patsy's gaze was critical and not over-flattering.

He saw her look and met it, eye for eye, only he still fumbled his chin ineffectually. "Have you forgot?" he asked, a bit sheepishly. "There were the lady's-slippers; you said as how you cared about findin' 'em; and they're not near so pretty an' bright if they're left standin' too long after the dew dries."

Patsy pulled a wry little smile. "Is that so? And ye've been after making me trade a feather-bed and a good breakfast for—for the best color of lady's-slippers. Well, if I was Dan instead of myself, standing here, I'd be likely to tell ye to go to the devil—aye, an' help ye there with my two fists." Her cheeks were flushed and all the comradeship faded quickly from her eyes.

The tinker said never a word, only his lips parted in a coaxing smile which seemed to say, "Please go on believing in me," and his eyes still held hers unwaveringly.

And the tinker's smile won. Bit by bit Patsy's rigid attitude of condemnation relaxed; the comradeship crept back in her eyes, the smile to her lips. "Heigho! 'Tis a bad bargain ye can't make the best of. But mind one thing, Master Touchstone! Ye'll find the right road to Arden this time or ye and the duke's daughter will part company—for all Willie Shakespeare wrote it otherwise."

He nodded. "We can ask the way 's we go. But first we'll be gettin' the lady's-slippers and some breakfast. You'll see—I'll find them both for you, lass"; and he set off with his swinging stride straight across country, wagging his head wisely. Patsy fell in behind him, and the road was soon out of sight and earshot.

It was just about this time that the storekeeper at Lebanon got the Green County sheriff on the 'phone, and squared his conscience. "I cal'ate she's the guilty party," were his closing remarks. "She'd never ha' lighted out o' this 'ere town afore Christian folks were out o' bed ef she hadn't had somethin' takin' her. And what's more, she's keepin' bad company."

And so it came about that all the time the sorrel mare was being harnessed into the runabout the tinker was leading Patsy farther afield. And so it came to pass that when the mare's heels were raising the dust on the road between Lebanon and Arden, they were following a forest brook, deeper and deeper, into the woods.

They found it the most cheery, neighborly, and comfortable kind of a brook, the quiet and well-contained sort that one could step at will from bank to bank, and see with half an eye what a prime favorite it was among its neighbors. Patsy and the tinker marked how close things huddled to it, even creeping on to cover stones and gravel stretches; there were moss and ferns and little, clinging things, like baby's-breath and linnea. The major part of the bird population was bathing in the sunnier pools, soberly or with wild hilarity, according to disposition.

The tinker knew them all, calling to them in friendly fashion, at which they always answered back. Patsy listened silently, wrapped in the delight and beauty of it. On went the brook—dancing here in a broken patch of sunshine—quieting there between the banks of rock-fern and columbine, to better paint their prettiness; and all the while singing one farther and farther into the woods. She was just wondering if there could be anything lovelier than this when the tinker stopped, still and tense as a pointer. She craned her head and looked beyond him—looked to where the woods broke, leaving for a few feet a thinly shaded growth of beech and maple. The sunlight sifted through in great, unbroken patches of gold, falling on the beds of fern and moss and—yes, there they were, the promised lady's-slippers.

A little, indrawn sigh of ecstasy from Patsy caused the tinker to turn about. "Then you're not hatin' gold when you find it growin' green that-a-way?" he chuckled.

Patsy shook her head with vehemence. "Never! And wouldn't it be grand if nature could be gathering it all up from everywhere and spinning it over again into the likes of those! In the name o' Saint Francis, do ye suppose if the English poets had laid their two eyes to anything so beautiful as what's yonder they'd ever have gone so daffy over daffodils?"

"They never would," agreed the tinker.

Patsy studied him with a sharp little look. "And what do ye know about English poets, pray?"

His lower jaw dropped in a dull, foolish fashion. “Nothin’; but I know daff’dils,” he explained at last.

And at that moment the call of a thrush came to them from just across the glade. Patsy listened spellbound while he sang his bubbling song of gladness through half a score of times.

“Is it the flowers singing?” she asked at last, her eyes dancing mischievously.

“It might be the souls o’ the dead ones.” The tinker considered thoughtfully a moment. “Maybe the souls o’ flowers become birds, same as ours becomes angels—wouldn’t be such a deal o’ difference—both takin’ to wings and singin’.” He chuckled again. “Anyhow, that’s the bellbird; and I sent him word yesterday by one o’ them tattlin’ finches to be on hand just about this time.”

“Ye didn’t order a breakfast the same way, did ye?”

The tinker threw back his head and laughed. “I did, then,” and, before Patsy could strip her tongue of its next teasing remark, he had vanished as quickly and completely as if magic had had a hand in it.

A crescendo of snapping twigs and rustling leaves marked his going, however; and Patsy leaped the brook and settled herself, tailor fashion, in the midst of the sunshine and the lady’s-slippers. She unpinned the rakish beaver and tossed it from her; off came the Norfolk jacket, and followed the beaver. She eyed the rest of her costume askance; she would have sorely liked to part with that, too, had she but the Lord’s assurance that He would do as well by her as he had by the lilies of the field or the lady’s-slippers.

“’Tis surprising how wearisome the same clothes can grow when on the back of a human being—yet a flower can wear them for a thousand years or more and ye never go tired of them. I’m not knowing why, but—somehow—I’d like to be looking gladsome—to-day.”

She stretched her arms wide for a minute, in a gesture of intense longing; then the glory of the woods claimed her again and she gave herself over completely to the wonder and enjoyment of them. Her eyes roamed about her unceasingly for every bit of prettiness, her ears caught the symphony of bird and brook and soughing wind. So still did she sit that the tinker, returning, thought for a moment that she had gone, and stood, knee-deep in the brakes, laden to the chin and covered with the misery of poignant disappointment. For him all the music

of the place had turned to laughing discord—until he spied her.

“I thought”—his tongue stumbled—“I was thinkin’ you had gone—sudden-like—same as you came—down the road yesterday.” He paused a moment. “You wouldn’t go off by yourself and leave a lad without you said somethin’ about it first, would you?”

“I’ll not leave ye till we get to Arden.”

“An’—an’ what then?”

“The road must end for me there, lad. What I came to do will be done, and there’ll be no excuse for lingering. But I’ll not forget to wish ye ‘God-speed’ along your way before I go.”

A sly look came into the tinker’s eyes. Patsy never saw it, for he was bending close over the huge basket he had brought; she only caught a tinge of exultation in his voice as he said, “Then that’s a’right, if you’ll promise your comp’ny till we fetch up in Arden.”

With that he went busily about preparations for breakfast, Patsy watching him, plainly astonished. He gathered bark and brush and kindled a fire on a large flat rock which he had moved against a near-by boulder. About it he fastened a tripod of green saplings, from which he hung a coffee-pot, filled from the brook.

“I’m praying there’s more nor water in it,” murmured Patsy. And a moment later, as the tinker shook out a small white table-cloth from the basket and spread it at her feet, she clasped her hands and repeated with perfect faith, “‘Little goat bleat, table get set’; I smell the coffee.”

Out of the basket came little green dishes, a pat of butter, a jug of cream, a bowl of berries, a plate of biscuits. “Riz,” was the tinker’s comment as he put down the last named; and then followed what appeared to Patsy to be round, brown, sugared buns with holes in them. These he passed twice under her nose with a triumphant flourish.

“And what might they be?” Her curiosity was reaching the breaking-point. “If ye bring out another thing from that basket I’ll believe ye’re in league with Bodh Dearg himself, or ye’ve stolen the faeries’ trencher of plenty.”

For reply the tinker dived once more beneath the cover and brought out a frying-pan full of bacon, and four white eggs. “Think whatever you’re mind to, I’m

going to fry these.” But after he had raked over the embers to his complete satisfaction and placed the pan on them, he came back and, picking up one of the “brown buns,” slipped it over Patsy’s forefinger. “This is a wishin’-ring,” he announced, soberly, “though most folks calls ’em somethin’ different. Now if you wish a wish—and eat it—all but the hole, you’ll have what you’ve been wishin’ for all your life.”

“How soon will ye be having it?”

“In as many days as there are bites.”

So Patsy bit while the tinker checked them off on his fingers. “One, two, three, four, five, six. You’ll get your wish by the seventh day, sure, or I’m no tinker.”

illustration2

“If you wish a wish and eat it—all but the hole, you’ll have what you’ve been wishin’ for all your life.”

“But are ye?” Patsy shook the de-ringed finger at him accusingly. “I’m beginning to have my doubts as to whether ye’re a tinker at all. Ye are foolish one minute, and ye’ve more wits than I have the next; I’ve caught ye looking too lonesome and helpless to be allowed beyond reach of our mother’s kerchief-end, and yet last night and the day ye’ve taken care of me as if ye’d been hired out to tend babies since ye were one yourself. As for your language, ye never speak twice the same.”

The tinker grinned. “That bacon’s burnin’; I—cal’ate I’d better turn it, hadn’t I?”

“I—cal’ate you had,” and Patsy grinned back at him derisively.

The tinker was master of ceremonies, and he served her as any courtier might have served his liege lady. He shook out the diminutive serviette he had brought for her and spread it across her lap; he poured her coffee and sweetened it according to direction; he even buttered her “riz” biscuits and poured the cream on her berries.

“Are ye laboring under the delusion that the duke’s daughter was helpless, entirely?” she asked, at length.

The tinker shook an emphatic negative. “I was just thinkin’ she might like things a mite decent—onct in a while.”

“Lad—lad—who in the wide world are ye!” Patsy checked her outburst with a warning hand: “No—don’t ye be telling me. Ye couldn’t turn out anything better nor a tinker—and I’d rather keep ye as I found ye. So if ye have a secret—mind it well; and don’t ye be letting it loose to scare the two of us into over-wise, conventional folk. We’ll play Willie Shakespeare comedy to the end of the road—please God!”

“Amen!” agreed the tinker, devoutly, as he threw her portion of fried eggs neatly out of the pan into her plate.

It was not until she was served that he looked after his own wants; then they ate in silence, both too hungry and too full of their own thoughts to loosen their tongues.

Once the tinker broke the silence. “Your wish—what was it?” he asked.

“That’s telling,” said Patsy. “But if ye’ll confess to where ye came by this heavenly meal, I might confess to the wish.”

He rubbed his chin solemnly for an instant; then he beamed. “I’ll tell ye. I picked it off o’ the fern-tops and brambles as I came along.”

“Of course ye did,” agreed Patsy, with fine sarcasm, “and for my wish—I was after thinking I’d marry the king’s son.”

They looked at each other with the teasing, saucy stare of two children; then they laughed as care-free and as merrily.

“Maybe you’ll get your wish,” he suggested, soberly.

“Maybe I will,” agreed Patsy, with mock solemnity.

A look of shrewdness sprang into the tinker’s face. “But you said you hated gold. You couldn’t marry a king’s son ’thout havin’ gold—lots of it.”

“Aye—but I could! Couldn’t I be making him throw it away before ever I’d marry him?” And Patsy clapped her hands triumphantly.

“An’ you’d marry him—poor?” The tinker’s eyes kindled suddenly, as he asked it—for all the world as if her answer might have a meaning for him.

Patsy never noticed. She was looking past him—into the indistinguishable wood-tangle beyond. “Sure, we wouldn’t be poor. We’d be blessed with nothing

—that’s all!”

For those golden moments of romancing Patsy’s quest was forgotten; they might have reached Arden and despatched her errand, for all the worriment their loitering caused her. As for the tinker, if he had either a mission or a destination he gave no sign for her to reckon by.

They dallied over the breakfast; they dallied over the aftermath of picking up and putting away and stamping out the charred twigs and embers; and then they dallied over the memory of it all. Patsy spun a hundred threads of fancy into tales about the forest, while the tinker called the thickets about them full of birds, and whistled their songs antiphonally with them.

“Do ye know,” said Patsy, with a deep sigh, “I’m happier than ye can tell me, and twice as happy as I can tell ye.”

“An’ this, hereabouts, wouldn’t make a bad castle,” suggested the tinker, irrelevantly.

What Patsy might have answered is not recorded, for they both happened to look up for the first time in a long space and saw that the sky above their heads had grown a dull, leaden color. They were no longer sitting in the midst of sunlight; the lady’s-slippers had lost their golden radiance; the brook sounded plaintive and melancholy, and from the woods fringing the open came the call of the bob-white.

“He’s singin’ for rain. Won’t hurt a mite if we make toward some shelter.” The tinker pulled Patsy to her feet and gathered up the basket and left-overs.

“Hurry,” said Patsy, with a strange, little, twisted smile on her lips. “Of course I was knowing, like all faery tales, it had to have an ending; but I want to remember it, just as we found it first—sprinkled with sunshine and not turning dull and gray like this.”

She started plunging through the woods, and the tinker was obliged to turn her about and set her going right, with the final instruction to follow her nose and he would catch up with her before she had caught up with it. She had reached the road, however, and thunder was grumbling uncomfortably near when the tinker joined her.

“It’s goin’ to be a soaker,” he announced, cheerfully.

“Then we’d better tramp fast as we can and ask the first person we pass, are we on the right road to Arden.”

They tramped, but they passed no one. The road was surprisingly barren of shelters, and, strangely enough, of the two houses they saw one was temporarily deserted and the other unoccupied. The wind came with the breaking of the storm—that cold, piercing wind that often comes in June as a reminder that winter has not passed by so very long before. It whipped the rain across their faces and cut down their headway until it seemed to Patsy as if they barely crawled. They came to a tumble-down barn, but she was too cold and wet to stop where there was no fire.

“Any place that’s warm,” she shouted across to the tinker; and he shouted back, as they rounded the bend of the road.

“See, there it is at last!”

The sight of a house ahead, whose active chimney gave good evidence of a fire within, spurred Patsy’s lagging steps. But in response to their knocking, the door was opened just wide enough to frame the narrow face of a timid-eyed, nervous woman who bade them be gone even before they had gathered breath enough to ask for shelter.

“Faith, ’tis a reminder that we are no longer living three hundred years ago,” Patsy murmured between tightening lips. “How long in, do ye think, the fashion has been—to shut doors on poor wanderers?”

At the next house, a half-mile beyond, they fared no better. The woman’s voice was curter, and the uninviting muzzle of a bull-terrier was thrust out between the door and the woman’s skirts. As they turned away Patsy’s teeth were chattering; the chill and wet had crept into her bones and blood, turning her lips blue and her cheeks ashen; even the cutting wind failed to color them.

“Curse them!” muttered the tinker, fiercely. “If I only had a coat to put around you—anything to break the wind. Curse them warm and dry inside there!” and he shook his fist at the forbidden door.

Patsy tried to smile, but failed. “Faith! I haven’t the breath to curse them; but God pity them, that’s all.”

Before she had finished the tinker had a firm grip of her arm. “Hang it! If no one will take us in, we’ll break in. Cheer up, lass; I’ll have you by a crackling good

fire if I have to steal the wood."

He hurried her along—somewhere. Weariness and bodily depression closed her eyes; and she let him lead her—whither she neither wondered nor cared. Time and distance ceased to exist for her; she stumbled along, conscious of but two things—a fear that she would be ill again with no one to tend her, and a gigantic craving for heat—heat!

When she opened her eyes again they had stopped and were standing under a shuttered window at what appeared to be the back of a summer cottage; the tinker was prying a rock out of the mud at their feet. In a most business-like manner he used it to smash the fastening of the shutters, and, when these were removed, to break the small, leaded pane of glass nearest the window-fastening. It was only a matter of seconds then before the window was opened and Patsy boosted over the sill into the kitchen beyond.

"Ye'd best stand me in the sink and wring me out, or I'll flood the house," Patsy managed to gasp. "I'd do it myself, but I know, if I once let go of my hands, I'll shake to death."

The tinker followed her advice, working the water out of her dripping garments in much the same fashion that he would have employed had she been a half-drowned cat. In spite of her numbness Patsy saw the grim humor of it all and came perilously near to a hysterical laugh. The tinker unconsciously forestalled it by shouldering her, as if she had been a whole bag of water-soaked cats, and carrying her up the stairs. After looking into three rooms he deposited her on the threshold of a fourth.

"It has the look of women folks; you're sure to find some left-behind clothes o' theirs hanging up somewhere. Come down when you're dry an' I'll have that fire waiting for you."

What followed was all a dream to Patsy's benumbed senses: the search in drawers and closets for things to put on, and the finding of them; the insistent aching of fingers and arms in trying to adjust them, and the persistent refusal of brain to direct them with any degree of intelligence. She came down the stairs a few minutes later, dragging a bundle of wet clothes after her, and found the tinker kneeling by the hearth, still in his dripping rags, and heaping more logs on the already blazing fire.

He rose as she came toward him, took the clothes from her and dropped them on

the hearth. He seemed decidedly hazy and remote as he brought a steamer rug from somewhere and wrapped it about her; his voice, as he coaxed her over to the couch, apparently came from miles away. As Patsy sank down, too weary to speak, the figure above her took upon itself once more that suggestion of unearthliness that it had worn when she had discovered it at dawn—hanging to the stump fencing. For an instant the glow of the fire threw the profile into the same shadowy outlines that the rising sun had first marked for her; and the image lingered even after her eyes had closed.

“Sure, he’s fading away like Oisiu, Gearoidh Iarla, and all of them in the old tales,” she thought, drowsily. “Like as not, when I open my eyes again he’ll be clear gone.” This was where the dream ended and complete oblivion began.

How long it lasted she could not have told; she only knew she was awake at last and acutely conscious of everything about her; and that she was warm—warm—warm! The room was dark except for the firelight; but whether it was evening or night or midnight, she could not have guessed. She found herself speculating in a hazy fashion where she was, whose house they had broken into, and what the tinker had done with himself. She had a vague, far-away feeling that she ought to be disturbed over something—her complete isolation with a strange companion on a night like this; but the physical contentment, the reaction from bodily torture, drugged her sensibilities. She closed her eyes lazily again and listened to the wind howling outside with the never-ceasing accompaniment of beating rain. She was content to revel in that feeling of luxury that only the snugly housed can know.

A sound in the room roused her. She opened her eyes as lazily as she had closed them, expecting to find the tinker there replenishing the fire; instead—She sat up with a jerk, speechless, rubbing her eyes with two excited fists, intent on proving the unreality of what she had seen; but when she looked again there it was—the clean-cut figure of a man immaculate in white summer flannels.

The blood rushed to Patsy’s face; mortification, dread, sank into her very soul; the drug of physical contentment had lost its power. For the first time in her life she was dominated by the dictates of convention. She cursed her irresponsible love of vagabondage along with her freedom of speech and manner and her lack of conservative judgment. These had played her false and shamed her

womanhood.

The Patsys of this world are not given to trading on their charm or powers of attraction to win men to them—it is against their creed of true womanhood. Moreover, a man counts no more than a woman in their sum total of daily pleasure, and when they choose a comrade it is for human qualities, not sexualities. And because of this, this particular Patsy felt the more intensely the humiliation and challenge of the moment. She hated herself; she hated the man, whoever he might be; she hated the tinker for his share in it all.

Anger loosened her tongue at last. “Who, in the name of Saint Bridget, are ye?” she demanded.

And the man in white flannels threw back his head and laughed.

VIII

WHEN TWO WERE NOT COMPANY

The laughter would have proved contagious to any except one in Patsy's humor; and, as laughing alone is sorry business, the man soon sobered and looked over at Patsy with the merriment lingering only in his eyes.

"By Willie Shakespeare, it's the duke's daughter in truth!"

The words made little impression on her; it was the laugh and voice that puzzled her; they were unmistakably the tinker's. But there was nothing familiar about face, figure, or expression, although Patsy studied them hard to find some trace of the man she had been journeying with.

With a final bewildered shake of the head her eyes met his coldly, mockingly. "My name is Patricia O'Connell"—her voice was crisp and tart; "it's the Irish for a short temper and a hot one. Now maybe you will have the grace to favor me with yours."

"Just the tinker," he complied, amiably, "and very much at your service." This was accompanied by a sweeping bow.

Patsy had marked that bow on two previous occasions, and it testified undeniably to the man's identity. Yet Patsy's mind balked at accepting it; it was too galling to her pride, too slanderous of her past judgment and perceptibilities. A sudden rush of anger brought her to her feet, and, coming over to the opposite side of the hearth, she faced him, flushed, determined, and very dignified. It is to be doubted if Patsy could have sustained the latter with any degree of conviction if she could have seen herself. Straying strands of still damp hair curled bewitchingly about her face, bringing out the roundness of cheek and chin and the curious, guileless expression of her eyes. Moreover, the coquettish gown she wore was entrancing; it was a light blue, tunic affair with wide baby collar and cuffs, and a Roman girdle; and she had found stockings to match, with white buckskin pumps. It had been blind chance on her part—this making of a toilet, but the effect was none the less adorable—and condemning to dignity.

This was evidently appreciated by the tinker, for his face was an odd mixture of grotesque solemnity and keen enjoyment. Patsy was altogether too flustered to diagnose his expression, but it added considerably to the temperature of the

O’Connell temper. In view of the civilized surroundings and her state of dignity Patsy had taken to King’s English with barely a hint of her native brogue.

“If you are the tinker—and I presume you are—I should very much appreciate an explanation. Would you mind telling me how you happened to be hanging onto that stump, in rags, and looking half-witted when I—when I came by?”

“Why—just because I was a tinker,” he laughed.

“Then what are you now?”

“Once a tinker, always a tinker. I’m just a good-for-nothing; good to mend other people’s broken pots, and little else; knowing more about birds than human beings, and poor company for any one saving the very generous-hearted.”

Patsy stamped her foot. “Why can’t you play fair? Isn’t it only decent to tell who you are and what you were doing on the road when I found you?”

“You know as well as I what I was doing—hanging onto the stump and trying to gather my wits. And don’t you think it would be nicer if you talked Irish? It doesn’t make a lad feel half as comfortable or as much at home when he is addressed in such perfect English.”

Patsy snorted. “In a minute I’ll not be addressing you at all. Do you think, if I had known you were what you are, I would ever have been so—so brazen as to ask for your company and tramp along with you for—*two* days—or be here, now? Oh!” she finished, with a groan and a fierce clenching of her fists.

“No, I don’t think so. That’s why I didn’t hurry about gathering up the wits; it seemed more sociable without them. I wouldn’t have bothered with them now, only I couldn’t stay in those rags any longer; it wouldn’t have been kind to the furniture or the people who own it. These togs were the only things that came anywhere near to fitting me; and, somehow, a three-days’ beard didn’t match them. Lucky for me, Heaven blessed the house with a good razor, and, presto! when the beard and the rags were gone the wits came back. I’m awfully sorry if you don’t like them—the wits, I mean.”

“Sure, ye must be!” Unconsciously Patsy had stepped back onto her native sod and her tongue fairly dripped with irony. “So ye thought ye’d have a morsel o’ fun at the expense of a strange lass, while ye laughed up your sleeve at how clever ye were.”

“See here! don’t be too hard, please! That foolishness was real enough; I had just been knocked over the head by the kind gentleman from whom I borrowed the rags. I paid him a tidy sum for the use of them, and evidently he thought it was a shame to leave me burdened with the balance of my money. Arguing wouldn’t have done any good, so he took the simplest way—just sandbagged me and—”

“Was it much money?”

“Mercy, no! Just a few dollars, hardly worth the anæsthesia.”

“And ye were—half-witted, then?”

“Half? A bare sixteenth! It wasn’t until afternoon—until we reached the church at the cross-roads—that I really came into full possession—” The sentence trailed off into an inexplicable grin.

“And after that, ’twas I played the fool.” Patsy’s eyes kindled.

The tinker grew serious; he dug his hands deep into his capacious white flannels as if he were very much in earnest. “Can’t you understand? If I hadn’t played foolish you would never have let me wander with you—you just said so. I knew that, and I was selfish, lonely—and I didn’t want to give you up. You can’t blame me. When a man meets with genuine comradeship for the first time in his life—the kind he has always wanted, but has grown to believe doesn’t exist—he’s bound to win a crumb of it for himself, it costs no more than a trick of foolishness. Surely you understand?”

“Oh, I understand! I’m understanding more and more every minute—’tis the gift of your tongue, I’m thinking—and I’m wondering which of us will be finding it the pleasantest.” She flashed a look of unutterable scorn upon him. “If ye were not half-witted, would ye mind telling me how we came to be taking the wrong road at the church?”

The tinker choked.

“Aye, I thought so. Ye lied to me.”

“No, not exactly; you see—” he floundered helplessly.

“Faith! don’t send a lie to mend a lie; ’tis poor business, I can promise ye.”

“Well,”—the tinker’s tone grew dogged—“was it such a heinous sin, after all, to want to keep you with me a little longer?”

The fire in Patsy's eyes leaped forth at last. "Sin, did ye say? Faith! 'tis the wrong name ye've given it entirely. 'Twas amusement, ye meant; the fun of trading on a girl's ignorance and simple-heartedness; the trick of getting the good makings of a tale to tell afterward to other fine gentlemen like yourself."

"So you think—"

"Aye, I think 'twas a joke with ye—from first to last. Maybe ye made a wager with some one—or ye were dared to take to the road in rags—or ye did it for copy; ye're not the first man who has done the like for the sake of a new idea for a story. 'Twas a pity, though, ye couldn't have got what ye wanted without making a girl pay with her self-respect."

The tinker winced, reaching out a deprecatory hand. "You are wrong; no one has paid such a price. There are some natures so clear and fine that chance and extremity can put them anywhere—in any company—without taking one whit from their fineness or leaving one atom of smirch. Do you think I would have brought you here and risked your trust and censorship of my honor if you had not been—what you are? A decent man has as much self-respect as a decent woman, and the same wish to keep it."

But Patsy's comprehension was strangely deaf.

"'Tis easy enough trimming up poor actions with grand words. There'd have been no need of risking anything if ye had set me on the right road this morning; I would have been in Arden now, where I belong. But that wasn't your way. 'Twas a grand scheme ye had—whatever it might be; and ye fetch me away afore the town is up and I can ask the road of any one; and ye coax me across pastures and woods, a far cry from passing folk and reliable information; and ye hold me, loitering the day through, till ye have me forgetting entirely why I came, along with the promise laid on me, and the other poor lad—Heaven help him!"

"Oho!" The tinker whistled unconsciously.

"Oho!" mimicked Patsy; "and is there anything so wonderfully strange in a lass looking after a lad? Sure, I'm hating myself for not minding his need better; and, Holy Saint Michael, how I'm hating ye!" She ran out of the room and up the stairway.

The tinker was after her in a twinkling. He reached the foot of the stairs before

she was at the top. “Please—please wait a minute,” he pleaded. “If there’s another—lad, a lad you—love, that I have kept you from—then I hate myself as much as you do. All I can say is that I didn’t think—didn’t guess; and I’m no end sorry.”

Patsy leaned over the banisters and looked down at him through eyes unmistakably wet. “What does it matter to ye if he’s the lad I love or not? And can’t a body do a kindness for a lad without loving him?”

“Thank Heaven! she can. You have taught me that miracle—and I don’t believe the other lad will grudge me these few hours, even if you do. Who knows? My need may have been as great as his.”

Patsy frowned. “All ye needed was something soft to dull your wits on; what he’s needing is a father—and mother—and sweetheart—and some good 1915 bonds of human trust.”

The tinker folded his arms over the newel-post and smiled. “And do you expect to be able to supply them all?”

“God forbid!” Patsy laughed in spite of herself.

And the tinker, scoring a point, took courage and went on: “Don’t you suppose I realize that you have given me the finest gift a stranger can have—the gift of honest, unconditional friendship, asking no questions, demanding no returns? It is a rare gift for any man—and I want to keep it as rare and beautiful as when it was given. So please don’t mar it for me—now. Please—!” His hands went out in earnest appeal.

The anger was leaving Patsy’s face; already the look of comradeship was coming back in her eyes; her lips were beginning to curve in the old, whimsical smile. And the tinker, seeing, doubled his courage. “Now, won’t you please forgive me and come down and get some supper?”

She hesitated and, seeing that her decision was hanging in the balance, he recklessly tried his hand at tipping the scales in his favor. “I’m no end of a good forager, and I’ve rooted out lots of things in tins and jars. You must be awfully hungry; remember, it’s hours since our magical breakfast with the lady’s-slippers.”

Patsy’s fist banged the railing with a startling thud. “I’ll never break fast with ye again—never—never—never! Ye’ve blighted the greenest memory I ever had!”

And with that she was gone, slamming the door after her by way of dramatic emphasis.

It was a forlorn and dejected tinker that returned alone to the empty hearthside. The bright cheer of the fire had gone; the room had become a place of shadows and haunting memories. For a long time he stood, brutally kicking one of the fire-dogs and snapping his fingers at his feelings; and then, being a man and requiring food, he went out into the pantry where he had been busily preparing to set forth the hospitality of the house when Patsy had wakened.

But before he ate he found a tray and covered it with the best the pantry afforded. He mounted the stairs with it in rather a lagging fashion, being wholly at sea concerning the temperature of his reception. His conscience finally compromised with his courage, and he put the tray down outside Patsy's door.

It was not until he was half-way down the stairs again that he called out, bravely, "Oh—I say—Miss—O'Connell; you'd better change your mind and eat something."

He waited a good many minutes for an answer, but it came at last; the voice sounded broken and wistful as a crying child's. "Thank—you!" and then, "Could ye be after telling me how far it is from here to Arden?"

"Let me see—about—seven miles;" and the tinker laughed; he could not help it.

The next instant Patsy's door opened with a jerk and the tray was precipitated down the stairs upon him. It was the conclusive evidence of the O'Connell temper.

But the tinker never knew that Patsy wept herself remorsefully to sleep; and Patsy never knew that the last thing the tinker did that night was to cut a bedraggled brown coat and skirt and hat into strips and burn them, bit by bit. It was not altogether a pleasant ceremony—the smell of burning wool is not incense to one's nostrils; and the tinker heaved a deep sigh of relief as the last flare died down into a heap of black, smudgy embers.

"That Green County sheriff will have a long way to go now if he's still looking for a girl in a brown suit," he chuckled.

Sleep laid the O’Connell temper. When Patsy awoke her eyes were as serene as the patches of June sky framed by her windows, and she felt at peace with the world and all the tinkers in it.

“’Twould be flattering the lad too much entirely to make up with him before breakfast; but I’ll be letting him tramp the road to Arden with me, and we’ll part there good friends. Troth, maybe he was a bit lonesome,” she added by way of concession.

She sprang out of bed with a glad little laugh; the day had a grand beginning, spilling sunshine and bird-song into every corner of her room, and to Patsy’s optimistic soul a good beginning insured a better ending. As she dressed she planned that ending to her own liking and according to the most approved rules of dramatic construction: The tinker should turn out a wandering genius, for in her heart she could not believe the accusations she had hurled against him the night past; when they reached Arden they would come upon the younger Burgeman, contemplating immediate suicide; this would give her her cue, and she would administer trust and a general bracer with one hand as she removed the revolver with the other; in gratitude he would divulge the truth about the forgery—he did it to save the honor of some lady—after which the tinker would sponsor him, tramping him off on the road to take the taste of gold out of his mouth and teach him the real meaning of life.

Patsy had no difficulty with her construction until she came to the final curtain; here she hesitated. She might trail off to find King Midas and square Billy with him, or—the curtain might drop leaving her right center, wishing both lads “God-speed.” Neither ending was entirely satisfactory, however; the mental effect of the tinker going off with some one else—albeit it was another lad—was anything but satisfying.

The house was strangely quiet. Patsy stopped frequently in her playmaking to listen for some sounds of human occupancy other than her own, but there was none.

“Poor lad! Maybe I killed him last night when I kicked the tea-things down the stairs after him; or, most likely, the O’Connell temper has him stiffened out with fear so he daren’t move hand or foot.”

A moment later she came down the stairs humming, “Blow, blow, thou winter wind,” her eyes dancing riotously.

Now, by all rights, dramatic or otherwise, the tinker should have been on hand, waiting her entrance. But tinker there was none; nothing but emptiness—and a breakfast-tray, spread and ready for her in the pantry.

Curiosity, uneasiness mastered her pride and she called—once—twice—several times. But there came no answering sound save the quickening of her own heart-beats under the pressure of her held breath.

She was alone in the house.

A feeling of unutterable loneliness swept over Patsy. She came back to the stairs and stood with her hands clasping the newel-post—for all the world like a shipwrecked maiden clinging to the last spar of the ship. No, she did not believe a shipwrecked person could feel more deserted—more left behind than she did; moreover, it was an easier task to face the inevitable when it took the form of blind, impersonal disaster. When it was a matter of deliberate, intentional human motives—it became well-nigh unbearable. Had the tinker gone to be rid of her company and her temper? Had he decided that the road was a better place without her? Maybe he had taken the matter of the other lad too seriously—and, thinking them sweethearts, had counted himself an undesired third, and betaken himself out of their ways. Or—maybe—he was fearsome of constables—and had hurried away to cover his trail and leave her safe.

“Maybe a hundred things,” moaned Patsy, disconsolately; “maybe ’tis all a dream and there’s no road and no quest and no Rich Man’s son and no tinker, and no anything. Maybe—I’ll be waking up in another minute and finding myself back in the hospital with the delirium still on me.”

She closed her eyes, rubbed them hard with two mandatory fists, then opened them to test the truth of her last remark; and it happened that the first object they fell on was a photograph in a carved wooden frame on the mantel-shelf in the room across the hall. It was plainly visible from where Patsy stood by the stairs—it was also plainly familiar. With a run Patsy was over there in an instant, the photograph in her hands.

“Holy Saint Patrick, ’tis witchcraft!” she cried under her breath. “How in the name of devils—or saints—did he ever get this taken, developed, printed, and framed—between the middle of last night and the beginning of this morning!”

For Patsy was looking down at a picture of the tinker, in white flannels, with head thrown back and laughing.

IX

PATSY ACQUIRES SOME INFORMATION

With the realization that the tinker was gone, the empty house suddenly became oppressive. Patsy put down the photograph with a quick little sigh, and hunted up the breakfast-tray he had left spread and ready for her, carrying it out to the back porch. There in the open and the sunshine she ate, according to her own tabulation, three meals—a left-over supper, a breakfast, and the lunch which she was more than likely to miss later, She was in the midst of the lunch when an idea scuttled out of her inner consciousness and pulled at her immediate attention. She rose hurriedly and went inside. Room after room she searched, closet after closet.

In one she came upon a suit of familiar white flannels; and she passed them slowly—so slowly that her hands brushed them with a friendly little greeting. But the search was a barren one, and she returned to the porch as empty-handed and as mystified as she had left it; the heap of ashes on the hearth held no meaning for her, and consequently told no tales.

“’Tis plain enough what’s happened,” she said, soberly, to the sparrows who were skirmishing for crumbs. “Just as I said, he was fearsome of those constables, after all, and he’s escaped in my clothes!”

The picture of the tinker’s bulk trying to disguise itself behind anything so scanty as her shrunken garments proved too irresistible for her sense of humor; she burst into peal after peal of laughter which left her weak and wet-eyed and dispelled her loneliness like fog before a clearing wind.

“Anyhow, if he hasn’t worn them he’s fetched them away as a wee souvenir of an O’Connell; and if I’m to reach Arden in any degree of decency ’twill have to be in stolen clothes.”

But she did not go in the blue frock; the realization came to her promptly that that was no attire for the road and an unprotected state; she must go with dull plumage and no beguiling feathers. So she searched again, and came upon a blue-and-white “middy” suit and a dark-blue “Norfolk.” The exchange brought forth the veriest wisp of a sigh, for a woman’s a woman, on the road or off it; and what one has not a marked preference for the more becoming frock?

Patsy proved herself a most lawful housebreaker. She tidied up and put away everything; and the shutter having already been replaced over the broken window by the runaway tinker, she turned the knob of the Yale lock on the front door and put one foot over the threshold. It was back again in an instant, however; and this time it was no lawful Patsy that flew back through the hall to the mantel-shelf. With the deftness and celerity of a true housebreaker she de-framed the tinker and stuffed the photograph in the pocket of her stolen Norfolk.

“Sure, he promised his company to Arden,” she said, by way of stilling her conscience. Then she crossed the threshold again; and this time she closed the door behind her.

The sun was inconsiderately overhead. There was nothing to indicate where it had risen or whither it intended to set; therefore there was no way of Patsy’s telling from what direction she had come or where Arden was most likely to be found. She shook her fist at the sun wrathfully. “I’ll be bound you’re in league with the tinker; ’tis all a conspiracy to keep me from ever making Arden, or else to keep me just seven miles from it. That’s a grand number—seven.”

A glint of white on the grass caught her eye; she stooped and found it to be a diminutive quill feather dropped by some passing pigeon. It lay across her palm for a second, and then—the whim taking her—she shot it exultantly into the air. Where it fell she marked the way it pointed, and that was the road she took.

It was beginning to seem years ago since she had sat in Marjorie Schuyler’s den listening to Billy Burgeman’s confession of a crime for which he had not sounded in the least responsible. That was on Tuesday. It was now Friday—three days—seventy-two hours later. She preferred to think of it in terms of hours—it measured the time proportionally nearer to the actual feeling of it. Strangely enough, it seemed half a lifetime instead of half a week, and Patsy could not fathom the why of it. But what puzzled her more was the present condition of Billy Burgeman, himself. As far as she was concerned he had suddenly ceased to exist, and she was pursuing a Balmacaan coat and plush hat that were quite tenantless; or—at most—they were supported by the very haziest suggestion of a personality. The harder she struggled to make a flesh-and-blood man therefrom the more persistently did it elude her—slipping through her mental grasp like so much quicksilver. She tried her best to picture him doing something, feeling something—the simplest human emotion—and the result was an absolute blank.

And all the while the shadow of a very real man followed her down the road—a

shadow in grotesquely flapping rags, with head flung back. A dozen times she caught herself listening for the tramp of his feet beside hers, and flushed hotly at the nagging consciousness that pointed out each time only the mocking echo of her own tread. Like the left-behind cottage, the road became unexpectedly lonely and discouraging.

“The devil take them both!” she sputtered at last. “When one man refuses to be real at all, and the other pesters ye with being too real—’tis time to quit their company and let them fetch up where and how they like.”

But an O’Connell is never a quitter; and deep down in Patsy’s heart was the determination to see the end of the road for all three of them—if fate only granted the chance.

She came to a cross-roads at length. She had spied it from afar and hailed it as the end of her troubles; now she would learn the right way to Arden. But Patsy reckoned without chance—or some one else. The sign-boards had all been ripped from their respective places on a central post and lay propped up against its base. There was little information in them for Patsy as she read: “Petersham, five miles; Lebanon, twelve miles; Arden, seven miles—”

The last sign went spinning across the road, and Patsy dropped on a near-by stone with the anguish of a great tragedian. “Seven miles—seven miles! I’m as near to it and I know as much about it as when I started three days ago. Sure, I feel like a mule, just, on a treadmill, with Billy Burgeman in the hopper.”

A feeling of utter helplessness took possession of her; it was as if her experiences, her actions, her very words and emotions, were controlled by an unseen power. Impulse might have precipitated her into the adventure, but since her feet had trod the first stretch of the road to Arden chance had sat somewhere, chuckling at his own comedy—making, while he pulled her hither and yon, like a marionette on a wire. Verily chance was still chuckling at the incongruity of his stage setting: A girl pursuing a strange man, and a strange sheriff pursuing the girl, and neither having an inkling of the pursuit or the reason for it.

On one thing her mind clinched fast, however: she would at least sit where she was until some one came by who could put her right, once and for all; rich man, poor man, beggar-man, thief—she would stop whoever came first.

The arpeggio of an automobile horn brought her to her feet; the next moment the machine careened into sight and Patsy flagged it from the middle of the road, the

lines of her face set in grim determination.

“Would you kindly tell me—” she was beginning when a girl in the tonneau cut her short:

“Why, it’s Patsy O’Connell! How in the name of your blessed Saint Patrick did you ever get so far from home?”

The car was full of young people, but the girl who had spoken was the only one who looked at all familiar. Patsy’s mind groped out of the present into the past; it was all a blind alley, however, and led nowhere.

The girl, seeing her bewilderment, helped her out. “Don’t you remember, I was with Marjorie Schuyler in Dublin when you were all so jolly kind to us? I’m Janet Payne—those awful ‘Spitsburger Paynes’”—and the girl’s laugh rang out contagiously.

The laugh swept Patsy’s mind out into the open. She reached out and gripped the girl’s hand. “Sure, I remember. But it’s a long way from Dublin, and my memory is slower at hearkening back than my heart. A brave day to all of you.” And her smile greeted the carful indiscriminately.

“Oh!”—the girl was apologetic—“how beastly rude I am! I’m forgetting that you don’t know everybody as well as everybody knows you. Jean Lewis, Mrs. Dempsy Carter, Dempsy Carter, Gregory Jessup, and Jay Clinton—Miss Patricia O’Connell, of the Irish National Players. We are all very much at your service—including the car, which is not mine, but the Dempsy Carters’.”

“Shall we kidnap Miss O’Connell?” suggested the owner. “She appears an easy victim.”

Janet Payne clapped her hands, but Patsy shook a decided negative. “That’s the genius of the Irish,” she laughed; “they look easy till you hold them up. I’m bound for Arden, and must make it by the quickest road if you’ll point it out to me.”

“Why, of course—Arden; that accounts for you perfectly. Stupid that I didn’t think of it at once. What part are you playing?” Janet Payne accompanied the question with unmistakable eagerness.

Patsy shot a shrewd glance at the girl. Was she indulging in good-natured banter, or had she learned through Marjorie Schuyler of Patsy’s self-imposed quest, and

was seeking information in figurative speech? Patsy decided in favor of the former and answered it in kind: “Faith! I’m not sure whether I’ve been cast for the duke’s daughter—or the fool. I can tell ye better after I reach Arden.” And she turned abruptly as if she would be gone.

But the girl held her back. “No, you don’t. We are not going to lose you like that. We’ll kidnap you, as Dempsy suggested, till after lunch; then we’ll motor you back to Arden. You’ll get there just about as soon.”

Patsy had not the slightest intention of yielding; her mind and her feet were braced against any divergence from the straight road now; but the man Janet Payne had called Gregory Jessup said something that scattered her resolutions like so much chaff.

“You’ve simply got to come, Miss O’Connell.” And he leaned over the side of the car in boyish enthusiasm. “Last summer Billy Burgeman used to read to me the parts of Marjorie’s letters that told about you, and they were great! We were making up our minds to go to Ireland and see if you were real when your company came to America. After that Marjorie would never introduce us after the plays, just to be contrary. You wouldn’t have the heart to grudge us a little acquaintanceship now, would you?”

“Billy Burgeman,” repeated Patsy. “Do you know him?”

Dempsy Carter interposed. “They’re chums, Miss O’Connell. I’ll wager there isn’t a soul on earth that knows Billy as well as Greg does.”

“That’s hard on Marjorie, isn’t it?” asked Janet Payne.

“Oh, hang Marjorie!” The sincerity of Gregory Jessup’s emotion somewhat excused his outburst.

“Why, I thought they were betrothed!” Patsy looked innocent.

“They were. What they are now—Heaven only knows! Marjorie Schuyler has gone to China, and Billy has dropped off the face of the earth.”

A sudden silence fell on the cross-roads. It was Patsy who broke it at last. “Well?” A composite, interrogative stare came from the carful. Patsy laughed bewitchingly. “For a crowd of rascally kidnappers, you are the slowest I ever saw. Troth, in Ireland they’d have it done in half the time.”

The next instant Patsy was lifted bodily inside, and, amid a general burst of merriment, the car swung down the road.

It was a picnic lunch—an elaborate affair put up in a hamper, a fireless cooker, and a thermos basket; and it was spread on a tiny, fir-covered peninsula jutting out into a diminutive lake. It was an enchanting spot and a delicious lunch, with good company to boot; but, to her annoyance, Patsy found herself continually comparing it unfavorably with a certain vagabond breakfast garnished with yellow lady's-slippers, musicianed by throstles, and served by a tinker.

"Something is on your mind, or do you find our American manners and food too hard to digest comfortably?" Gregory Jessup had curled up unceremoniously at her feet, balancing a caviar sandwich, a Camembert cheese, and a bottle of ale with extraordinary dexterity.

"I was thinking about—Billy Burgeman."

He cast a furtive look toward the others beyond them. They seemed engrossed for the moment in some hectic discussion over fashions, and he dropped his voice to a confidential pitch: "I can't talk Billy with the others; I'm too much cut up over the whole thing to stand hearing them hold an autopsy over Billy's character and motives." He stopped abruptly and scanned Patsy's face. "I believe a chap could turn his mind inside out with you, though, and you'd keep the contents as faithfully as a safe-deposit vault."

Patsy smiled appreciatively. "Faith! you make me feel like Saint Martin's chest that Satan himself couldn't be opening."

"What did he have in it?"

"Some good Christian souls."

"Contents don't tally—mine are some very un-Christian thoughts." He abandoned the sandwich and cheese, and settled himself to the more serious business of balancing his remarks. "Billy and I work for the same engineering firm; he walked out for lunch Tuesday and no one has seen him since—unless it's Marjorie Schuyler. Couldn't get anything out of the old man when I first went to see him, and now he's too ill to see any one. Marjorie said she really

didn’t know where he was, and quit town the next day. Now maybe they don’t either of them know what’s happened any more than I do; but I think it’s infernally queer for a man to disappear and say nothing to his father, the girl he’s engaged to, or his best friend. Don’t you?”

Patsy’s past training stood stanchly by her. She played the part of the politely interested listener—nothing more—and merely nodded her head.

“You see,” the man went on, “Billy has a confoundedly queer sense of honor; he can stretch it at times to cover nearly everybody’s calamities and the fool shortcomings of all his acquaintances. Why, it wasn’t a month ago a crowd of us from the works were lunching together, and the talk came around to speculating. Billy’s hard against it on principle, but he happened to say that if he was going in for it at all he’d take cotton. What was in Billy’s mind was not the money in it, but the chance to give the South a boost. Well, one of the fellows took it as a straight tip to get rich from the old man’s son and put in all he had saved up to be married on; lost it and squealed. And Billy—the big chump—claimed he was responsible for it—that, being the son of his father, he ought to know enough to hold his tongue on some subjects. He made it good to the fellow. I happen to know, for it took every cent of his own money and his next month’s salary into the bargain—and that he borrowed from me.”

“Wouldn’t his father have helped him out?”

Gregory Jessup gave a bitter little laugh. “You don’t know the old man or you wouldn’t ask. He is just about as soft-hearted and human as a Labrador winter. I’ve known Billy since we were both little shavers—and, talk about the curse of poverty! It’s a saintly benediction compared to a fortune like that and life with the man who made it.”

“And—himself, Billy—what does he think of money?”

“I’ll tell you what he said once. He had dropped in late after a big dinner where he had been introduced to some one as the fellow who was going to inherit sixty millions some day. Phew! but he was sore! He walked miles—in ten-foot laps—about my den, while he cursed his father’s money from Baffin Bay to Cape Horn. ‘I tell you, Greg,’ he finished up with, ‘I want enough to keep the cramps out of life, that’s all; enough to help the next fellow who’s down on his luck; enough to give the woman I marry a home and not a residence to live in, and to provide the father of my kiddies with enough leisure for them to know what real fatherhood means. I bet you I can make enough myself to cover every one of

those necessities; as for the millions, I'd like to chuck them for quoits off the Battery.'"

For a moment Patsy's eyes danced; but the next, something tumbled out of her memory and quieted them. "Then why in the name of Saint Anthony did he choose to marry Marjorie Schuyler?"

"That does seem funny, I know, but that's a totally different side of Billy. You see, all his life he's been falling in with people who made up to him just for his money, and his father had a confounded way of reminding him that he was bound to be plucked unless he kept his wits sharp and distrusted every one. It made Billy sick, and yet it had its effect. He's always been mighty shy with girls—reckon his father brought him up on tales of rich chaps and modern Circes. Anyway, when he met Marjorie Schuyler it was different—she had too much money of her own to make his any particular attraction, and he finally gave in that she liked him just for himself. That was a proud day for him, poor old Bill!"

"And did she—could she really love him?" Patsy asked the question of herself rather than the man beside her.

But he answered it promptly: "I don't believe Marjorie Schuyler has anything to love with; it was overlooked when she was made. That's what's worrying me. If he's got into a scrape he'd tell Marjorie the first thing; and she's not the understanding, forgiving kind. He hasn't any money; he wouldn't go to his father; and because he's borrowed from me once, he's that idiotic he wouldn't do it again. If Marjorie has given him his papers he's in a jolly blue funk and perfectly capable of going off where he'll never be heard of again. Hang it all! I don't see why he couldn't have come to me?"

Patsy said nothing while he replenished her plate and helped himself to another sandwich. At last she asked, casually, "Did the two of you ever have a disagreement over Marjorie Schuyler?"

"He asked me once just what I thought of her, and I told him. We never discussed her again."

"No?" Inwardly Patsy was tabulating why Billy Burgeman had not gone to his friend when Marjorie Schuyler failed him. He would hardly have cared to criticize the shortcomings of the girl he loved with the man who had already discovered them.

“What are you two jabbering about?” Janet Payne had left her group and the hectic argument over fashions.

“Sure, we’re threshing out whether it’s the Irish or the suffragettes will rule England when the war is over.”

“Well, which is it?”

“Faith! the answer’s so simple I’m ashamed to give it. The women will rule England—that’s an easy matter; but the Irish will rule the women.”

“Then you are one of the old-fashioned kind who approves of a lord and master?” Gregory Jessup looked up at her quizzically.

“’Tis the new fashion you’re meaning; having gone out so long since, ’tis barely coming in yet. I’d not give a farthing for the man who couldn’t lead me; only, God help him! if he ever leaves his hands off the halter.”

The laugh that followed gave Patsy time to think. There was one more question she must be asking before the others joined them and the conversation became general. She turned to Janet Payne with a little air of anxious inquiry.

“Maybe you’d ask the rascally villain who kidnapped me, when he has it in his mind to keep his promise and fetch me to Arden?”

As the girl left them Patsy turned toward Gregory Jessup again and asked, softly: “Supposing Billy Burgeman has fallen among strangers? If they saw he was in need of friendliness, would it be so hard to do him a kindness?”

The man shook his head. “The hardest thing in the world. Billy Burgeman has been proud and lonely all his life, and it’s an infernal combination. You may know he’s out and out aching for a bit of sympathy, but you never offer it; you don’t dare. We could never get him to own up as a little shaver how neglected and lonely he was and how he hated to stay in that horrible, gloomy Fifth Avenue house. It wasn’t until he had grown up that he told me he used to come and play as often as they would let him—just because mother used to kiss him good-by as she did her own boys.”

Gregory Jessup looked beyond the firs to the little lake, and there was that in his face which showed that he was wrestling with a treasured memory. When he spoke again his voice sounded as if he had had to grip it hard against a sign of

possible emotion.

“You know Billy’s father never gave him an allowance; he didn’t believe in it—wouldn’t trust Billy with a cent. Poor little shaver—never had anything to treat with at school, the way the rest of the boys did; and never even had car-fare—always walked, rain or shine, unless his father took him along with him in the machine. Billy used to say even in those days he liked walking better. Mother died in the winter—snowy time—when Billy was about twelve; and he borrowed a shovel from a corner grocer and cleared stoops all afternoon until he’d made enough to buy two white roses. Father hadn’t broken down all day—wouldn’t let us children show a tear; but when Billy came in with those roses—well, it was the children who finally had to cheer father up.”

Patsy sprang to her feet with a little cry. “I must be going.” She turned to the others, a ring of appeal in her voice. “Can’t we hurry a bit? There’s a deal of work at Arden to be done, and no one but myself to be doing it.”

“Rehearsals?” asked Janet Payne.

And Patsy, unheeding, nodded her head.

There was a babel of nonsense in the returning car. Patsy contributed her share the while her mind was busy building over again into a Balmacaan coat and plush hat the semblance of a man.

“Sure, I’m not saying I can make out his looks or the color of his eyes and hair, but he’s real, for all that. Holy Saint Patrick, but he’s a real man at last, and I’m liking him!” She smiled with deep contentment.

JOSEPH JOURNEYS TO A FAR COUNTRY

Having established the permanent reality of Billy Burgeman to her own satisfaction, Patsy's mind went racing off to conjure up all the possible things Billy and the tinker might think of each other as soon as chance should bring them together. Whereas it was perfectly consistent that Billy should shun the consolation and companionship of his own world, he might follow after vagabond company as a thirsty dog trails water; and who could slake that thirst better than the tinker? For a second time that day she pictured the two swinging down the open road together; and for the second time she pulled a wry little smile.

The car was nearing the cross-roads from which Patsy had been originally kidnapped. She looked up to identify it, and saw a second car speeding toward them from the opposite direction, while between the two plodded a solitary little figure, coming toward them, supported by a mammoth pilgrim staff. It was a boy, apparently conscious of but the one car—theirs; and he swerved to their left—straight into the path of the car behind—to let them pass. They sounded their horns, waved their hands, and shouted warnings. It seemed wholly unbelievable that he should not understand or that the other car would not stop. But the unbelievable happened; it does sometimes.

Before Gregory Jessup could jump from their machine the other car had struck and the boy was tossed like a bundle of empty clothing to the roadside beyond. The nightmarish suddenness of it all held them speechless while they gaped at the car's driver, who gave one backward glance and redoubled his speed. Patsy was the first out of the tonneau, and she reached the boy almost as soon as Gregory Jessup.

"Damn them! That's the second time in my life I've seen a machine run some one down and sneak—"

He broke off at Patsy's sharp cry: "Holy Mary keep him! 'Tis the wee lad from Lebanon!"

By this time the rest of the carful had gathered about them; and Dempsy Carter—being a good Catholic—bared his head and crossed himself.

“’Tis wee Joseph of Lebanon,” Patsy repeated, dully; and then to Dempsy Carter, “Aye, make a prayer for him; but ye’d best do it driving like the devil for the doctor.”

They left at once with her instructions to get the nearest doctor first, and then to go after the boy’s parents. Gregory Jessup stayed behind with her, and together they tried to lift the still, little figure onto some rugs and pillows. Then Patsy crept closer and wound her arms about him, chafing his cheeks and hands and watching for some sign of returning life.

The man stood silently beside them, holding the pilgrim staff, while his eyes wandered from Patsy to the child and back to Patsy again, her face full of harboring tenderness and a great suffering as she gathered the little boy into her arms and pressed her warm cheek against the cold one.

Only once during their long wait was the silence broken. “’Tis almost as if he’d slipped over the border,” Patsy whispered. “Maybe he’s there in the gray dusk—a wee shadow soul waiting for death to loosen its wings and send it lilting into the blue of the Far Country.”

“How did you happen to know him?”

“Chance, just. I stopped to tell him a tale of a wandering hero and he—” She broke off with a little moan. “*Ochone!* poor wee Joseph! did I send ye forth on a brave adventure only to bring ye to this?” Her fingers brushed the damp curls from his forehead. “Laddy, laddy, why didn’t ye mind the promise I laid on ye?”

The doctor was kindly and efficient, but professionally non-committal. The boy was badly injured, and he must be moved at once to the nearest house. Somehow they lifted Joseph and held him so as to break the jar of stone and rut as the doctor drove his car as carefully as he could down the road leading to the nearest farm-house.

There they were met with a generous warmth of sympathy and hospitality; the spare chamber was opened, and the farm wife bustled about, turning down the bed and bringing what comforts the house possessed. The doctor stayed as long as he could; but the stork was flying at the other end of the township, and he was forced to leave Patsy in charge, with abundant instructions.

Soon after his leaving the Dempsy Carters returned without Joseph’s parents; they had gone to town and were not expected home until “chore time.”

“All right,” Patsy sighed. “Now ye had best all go your ways and I’ll bide till morning.”

“But can you?” Janet Payne asked it, wonderingly. “I thought you said you had to be in Arden to-day?”

A smile, whimsical and baffling, crept to the corners of Patsy’s mouth. “Sure, life is crammed with things ye think have to be done to-day till they’re matched against a sudden greater need. Chance and I started the wee lad on his journey, and ’twas meant I should see him safe to the end, I’m thinking. Good-by.”

Gregory Jessup lingered a moment behind the others; his eyes were suspiciously red, and the hands that gripped Patsy’s shook the least bit. “I wanted to say something: If—if you should ever happen to run up against Billy Burgeman—anywhere—don’t be afraid to do him a kindness. He—he wouldn’t mind it from you.”

Patsy leaned against the door and watched him go. “There’s another good lad. I’d like to be finding him again, too, some day.” She pressed her hands over her eyes with a fierce little groan, as if she would blot out the enveloping tragedy along with her surroundings. “Faith! what is the meaning of life, anyway? Until to-day it has seemed such a simple, straight road; I could have drawn a fair map of it myself, marking well the starting-point and tracing it reasonably true to the finish. But to-night—to-night—’tis all a tangle of lanes and byways. There’s no sign-post ahead—and God alone knows where it’s leading.”

She went back to the spare chamber and took up her watching by the bedside; and for the rest of that waning day she sat as motionless as everything else in the room. The farm wife came and went softly, in between her preparations for supper. When it was ready she tried her best to urge Patsy down-stairs for a mouthful.

But the girl refused to stir. “I couldn’t. The wee lad might come back while I was gone and find no one to reach him a hand or smile him a welcome.”

A little later, as the dark gathered, she begged two candles and stood them on the stand beside the bed. Something in her movements or the flickering light must have pierced his stupor, for Joseph moaned slightly and in a moment opened his eyes.

Patsy leaned over him tenderly; could she only keep him content until the

mother came and guard the mysterious borderland against all fear or pain, “Laddy, laddy,” she coaxed, “do ye mind me—now?”

The veriest wisp of a smile answered her.

“And were ye for playing Jack yourself, tramping off to find the castle with a window in it for every day in the year?” Her voice was full of gentle, teasing laughter, the voice of a mother playing with a very little child. “I’m hoping ye didn’t forget the promise—ye didn’t forget to ask for the blessing before ye went, now?”

No sound came; but the boy’s lips framed a silent “No.” In another moment his eyes were drooping sleepily.

Night had come, and with it the insistent chorus of tree-toad and katydid, interspersed with the song of the vesper sparrow. From the kitchen came the occasional rattle of dish or pan and the far-away murmur of voices. Patsy strained her ears for some sound of car or team upon the road; but there was none.

Again the lids fluttered and opened; this time Joseph smiled triumphantly. “I thought—p’r’aps—I hadn’t found you—after all—there was—so many ways—you might ha’ went.” He moistened his lips. “At the cross-roads—I wasn’t quite—sure which to be takin’, but I took—the right one, I did—didn’t I?”

There was a ring of pride in the words, and Patsy moistened her lips. Something clutched at her throat that seemed to force the words back. “Aye,” she managed to say at last.

“An’ I’ve—found you now—you’ll have to—promise me not to go back—not where they can get you. Si Perkins said—as how they’d soon forget—if you just stayed away long enough.” The boy looked at her happily. “Let’s—let’s keep on—an’ see what lies over the next hill.”

To Patsy this was all an unintelligible wandering of mind; she must humor it. “All right, laddy, let’s keep on. Maybe we’ll be finding a wood full of wild creatures, or an ocean full of ships.”

“P’r’aps. But I’d rather—have it a big—big city. I never—saw a city.”

“Aye, ’tis a city then”—Patsy’s tone carried conviction—“the grandest city ever built; and the towers will be touching the clouds, and the streets will be white as sea-foam; and there will be a great stretch of green meadow for fairs—”

“An’ circuses?”

“What else but circuses! And at the entrance there will be a gate with tall white columns—”

The sound Patsy had been listening for came at last through the open windows: the pad-pad-pad of horses’ hoofs coming fast.

Joseph looked past Patsy and saw for the first time the candles by his bed. His eyes sparkled. “They *are*—woppin’ big columns—an’ at night—they have lighted lamps on top—all shinin’. Don’t they?”

“Aye, to point the way in the dark.”

“It’s dark—now.” The boy’s voice lagged in a tired fashion.

“Maybe we’d best hurry—then.”

A door slammed below, and there was a rustle of tongues.

“Who’ll be ’tendin’ the city gates?” asked Joseph.

“Who but the gatekeeper?”

Muffled feet crept up the stairs.

“Will he let us in?”

“He’ll let ye in, laddy; I might be too much of a stranger.”

“But I could speak for you. I—I wouldn’t like—goin’ in alone in the dark.”

“Bless ye! ye’d not be alone.” Patsy’s voice rang vibrant with gladness. “Now, who do you think will be watching for ye, close to the gate? Look yonder!”

Joseph’s eyes went back to the candles, splendid, tall columns they were, with beacon lamps capping each. “Who?”

Dim faces looked at him through the flickering light; but there was only one he saw, and it brought the merriest smile to his lips.

“Why—’course it’s mother—sure’s shootin’!”

Early the next morning Patsy waited on the braided rug outside the spare chamber for Joseph’s mother to come out.

“I’ve been praying ye’d not hate me for the tale I told the little lad that day, the tale that brought him—yonder. And if it isn’t overlate, I’d like to be thanking ye for taking me in that night.”

The woman looked at her searchingly through swollen lids. “I cal’ate there’s no thanks due; your man paid for your keep; he sawed and split nigh a cord o’ wood that night—must ha’ taken him ’most till mornin’.” She paused an instant. “Didn’t—he”—she nodded her head toward the closed door behind her—“never tell you what brought him?”

“Naught but that he wanted to find me.”

“He believed in you,” the woman said, simply, adding in a toneless voice: “I cal’ate I couldn’t hate you. I never saw any one make death so—sweet like—as you done for—him.”

Patsy spread her hands deprecatingly. “Why shouldn’t it be sweet like? Faith! is it anything but a bit of the very road we’ve been traveling since we were born, the bit that lies over the hill and out of sight?” She took the woman’s work-worn hands in hers. “’Tis terrible, losing a little lad; but ’tis more terrible never having one. God and Mary be with ye!”

When Patsy left the house a few minutes later Joseph’s pilgrim staff was in her hands, and she stopped on the threshold an instant to ask the way of Joseph’s father.

The good man was dazed with his grief and he directed Patsy in terms of his own home-going: “Keep on, and take the first turn to your right.”

So Patsy kept on instead of returning to the cross-roads; and chance scored another point in his comedy and continued chuckling.

Meanwhile Joseph's father went back to the spare chamber.

"'S she gone?" inquired Joseph's mother.

"Yep."

"You know, the boy believed in her."

"Yep, I know."

"Well, I cal'ate we've got to, too."

"Sure thing!"

"Ye'll never say a word, then—about seein' her; nuthin' to give the sheriff a hint where she might be?"

"Why, mother!" The man laid a hand on her shoulder, looking down at her with accusing eyes. "Hain't you known me long enough to know I couldn't tell on any one who'd been good to—" He broke off with a cough. "And what's more, do you think any one who could take our little boy's hand and lead him, as you might say, straight to heaven—would be a thief? No, siree!"

It was a sober, thoughtful Patsy that followed the road, the pilgrim staff gripped tightly in her hand. She clung to it as the one tangible thing left to her out of all the happenings and memories of her quest. The tinker had disappeared as completely as if the earth had swallowed him, leaving behind no reason for his going, no hope of his coming again; Billy Burgeman was still but a flimsy promise; and Joseph had outstripped them both, passing beyond her farthest vision. Small wonder, then, that the road was lonely and haunted for Patsy, and that she plodded along shorn of all buoyancy.

Her imagination began playing tricks with her. Twice it seemed as if she could feel a little lad's hand, warm and eager, curled under hers about the staff; another time she found herself gazing through half-shut eyes at a strange lad—a lad of twelve—who walked ahead for a space, carrying two great white roses; and once she glanced up quickly and saw the tinker coming toward her, head thrown back and laughing. Her wits had barely time to check her answering laugh and hands outstretching, when he faded into empty winding road.

The morning was uneventful. Patsy stopped but once—to trundle a perambulator laden with washing and twins for its small conductor, a mite of a girl who looked almost too frail to breast the weight of a doll's carriage.

Even Patsy puffed under the strain of the burden. "How do you do it?" she gasped.

"Well, I started when them babies was tiny and the washin' was small; an' they both growed so gradual I didn't notice—much. An' ma don't make me hurry none."

"How many children are there?"

"Nine. Last's just come. Pa says he didn't look on him as no blessin', but ma says the Lord must provide—an' if it's babies, then it's babies." She stopped and clasped her hands after the fashion of an ancient grandmother tottering in the nineties: "Land o' goodness, I do think an empty cradle's an awful dismal thing to have round. Don't you?"

Patsy agreed, and a moment later unloaded the twins and the washing for the child at her doorstep.

Soon after this she caught her first glimpse of the town she was making. "If luck will only turn stage-manager," she thought, "and put Billy Burgeman in the center of the scene—handy, why, I'll promise not to murder my lines or play under."

It was not luck, however, but chance, still pulling the wires; and accordingly he managed Patsy's entrance as he wished.

The town had one main street, like Lebanon, and in front of the post-office in a two-seated car sat a familiar figure. There was the Balmacaan coat and the round plush hat; and to Patsy, impulsive and heart-strong, it sufficed. She ran nearly the length of the street in her eagerness to reach him.

XI

AND CHANCE STAGES MELODRAMA INSTEAD OF COMEDY

“

A brave day to ye!” A little bit of everything that made Patsy was wrapped in the smile she gave the man in the Balmacaan coat standing by the wheel-guard of the car before the town post-office, a hand on the front seat. “Maybe ye’re not knowing it, but it’s a rare good day for us both. If you’ll only take me for a spin in your car I’ll tell you what brings me—and who I am—if you haven’t that guessed already.”

Plainly the occupant of the coat and the car was too much taken by surprise to guess. He simply stared; and by that stare conveyed a heart-sinking impression to Patsy. She looked at the puffed eyes and the grim, unyielding line of the mouth, and she wanted to run. It took all the O’Connell stubbornness, coupled with the things Gregory Jessup had told her about his friend, to keep her feet firm to the sidewalk and her resolution.

“Maybe,” she thought, “he’s just taken on the look of a rascal because he thinks the world has written him down one. That’s often the way with a man; and often it takes but a bit of kindness to change it. If I could make him smile—now—”

Her next remark accomplished this, but it did not mend matters a whit. Patsy’s heart turned over disconsolately; and she was safety-locking her wits to keep them from scattering when she made her final plea.

“I’m not staying long, and I want to know you; there’s something I have to be saying before I go on my way. ’Twould be easiest if you’d take me for a ride in your car; we could talk quieter there.”

She tried to finish with a reasonably cheerful look, but it was a tragic failure. The man was looking past her to the post-office beyond, and the things Patsy had seemed to feel in his face suddenly rose to the surface and revealed themselves with an instant’s intensity. Patsy followed the look over her shoulder and shrank away perceptibly.

In the doorway of the office stood another man, younger and more—

pronounced. It could mean but one thing: Billy Burgeman had lost his self-respect along with Marjorie Schuyler and had fallen in with foul company.

There were natures that crumbled and went to pieces under distrust and failure—natures that allowed themselves to be blown by passion and self-pity until they burned down into charred heaps of humanity. She had met a few of them in her life; but—thank God!—there were only a few.

She found herself praying that she might not have come too late. Just what she would do or say she could not tell; but she must make him understand that he was not the arbiter of his own life, that in spite of what he had found, there were love and trust and disinterested kindness in the world, lots of it. Money might be a curse, but it was a curse that a man could raise for himself; and a little lad who could shovel snow for half a day to earn two white roses for a dead friend was too fine to be lost out of life's credit-sheet.

She did not wait for any invitation; silently, with a white face, she climbed into the car and sat with hands folded about the pilgrim staff. It was as if she had taken him for granted and was waiting for his compliance to her will. And he understood. He moved the starter, and, as the motor began its chugging, he called out to the man in the doorway:

"Better not wait for me. I seem to have a date with—a lady." There was an unpleasant intonation on the last word.

"Please take a quiet road—where there will not be much passing," commanded Patsy.

She did not speak again until the town lay far behind and they were well on that quiet road. Then she turned partly toward him, her hands still clasped, and when she spoke it was still in the best of the king's English—she had neither feeling nor desire for the intimacy of her own tongue.

"I know it must seem a bit odd to have me, a stranger, come to you this way. But when a man's family and betrothed fail him—why, some one must—make it up —"

He turned fiercely. "How did you know that?"

"I—she—Never mind; I know, that's all. And I came, thinking maybe you'd be glad—"

“Of another?” he laughed coarsely, looking her over with an appraising scrutiny. “Well, a fellow might have a worse—substitute.”

Patsy crimsoned. It seemed incredible that the man she had listened to that day in Marjorie Schuyler’s den, who had then gripped her sympathies and thereby pulled her after him in spite of past illness and all common sense, should be the man speaking now. And yet—what was it Gregory Jessup had said about him? Had he not implied that old King Midas had long ago warped his son’s trust in women until he had come to look upon them all as modern Circes? And gradually shame for herself changed into pity for him. What a shabby performance life must seem to such as he!

She had an irresistible desire to take him with her behind the scenes and show him what it really was; to point out how with a change of line here, a new cue there, and a different drop behind; with a choice of fellow-players, and better lights, and the right spirit back of it all—what a good thing he could make of his particular part. But would he see—could she make him understand? It was worth trying.

“You are every bit wrong,” she said, evenly. “Look at me. Do I look like an adventuress? And haven’t you ever had anybody kind to you simply because they had a preference for kindness?”

The two looked at each other steadily while the machine crawled at minimum speed down the deserted road. Her eyes never flinched under the blighting weight of his, although her heart seemed to stop a hundred times and the soul of her shrivel into nothing.

“Well,” she heard herself saying at last, “don’t you think you can believe in me?”

The man laughed again, coarsely. “Believe in you? That’s precisely what I’m doing this minute—believing in your cleverness and a deuced pretty way with you. Now don’t get mad, my dear. You are all daughters of Eve, and your intentions are very innocent—of course.”

Pity and sympathy left Patsy like starved pensioners. The eyes looking into his blazed with righteous anger and a hating distrust; they carried to him a stronger, more direct message than words could have done. His answer was to double the speed of the car.

“Stop the car!” she demanded.

“Oh, ho! we’re getting scared, are we? Repenting of our haste?” The grim line of his mouth became more sinister. “No man relishes a woman’s contempt, and he generally makes her pay when he can. Now I came for pleasure, and I’m going to get it.” An arm shot around Patsy and held her tight; the man was strong enough to keep her where he wished her and steer the car down a straight, empty road. “Remember, I can prove you asked me to take you—and it was your choice—this nice, quiet spin!”

She sat so still, so relaxed under his grip that unconsciously he relaxed too; she could feel the gradual loosening of joint and muscle.

“Why didn’t you scream?” he sneered at length.

“I’m keeping my breath—till there’s need of it.”

Silence followed. The car raced on down the persistently empty road; the few houses they passed might have been tenantless for any signs of human life about them. In the far distance Patsy could see a suspension-bridge, and she wished and wished it might be closed for repairs—something, anything to bring to an end this hideous, nightmarish ride. She groaned inwardly at the thought of it all. She—Patricia O’Connell—who would have starved rather than play cheap, sordid melodrama—had been tricked by chance into becoming an actual, living part of one. She wondered a little why she felt no fear—she certainly had nothing but distrust and loathing for the man beside her—and these are breeders of fear. Perhaps her anger had crowded out all other possible emotion; perhaps—back of everything—she still hoped for the ultimate spark of decency and good in him.

Her silence and apparent apathy puzzled the man. “Well, what’s in your mind?” he snapped.

“Two things: I was thinking what a pity it was you let your father throw so much filth in your eyes, that you grew up to see everything about you smirched and ugly; and I was wondering how you ever came to have a friend like Gregory Jessup and a fancy for white roses.”

“What in thunder are you talking—”

But he never finished. The scream he had looked for came when he had given up expecting it. Patsy had wrenched herself free from his hold and was leaning over the wind-shield, beckoning frantically to a figure mounted on one of the girders

of the bridge. It was a grotesque, vagabond figure in rags, a battered cap on the back of its head.

“Good God!” muttered the man in the car, stiffening.

Luckily for the tinker the car was running again at a moderate speed; the man had slowed up when he saw the rough planking over the bridge, and his hand had not time enough to reach the lever when the tinker was upon him. The car came to an abrupt stop.

Patsy sank back on the seat, white and trembling, as she watched the instant’s grappling of the two, followed by a lurching tumble over the side of the car to the planking. The fall knocked them apart, and for the space of a few quick breaths they half rose and faced each other—the one almost crazed with fury, the other steady, calm, but terrifyingly determined.

Before Patsy could move they were upon each other again—rolling about in the dust, clutching at each other’s throat—now half under the car, now almost through the girders of the bridge, with Patsy’s voice crying a warning. Again they were on their feet, grappling and hitting blindly; then down in the dust, rolling and clutching.

It was plain melodrama of the most banal form; and the most convincing part of it all was the evident personal enmity that directed each blow. Somehow it was borne in upon Patsy that her share in the quarrel was an infinitesimal part; it was the old, old scene in the fourth act: the hero paying up the villain for all past scores.

Like the scene in the fourth act, it came to an end at last. The time came when no answering blow met the tinker’s, when the hand that gripped his throat relaxed and the body back of it went down under him—breathless and inert. Patsy climbed out of the car to make room for the stowing away of its owner. He was conscious, but past articulate speech and thoroughly beaten; and the tinker kindly turned the car about for him and started him slowly off, so as to rid the road of him, as Patsy said. It looked possible, with a careful harboring of strength and persistence, for him to reach eventually the starting-point and his friend of the post-office. As his trail of dust lengthened between them Patsy gave a sigh of relieved content and turned to the tinker.

“Faith, ye are a sight for a sore heart.” Her hand slid into his outstretched one. “I’ll make a bargain with ye: if ye’ll forgive and forget the unfair things I said to

ye that night I'll not stay hurt over your leaving without notice the next morning."

"It's a bargain," but he winced as he said it. "It seems as if our meetings were dependent on a certain amount of—of physical disablement." He smiled reassuringly. "I don't really mind in the least. I'd stand for knockout blows down miles of road, if they would bring you back—every time."

"Don't joke!" Patsy covered her face. "If—if ye only knew—what it means to have ye standing there this minute!" She drew in her breath quickly; it sounded dangerously like a sob. "If ye only knew what ye have saved me from—and what I am owing ye—" Her hands fell, and she looked at him with a sudden shy concern. "Poor lad! Here ye are—a fit subject for a hospital, and I'm wasting time talking instead of trying to mend ye up. Do ye think there might be water hereabouts where we could wash off some of that—grease paint?"

But the tinker was contemplating his right foot; he was standing on the other. "Don't bother about those scratches; they go rather well with the clothes, don't you think? It's this ankle that's bothering me; I must have turned it when I jumped."

"Can't ye walk on it? Ye can lean on this"—she passed him the pilgrim staff —"and we can go slowly. Bad luck to the man! If I had known ye were hurt I'd have made ye leave him in the road and we'd have driven his machine back to Arden for him." She looked longingly after the trail of dust.

"Your ethics are questionable, but your geography is worse. Arden isn't back there."

"What do ye mean? Why, I saw Arden, back yonder, with my own eyes—not an hour ago."

"No, you didn't. You saw Dansville; Arden is over there," and the tinker's hand pointed over his shoulder at right angles to the road.

"Holy Saint Branden!" gasped Patsy. "Maybe ye'll have the boldness, then, to tell me I'm still seven miles from it?"

"You are." But this time he did not laugh—a smile was the utmost he could manage with the pain in his ankle.

Patsy looked as if she might have laughed or cried with equal ease. "Seven miles

—seven miles! Tramp the road for four days and be just as near the end as I was at the start—" An expression of enlightenment shot into her face. "Faith, I must have been going in a circle, then."

The tinker nodded an affirmative.

"And who in the name of reason was the man in the car?"

"That's what I'd like to know; the unmitigated nerve of him!" he finished to himself. His chin set itself squarely; his face had grown as white as Patsy's had been and his eyes became doggedly determined. "If it isn't a piece of impertinence, I'd like to ask how you happened to be with him, that way?"

Patsy flushed. "I'm thinking ye've earned the right to an answer. I took him for the lad I was looking for. I thought the place was Arden, and—and the clothes were the same."

"The clothes!" the tinker repeated it in the same bewildered way that had been his when Patsy first found him; then he turned and grasped Patsy's shoulders with a sudden, inexplicable intensity. "What's the name of the lad—the lad you're after?"

"I'll tell you," said Patsy, slowly, "if you'll tell me what you did with my brown clothes that morning before you left."

And the answer to both questions was a blank, baffling stare.

XII

A CHANGE OF NATIONALITY

The railroad ran under the suspension-bridge. Patsy could see the station not an eighth of a mile down the track, and she made for it as being the nearest possible point where water might be procured. The station-master gave her a tin can and filled it for her; and ten minutes later she set about scrubbing the tinker free of all the telltale make-up of melodrama. It was accomplished—after a fashion, and with persistent rebelling on the tinker's part and scolding on Patsy's. And, finally, to prove his own supreme indifference to physical disablement, he tore the can from her administering hands, threw it over the bridge, and started down the road at his old, swinging stride.

"Is it after more lady's-slippers ye're dandering?" called Patsy.

"More likely it's after a pair of those wingèd shoes of Perseus; I'll need them." But his stride soon broke to a walk and then to a lagging limp. "It's no use," he said at last; "I might keep on for another half-mile, a mile at the most; but that's about all I'd be good for. You'll have to go on to Arden alone, and you can't miss it this time."

Patsy stopped abruptly. "Why don't ye curse me for the trouble I have brought?" She considered both hands carefully for a minute, as if she expected to find in them the solution to the difficulty, then she looked up and away toward the rising woodland that marked Arden.

"Do ye know," she said, wistfully, "I took the road, thinking I could mend trouble for that other lad; and instead it's trouble I've been making for every one —ye, Joseph, and I don't know how many more. And instead of doling kindness —why, I'm begging it. Now what's the meaning of it all? What keeps me failing?"

"'There's a divinity that shapes'—" began the tinker.

But Patsy cut him short. "Ye do know Willie Shakespeare!"

He smiled, guiltily. "I'm afraid I do—known him a good many years."

"He's grand company; best I know, barring tinkers." She turned impulsively and, standing on tiptoe, her fingers reached to the top of his shoulders. "See here, lad,

ye can just give over thinking I'll go on alone. If I'm cast for melodrama, sure I'll play it according to the best rules; the villain has fled, the hero is hurt, and if I went now I'd be hissed by the gallery. I've got ye into trouble and I'll not leave ye till I see ye out of it—someway. Oh, there's lots of ways; I'm thinking them fast. Like as not a passing team or car would carry ye to Arden; or we might beg the loan of a horse for a bit from some kind-hearted farmer, and I could drive ye over and bring the horse back; or we'll ask a corner for ye at a farm-house till ye are fit to walk—"

"We are in the wrong part of the country for any of those things to happen. Look about! Don't you see what a very different road it is from the one we took in the beginning?"

Patsy looked and saw. So engrossed had she been in the incidents of the last hour or more that she had not observed the changing country. Here were no longer pastures, tilled fields, houses with neighboring barn-yards, and unclaimed woodland; no longer was the road fringed with stone walls or stump fencing. Well-rolled golf-links stretched away on either hand as far as they could see; and, beyond, through the trees, showed roofs of red tile and stained shingle; and trimmed hedges skirted everything.

"'Tis the rich man's country," commented Patsy.

"It is, and I'd crawl into a hole and starve before I'd take charity from one of them."

"Sure and ye would. When a body's poor 'tis only the poor like himself he'd be asking help of. Don't I know! What's yonder house?" She broke off with a jerk and pointed ahead to a small building, sitting well back from the road, partly hidden in the surrounding clumps of trees.

"It's a stable; house burned down last year and it hasn't been used by any one since."

"And I'll wager it's as snug as a pocket inside—with fresh hay or straw, plenty to make a lad comfortable. Isn't that grand good luck for ye?"

The tinker found it hard to echo Patsy's enthusiasm, but he did his best. "Of course; and it's just the place to leave a lad behind in when a lass has seven miles to tramp before she gets to the end of her journey."

"Is that so?" Patsy's tone sounded suspiciously sarcastic. "Well, talking's not

walking; supposing ye take the staff in one hand and lean your other on me, and we'll see can we make it before this time to-morrow."

They made it in another hour, unobserved by the few straggling players on the links.

The stable proved all Patsy had anticipated. She watched the tinker sink, exhausted, on the bedded hay, while she pulled down a forgotten horse-blanket from a near-by peg to throw over him; then she turned in a business-like manner back to the door.

"Are you going to Arden?" came the faint voice of the tinker after her.

"I might—and then again—I mightn't. Was there any word ye might want me to fetch ahead for ye?"

"No; only—perhaps—would you think a chap too everlastingly impertinent to ask you to wait there for him—until he caught up with you?"

"I might—and then again—I mightn't." At the door she stopped, and for the second time considered her hands speculatively. "It wouldn't inconvenience your feelings any to take charity from me, would it, seeing I'm as poor as yourself and have dragged ye into this common, tuppenny brawl by my own foolishness?"

"You didn't drag me in; I had one foot in already."

"I thought so," Patsy nodded, approvingly; her conviction had been correct, then. "And the charity?"

"Yes, I'd take it from you." The tinker rolled over with a little moan composed of physical pain and mental discomfort. But in another moment he was sitting upright, shaking a mandatory fist at Patsy as she disappeared through the door. "Remember—no help from the quality! I hate them as much as you do, and I won't have them coming around with their inquisitive, patronizing, supercilious offers of assistance to a—beggar. I tell you I want to be left alone! If you bring any one back with you I'll burn the stable down about me. Remember!"

"Aye," she called back; "I'll be remembering."

She reached the road again; and for the manyeth time since she left the women's free ward of the City Hospital she marshaled all the O'Connell wits. But even the best of wits require opportunity, and to Patsy the immediate outlook seemed barren of such.

"There's naught to do but keep going till something turns up," she said to herself; and she followed this Micawber advice to the letter. She came to the end of the grounds which had belonged to the burned house and the deserted stable; she passed on, between a stretch of thin woodland and a grove of giant pines; and there she came upon a cross-road. She looked to the right—it was empty. She looked to the left—and behold there was "Opportunity," large, florid, and agitated, coming directly toward her from one of the tile-roofed houses, and puffing audibly under the combined weight of herself and her bag.

"Ze depôt—how long ees eet?" she demanded, when she caught sight of Patsy.

The accent was unmistakably French, and Patsy obligingly answered her in her mother-tongue. "I cannot say exactly; about three—four kilometers."

"Opportunity" dropped her bag and embraced her. "Oh!" she burst out, volubly. "Think of Zoë Marat finding a countrywoman in this wild land. *Moi*—I can no longer stand it; and when madame's temper goes *pouffe*—I say, it is enough; let madame fast or cook for her guests, as she prefer. I go!"

"*Eh, bien!*" agreed the outer Patsy, while her subjective consciousness addressed her objective self in plain Donegal: "Faith! this is the maddest luck—the maddest, merriest luck! If yonder Quality House has lost one cook, 'twill be needing another; and 'tis a poor cook entirely that doesn't hold the keys of her own pantry. Food from Quality House needn't be choking the maddest tinker, if it's paid for in honest work."

Having been embraced by "Opportunity," Patsy saw no reason for wasting time in futile sympathy that might better be spent in prompt execution. She despatched the woman to the station with the briefest of directions and herself made straight for Quality House.

She was smiling over her appearance and the incongruities of the situation as she rang the bell at the front door and asked for "Madame" in her best parisien.

The maid, properly impressed, carried the message at once; and curiosity brought madame in surprising haste to the hall, where she looked Patsy over

with frank amazement.

“Madame speak French? Ah, I thought so. Madame desires a cook—*voilà!*”

The abruptness of this announcement turned madame giddy. “How did you know? Mine did not leave half an hour ago; there isn’t another French cook within five miles; it is unbelievable.”

“It is Providence.” Patsy cast her eyes devoutly heavenward.

“You have references—”

“References!” Patsy shrugged her shoulders contemptuously. “What would madame do with references? She cannot eat them; she cannot feed them to her guests. I can cook. Is that not sufficient?”

“But—you do not think—It is impossible that I ever employ a servant without references. And you—you look like anything in the world but a French cook.”

“Madame is not so foolish as to find fault with the ways of Providence, or judge one by one’s clothes? Who knows—at this moment it may be *à la mode* in Paris for cooks to wear sailor blouses. Besides, madame is mistaken; I am not a servant. I am an artist—a culinary artist.”

“You can cook, truly?”

“But yes, madame!”

“Excellent sauces?”

“*Mon Dieu*—Béchamel—Hollandaise—chaud-froid—maître d’hôtel—Espagnole—Béarnaise—” Patsy completed the list with an ecstatic kiss blown into the air.

Madame sighed and spoke in English: “It is unbelievable—absurd. I shouldn’t trust my own eyes or palate if I sat down to-night to the most remarkable dinner in the world; but one must feed one’s guests.” She looked Patsy over again. “Your trunk?”

“Trunk? Is it toilettes or sauces madame wishes me to make for her guests? *Ma foi!* Trunks—references—one is as unimportant as the other. Is it not enough for the present if I cook for madame? Afterward—” She ended with the all-expressive shrug.

Evidently madame conceded the point, for without further comment she led the way to the kitchen and presented the bill of fare for dinner.

"'For twelve,'" read Patsy. "And to-morrow is Sunday. Ah, Providence is good to madame, *mais-oui?*"

But madame's thoughts were on more practical matters. "Your wages?"

"One hundred francs a week, and the kitchen to myself. I, too, have a temper, madame." Patsy gave a quick toss to her head, while her eyes snapped.

That night the week-end guests at Quality House sat over their coffee, volubly commenting on the rare excellence of their dinner and the good fortune of their hostess in her possession of such a cook. Madame kept her own counsel and blessed Providence; but she did not allow that good fortune to escape with her better judgment—or anything else. She ordered the butler, before retiring, to count the silver and lock it in her dressing-room; this was to be done every night —as long as the new cook remained.

And the new cook? Her work despatched, and her kitchen to herself, she was free to get dinner for one more of madame's guests.

"Faith! he'd die of a black fit if he ever knew he was a guest of Quality House—and she'd die of another if she found out whom she was entertaining. But, glory be to Peter! what neither of them knows won't hurt them." And Patsy, unobserved, opened the back door and retraced the road to the deserted stable with a full basket and a glad heart.

She found the tinker under some trees at the back, smoking a disreputable cuddy pipe with a worse accompaniment of tobacco. When he saw her he removed it apologetically.

"It smells horrible, I know. I found it, forgotten, on a ledge of the stable, but it keeps a chap from remembering that he is hungry."

"Poor lad!" Patsy knelt on the ground beside him and opened her basket. "Put your nose into that, just. 'Tis a nine-course dinner and every bit of the best. Faith! 'tis lucky I was found on a Brittany rose-bush instead of one in Heidelberg, Birmingham, or Philadelphia; and if ye can't be born with gold in

your mouth the next best thing is a mixing-spoon."

"Meaning?" queried the tinker.

"Meaning—that there's many a poor soul who goes hungry through life because she is wanting the knowledge of how to mix what's already under her nose."

The tinker looked suspiciously from the contents of the basket to Patsy, kneeling beside it, and he dropped into a shameless mimicry of her brogue. "Aye, but how did she come by—what's under her nose? Here's a dinner for a king's son."

"Well, I'll be letting ye play the king's son instead of the fool to-night, just, if ye'll give over asking any more questions and eat."

"But"—he sniffed the plate she had handed him with added suspicion—"roast duck and sherry sauce! Honest, now—have ye been begging?"

"No—nor stealing—nor, by the same token, have I murdered any one to get the dinner from him." There was fine sarcasm in her voice as she returned the tinker's searching look.

"Then where did it come from? I'll not eat a mouthful until I get an honest answer." The tinker put the plate down beside him and folded his arms.

Patsy snorted with exasperation. "Was I ever saying ye could play the king's son? Faith! ye'll never play anything but the fool—first and last." Her voice suddenly took on a more coaxing tone; she was thinking of that good dinner growing cold—spoiled by the man's ridiculous curiosity. "I'll tell ye what—if ye'll agree to begin eating, I'll agree to begin telling ye about it—and we'll both agree not to stop till we get to the end. But Holy Saint Martin! who ever heard of a man before letting his conscience in ahead of his hunger!"

The bargain was made; and while the tinker devoured one plateful after another with a ravenous haste that almost discredited his previous restraint, Patsy spun a fanciful tale of having found a cluricaun under a quicken-tree. With great elaboration and seeming regard for the truth, she explained his magical qualities, and how—if you were clever enough to possess yourself of his cap—you could get almost anything from him.

"I held his cap firmly with the one hand and him by the scruff of the neck with the other; and says I to him, 'Little man, ye'll not be getting this back till ye've fetched me a dinner fit for a tinker.' 'Well, and good,' says he, 'but ye can't find

that this side of the King's Hotel, Dublin; and that will take time.' 'Take the time,' says I, 'but get the dinner.' And from that minute till the present I've been waiting under that quicken-tree for him to make the trip there and back."

Patsy finished, and the two of them smiled at each other with rare good humor out under the June stars. Only the tinker's smile was skeptical.

"So—ye are not believing me—" Patsy shammed a solemn, grieved look. "Well—I'll forgive ye this time if ye'll agree that the dinner was good, for I'd hate like the devil to be giving the wee man back his cap for anything but the best."

With laggard grace the tinker stretched his hands over the now empty basket and gripped Patsy's. "Lass, lass—what are you thinking of me? Faith! my manners are more ragged than my clothes—and I'm not fit to be a—tinker. The dinner was the best I ever ate, and—bless ye and the cluricaun!"

Patsy cooked for three days at Quality House, that the tinker might feast night and morning to his heart's content while his ankle slowly mended. But he still persisted questioning concerning his food—where and how Patsy had come by it; she still maintained as persistent a silence.

"I've come by it honestly, and 'tis no charity fare," was the most she would say, adding by way of flavor: "For a sorry tinker ye are the proudest I ever saw. Did ye ever know another, now, who wanted a written certificate of moral character along with every morsel he ate?"

According to wage agreement she had the kitchen to herself; no one entered except on matters of necessity; no one lingered after her work was despatched. Madame came twice daily to confer with Patsy on intricacies of gestation, while she beamed upon her as a probationed soul might look upon the keeper of the keys of Paradise. But the days held more for Patsy than sauces and entrées and pastries; they held gossip as well. Soupçons were served up on loosened tongues, borne in through open window and swinging door—straight from the dining-room and my lady's chamber. Most of it passed her ears, unheeded; it was but a droning accompaniment to her measuring, mixing, rolling, and baking—until news came at last that concerned herself—gossip of the Burgemans, father and son.

The butler and the parlor maid were cleaning the silver in the pantry—and the slide was raised. As transmitters of gossip they were more than usually concerned, for had not the butler at one time served in the house of Burgeman,

and the maid dusted next door? Therefore every item of news was well ripened before it dropped from either tongue, and Patsy gathered them in with eager ears.

The master of Quality House happened to be a director of that bank on which the Burgeman check of ten thousand had been drawn. It had been the largest check drawn to cash presented at the bank; and the teller had confessed to the directors that he would never have paid over the money to any one except the old man's son. In fact, he had been so much concerned over it afterward that he had called up the Burgeman office, and had been much relieved to have the assurance of the secretary that the check was certified and perfectly correct. Not a second thought would have been given to the matter had not the secretary's resignation been made public the next day—the day Billy Burgeman disappeared.

Patsy's ears fairly bristled with interest. "That's news, if it is gossip. Where is the secretary now? And which of them has the ten thousand?"

The director had touched on the subject of the check the next day when business had demanded his presence at the Burgeman home. The result had been distinctly baffling. Not that the director could put his finger on any one suspicious point in the behavior of Burgeman, senior; but it left him with the distinct impression that the father was shielding the son.

"Aye, that's what Billy said his father would do—shield him out of pride." Patsy dusted the flour from her arms and stood motionless, thinking.

Burgeman, senior, had offered only one remark to the director, given cynically with a nervous jerking of the shoulders and twitching of the hands: "He was needing pocket-money, a small sum to keep him in shoe-laces and collar-buttons, I dare say. That's the way rich men's sons keep their fathers' incomes from getting too cumbersome."

Burgeman, senior, had been ill then—confined to his room; but the next day his condition had become alarming. He was now dying at his home in Arden and his son could not be found. These last two statements were not merely gossip, but facts.

Patsy listened impatiently to the parlor maid arguing the matter of Billy's guilt with the butler. Their work was finished, and they were passing through the kitchen on their way to the servants' hall.

"Of course he took it"—the maid's tone was positive—"those rich men's sons

always are a bad lot."

"'E didn't take it, then. 'Is father's playin' some mean game on 'im—that's what. Hi worked five months hin that 'ouse an' Hi'd as lief work for the devil!" And the butler pounded his fist for emphasis.

It took all Patsy's self-control to refrain from launching into the argument herself, and that in the Irish tongue. She saved herself, however, by resorting to that temper of which she had boasted, and hurled at the two a torrent of words which sounded to them like the most horrible pagan blasphemy, and from which they fled in genuine horror. In reality it was the names of all the places in France that Patsy could recall with rapidity.

When the kitchen was empty once more Patsy systematically gathered together all that she knew and all that she had heard of Billy Burgeman, and weighed it against the bare possible chance she might have of helping him should she continue her quest. And in the end she made her decision unwaveringly.

"Troth! a conscience is a poor bit of property entirely," she sighed, as she stood the pâté-shells on the ledge of the range to dry. "It drives ye after a man ye don't care a ha'penny about, and it drives ye from the one that ye do. Bad luck to it!"

That night Patsy sat under the trees with the tinker while he ate his supper. A half-grown moon lighted the feast for them, for Patsy took an occasional mouthful at the tinker's insistence that dining alone was a miserably unsociable affair.

"To watch ye eat that pâté de fois gras a body would think ye had been reared on them. Honest, now, have ye ever tasted one before in your life?"

"I have."

"Then—ye have sat at rich men's tables?"

"Or perhaps I have begged at rich men's doors. Maybe that is how I came to have a distaste for their—charity."

"Who are ye? Ye know I'd give the full of my empty pockets to know who ye are, and what started ye tramping the road—in rags."

The tinker considered a moment. “Perhaps I took the road because I believed it led to the only place I cared to find. Perhaps I lost the way to it, as you lost yours to Arden, and in the losing I found—something else. Perhaps—perhaps—oh, perhaps a hundred things; but I’ll make another bargain with you. I’ll tell you all about it when we reach Arden, if you’ll tell me the name of the lad you came to find.”

“I’ll do more than that—I’ll bring ye together and let ye help mend him,” and she stretched forth her hand to clinch the bargain.

They sat in silence under the spattering of moonlight that sifted down through the branches; for the moment the tinker had forgotten his hunger.

“Well?” queried Patsy at last. “A ha’penny for them.”

“I’m thinking the same old thoughts I’ve thought a hundred times already—since that first day: What makes you so different from everybody else? What ever sent you out into the world with your gospel of kindness—on your lips and in your hands?”

“Would ye really like to know?” Patsy’s fingers stole through the grass about them. “Faith! the world’s not so soft and green as this under every one’s feet. Ye see ’twas by a thorn I was found hanging to that Killarney rose-bush in Brittany, and I’ve always remembered the feeling of it.”

“I always suspected that the people who fell heir to stinging memories generally went through life hugging their own troubles, and letting the rest of the world hug theirs.”

“I don’t believe it!” Patsy shook her head fiercely. “What’s the use of all the pain and sorrow and trouble scattered about everywhere if it can’t put a cure for others into the hands of those who have first tasted it? And what better cure can ye find than kindness; isn’t it the best thing in the world?”

“Is it? Can it cure—gold?”

“And why not? If every man had more kindness than he had gold, would neighbor ever have to fear neighbor or childther go hungry for love?” The tinker did not answer, and Patsy went on with a deepening intensity: “I’ll tell ye a tale—a foolish tale that keeps repeating itself over and over in my memory like the tick-tick-tick of a clock. Ye know that the Jesuit Fathers say—give them the care of a child till he’s ten and nothing afterward matters. Well, it’s true; a child can

feel all the sweetness or bitterness, hunger or plenty, that life holds before he is that age even."

Patsy stopped. A veery was singing in the woods close by, and she listened for a moment. "Hearken to that bird, now. A good-for-naught lad may have stolen his nest, or a cat filched his young, or his sons and daughters flown away and left him; but he'll sing, for all that. 'Tis a pity the rest of us can't do as well."

"Yes," agreed the tinker, "but the story—"

"Aye, the story. It begins with a wee white cottage in Brittany, fronted by roses and backed by great cliffs and the open sea." Patsy clasped her hands about her knees, while her eyes left the shadow of the trees and traveled to the open where the moonlight spread silvery clear and unbroken. And the tinker, watching, knew that her eyes were seeing the things of which she was telling. "A wee white cottage—the roses and the cliffs," repeated Patsy, "and a great, grim, silent figure of a man sitting there idle all day, watching a little lass at her play. Just the man and the child. And the trouble in his mind that had kept the man silent and idle was an old, old trouble—old as the peopled world itself.

"Long before, he had married a woman who cared for two things—love and gold; and he had but the one to give her. She had been a great actress, a favorite at the Comédie Française; but she left her work and all the applause and adulation for him, an expatriated Irishman with naught but a great love, because she thought she cared for love more. They had been wonderfully happy at first; he wrote beautiful verses about her—and his beloved motherland, and she said them for him in that wonderful singing voice of hers that had made her the idol of half of France. And she had made a game of their poverty in the wee white cottage with the roses—until her child was born and poverty could no longer be played at. Then work became drudgery, and love naught. The woman went back to her theater—and another man, a man who had gold a-plenty. And the child grew up playing alone beside the silent, grim Irishman.

"Then one day the child played with no one by to watch her; the man had walked over the cliff and forgot ever to come back. Aye, and the child played on till dark came and she fell asleep—there on the door-sill, under the roses. 'Twas a neighbor, passing, that found her, and carried her home to put to bed with her own children. After that the child was taken away to a convent, and the rich children called her '*la pauvre petite*,' shared their saints'-days' gifts with her, and bought her candles that she might make a *novena* to bring her father back again.

But ’twas her mother it brought instead.”

Patsy stopped again to listen to the veery; he was not singing alone now, and she smiled wistfully. “See! he’s found a friend, a comrade to sing with him. That’s grand!” Then she went back to the story:

“The child was taken from the convent in the night and by somber-clad servants who seemed in a great hurry. She was brought a long way to a château, one of the oldest and most beautiful in the south of France; and a small, shrivel-faced man in royal clothes met her at the door and carried her up great marble stairs to a chamber lighted by two tall candles, just. They stopped on the threshold for a breath, and the child saw that a woman was lying in the canopied bed—a very, very beautiful woman. To the child she seemed some goddess—or saint.

“‘Here is the child,’ said the man; and the woman answered: ‘Alone, Réné. Remember you promised—alone.’

“After that the man left them together—the dying woman and her child. Ah!—how can I be telling you the way she fondled and caressed her! How starved were the lips that touched the child’s hair, cheeks, and eyelids! And when her strength failed she drew the child into her tired arms and whispered fragments of prayers, haunting memories, pitiful regrets. Of all the things she said the child remembered but one: ‘Gold buys plenty for the body, but nothing for the heart—nothing—nothing!’

“And that kept repeating itself over and over in the child’s mind. She remembered it all through the night after they had taken her away from those lifeless arms and she lay awake alone in a terrifying, dark room; she remembered it all through the long day when she sat beside the gorgeous catafalque that held her mother, and watched the tall candles in the dim chapel burn lower and lower and lower. And that was why she refused to stay afterward—and be taken care of by the shrivel-faced man in that oldest and most beautiful château. Instead she slipped out early one morning, before any one was awake to see and mark the way she went. It is unbelievable, sometimes, how children who have the will to do it can lose themselves. And so this child—alone—went out into the world, empty-handed, seeking life.”

“But did she go empty-handed?” asked the tinker.

“Aye, but not empty-hearted, thank God!”

“And wherever the child went, she carried with her that hatred of gold,” mused the tinker.

“Aye; why not? She had learned how pitifully little it was worth, when all’s said and done. ’Twas her father’s name she heard last on her mother’s lips, and it was their child she prayed for with her dying breath.” Patsy sprang to her feet. “Do ye see—the moon will be beating me to bed, and ’twas a poor tale, after all. How is your foot?”

“Better—much better.”

“Would ye be able to travel on it to-morrow?”

The tinker shook his head. “The day after, perhaps.”

“Well, keep on coaxing it. Good night.” And she had picked up her basket and was gone before the tinker could stumble to his feet.

When the tinker woke the next morning the basket stood just inside the stable door, linked through the pilgrim’s staff. On investigation it proved to contain his breakfast and an envelope, and the envelope contained a ten-dollar bill and a letter, which read:

> DEAR LAD,—I’ll be well on the road when you get this; and with a tongue in my head and luck at my heels, please God, I’ll reach Arden this time. You need not be afraid to use the money—or too proud, either. It was honestly earned and the charity of no one; you can take it as a loan or a gift—whichever you choose. Anyhow, it will bring you after me faster—which was your own promise.
>
> Yours in advance,
>
> P. O’CONNELL

Surprise, disappointment, indignation, amusement, all battled for the upper hand; but it was a very different emotion from any of these which finally mastered the tinker. He smoothed the bill very tenderly between his hands before he returned it to the envelope; but he did something more than smooth the envelope.

And meanwhile Patsy tramped the road to Arden.

XIII

A MESSAGE AND A MAP

This time there was no mistaking the right road; it ran straight past Quality House to Arden—unbroken but for graveled driveways leading into private estates. Patsy traveled it at a snail's pace. Now that Arden had become a definitely unavoidable goal, she was more loath to reach it than she had been on any of the seven days since the beginning of her quest. However the quest ended—whether she found Billy Burgeman or not, or whether there was any need now of finding him—this much she knew: for her the road ended at Arden. What lay beyond she neither tried nor cared to prophesy. Was it not enough that her days of vagabondage would be over—along with the company of tinkers and such like? There might be an answer awaiting her to the letter sent from Lebanon to George Travis; in that case she could in all probability count on some dependable income for the rest of the summer. Otherwise—there were her wits. The very thought of them wrung a pitiful little groan from Patsy.

"Faith! I've been overworking Dan's legacy long enough, I'm thinking. Poor wee things! They're needing rest and nourishment for a while," and she patted her forehead sympathetically.

Of one thing she was certain—if her wits must still serve her, they should do so within the confines of some respectable community; in other words, she would settle down and work at something that would provide her with bed and board until the fall bookings began. And, the road and the tinker would become as a dream, fading with the summer into a sweet, illusive memory—and a photograph. Patsy felt in the pocket of her Norfolk for the latter with a sudden eagerness. It had been forgotten since she had found the tinker himself; but, now that the road was lengthening between them again, it brought her a surprising amount of comfort.

"There are three things I shall have to be asking him—if he ever fetches up in Arden, himself," mused Patsy as she loitered along. "And, what's more, this time I'll be getting an answer to every one of them or I'm no relation of Dan's. First, I'll know the fate of the brown dress; he hadn't a rag of it about him—that's certain. Next, there's that breakfast with the lady's-slippers. How did he come by it? And, last of all, how ever did this picture come on the mantel-shelf of a closed cottage where he knew the way of breaking in and what clothes would be

hanging in the chamber closets? ’Tis all too great a mystery—”

“Why, Miss O’Connell—what luck!”

Patsy had been so deep in her musing that a horse and rider had come upon her unnoticed. She turned quickly to see the rider dismounting just back of her; it was Gregory Jessup.

“The top o’ the morning to ye!” She broke into a glad laugh, blessing that luck, herself, which had broken into her disquieting thoughts and provided at least fair company and some news—perhaps. She held out her hand in hearty welcome. “Are ye ‘up so early or down so late’?”

“I might ask that, myself. Is it the habit of celebrated Irish actresses to tramp miles between sun-up and breakfast?”

“’Tis a habit more likely to fasten itself on French cooks, I’m thinking,” and Patsy smiled.

“Then how is a man to account for you?”

“He’d best not try; I’m a mortial poor person to account for. Maybe I’m up early—getting my lines for the next act.”

“Of course. What a stupid duffer I am! You must find us plain, plodding Americans horribly short-witted sometimes. Don’t you?”

Patsy shook a contradiction. “It’s your turn, now. What fetched ye abroad at this hour?”

Gregory Jessup slipped his arm through the horse’s bridle and fell into step with her. “Principally because I like the early morning better than any other part of the day; it’s fresh and sweet and unspoiled—like some Irish actresses. There—please don’t mind my crude attempt at poetic—simile,” for Patsy’s eyes had snapped dangerously. “If you only knew how rarely poetry or compliments ever came to roost on this dry tongue, you really wouldn’t want to discourage them when it does happen. Besides, there was another reason for my being up—a downright foolish reason.”

Gregory Jessup accompanied the remark with a downright foolish smile, and then lapsed into silence. In this fashion they walked to the bend of the road where another graveled driveway branched forth; and here the horse stopped of

his own accord and whinnied.

“This is the Dempsy Carters’ place—where I’m stopping,” Gregory explained.

“Aye, but the other reason?” Patsy reminded him, her eyes friendly once more.

“Oh—the other reason; I told you it was a foolish one.” He stood rubbing his horse’s nose and looking over the road they had come for some seconds before he finally confessed to it. “It’s Billy, you see. Somehow it occurred to me that if he should be in trouble and at the same time knowing his father was sick—dying—he might be hanging around somewhere near here—uncertain just what to do—and not wanting any one to see him. In that case, the best time to run across him would be early morning before the rest of the people were awake and up. Don’t you think so?”

“It sounds more sensible than foolish; but I don’t think ye’ll ever find him that way. If he was clever enough to let the earth swallow him up, he’s clever enough to keep swallowed. There’s but one way to reach him—and it’s been in my mind since yester-eve.”

A look of surprise came into Gregory Jessup’s face. “Why, Miss O’Connell! I had no idea what I said that day would fasten Billy on your mind like this. It’s awfully good of you; and he’s a perfect stranger—”

Patsy broke in with a whimsical chuckle. “Aye, I’ve grown overpartial to strangers of late; but ye hearken to me. Ye’ll have to leave a sign by the roadside for him—if ye want to reach him. Otherwise he’ll see ye first and be gone before ever ye know he’s about.”

“What kind of a sign?”

“Faith! I’m not sure of that yet—myself. It must be something that will put trust back in a lad and tell him to come home.”

“And where would you put it?”

“Where? On the roadside, just, anywhere along the road he’s used to tramping.”

Gregory Jessup’s face lost its puzzled frown and became suddenly illumined with an inspiration. “I know! By Hec! I’ve got it! There’s that path that runs down from the Burgeman estate to our old cottage. It was a short cut for us kids, and we were almost the only ones to use it. Billy would be far more likely to

take that than the highroad—and it leads to the Burgeman farm, too, run by an old couple that simply adore Billy. He might go there when he wouldn't go anywhere else. That's the place for a message. But what message?"

"I know!" Patsy clapped her hands. "Have ye a scrap of paper anywheres about ye—and a pencil?"

Hunting through the pockets of his riding-clothes, Gregory Jessup discovered a business letter, the back of which provided ample writing space, and the stub of a red-ink pencil. "We use 'em in the drafting-room," he explained. "If these will do—here's a desk," and he raised the end of his saddle, supporting it with a large expanse of palm.

Patsy accepted them all with a gracious little nod, and, spreading the paper on the improvised desk, she wrote quickly:

"If it do come to pass
That any man turn ass,"
Thinking the world is blind
And trust forsworn mankind,
"Ducdame, ducdame, ducdame":
Here shall he find
Both trust and peace of mind,
An he but leave all foolishness behind.

"With apologies to Willie Shakespeare," Patsy chuckled again as she returned paper and pencil to their owner. "Ye put it somewhere he'd be likely to look—furninst something that would naturally take his notice."

"I know just the spot—and they're in blossom now, too. I'll fasten it to a rock, there, wedge it in the cracks. Billy won't miss it if he comes within yards of the place." He grasped Patsy's hand with growing fervor that gave promise of developing suddenly into almost anything. "You're a brick, Miss O'Connell—a solid gold brick of a girl, and I wish—"

"Take care!" warned Patsy. "Ye're not improving as fast in your compliments as ye might—and there's no poetry in gold—for me."

Gregory Jessup looked puzzled, but his fervor did not abate one whit. "I want you to promise me if you ever need a friend—if there is anything I can ever do—"

“Ye can,” interrupted Patsy, “and ye can do it now. Take that riding-crop of yours and draw me a map in the dust there of the country hereabouts—ye can make a cross for Arden.... That’s grand. Now where would ye put Brambleside Inn? And is it seven miles from there to Arden?”

Gregory nodded an affirmative while he considered Patsy with grave perplexity. Patsy saw it, and smiled reassuringly. “’Tis all right. I’ve always had a great interest entirely to know the geography of every new country—and I haven’t the wits to discover it for myself. Now where would ye put the cross-roads and the Catholic church? And where would Lebanon be? Aye—Did ye ever see an old tabby chasing her tail? Faith! ’tis a very intelligent spectacle, I’m thinking. Now where might ye put the cross-roads where ye picked me up with the Dempsy Carters?... And Dansville?... and the railroad bridge? ... and the golf links, back yonder?”

She stood for many minutes, studying the rough chart in the dust at her feet. The connecting lines of roads between the places named made fully a hundred and twenty degrees of a circle about the cross marking Arden. And as chance would have it, every one of the encircling towns measured approximately seven miles from the central cross. Patsy smiled, and the smile grew to a chuckle—and the chuckle to a long, rippling laugh. Patsy was forced to hold her sides with the ache of it.

“I know ye think I’m crazy—but ’tis the rarest bit of humor this side of Ireland. Willie Shakespeare himself would steal it if he could to put in one of his comedies. There is just one thing I’d like to be knowing—how much of it was chance, and how much was the tricks of a tinker?”

“I don’t think I understand,” mumbled Gregory Jessup.

“Of course ye don’t,” agreed Patsy. “I don’t, myself. But there’s one thing more I’ll be telling ye—if ye’ll swear never to let it pass your lips?”

Patsy paused for dramatic effect while Gregory Jessup bound himself twice over to secrecy. “Well,” she said, at length, “’tis this: If I had the road to travel again I’d pray to Saint Brendan to keep my feet fast to the wrong turn. That’s what!”

Patsy left him, still looking after her in a puzzled fashion; and with quickening steps she passed out of sight.

But once again did she stop; and again it was by a graveled driveway. She was

deep in green memories when a figure in nurse's uniform coming down the drive caught her attention. She was immediately reminded of two facts: that the Burgeman estate was in Arden, and that Burgeman senior was dying. Impulsively she turned toward the nurse.

"Is Mr. Burgeman any better this morning?"

"We hardly expect that." The nurse's tone was cordial but professionally cautious.

"I know"—Patsy nodded wisely, as if she had been following the case professionally herself—"but there is often a last rallying of strength. Isn't there?"

"Sometimes. I hardly think there will be anything very lasting in Mr. Burgeman's case. There are moments, now, when his strength and will are remarkably vigorous—any other man would be in his bed."

"Oh! Then he is—up?"

"He's taken about on a wheeled chair or cot. He is too restless to stay in any place very long. He seems more contented outdoors, where he can watch—" She broke off abruptly. "Lovely morning—isn't it? Good-by."

She turned about and went up the drive again. Patsy watched her go, a strange, brooding look in her eyes. "So—he likes to be out of doors best—where he can be watching. And if a body chanced to trespass that way—she might come upon him, sudden like, and stay long enough to set him a-thinking. Would it be too late, now, I wonder?"

She resumed her way—and her memories. She passed a half-dozen more driveways and she climbed a hill; and when she came to the top she found herself looking down on a thickly wooded hamlet. Spires and gabled roofs broke the foliage here and there, and on the rising slope beyond towered a veritable forest. Patsy stood on the brink of the hill and gazed down long and thoughtfully; at last she flung out her arms in an impetuous gesture of confirmation, while the old, whimsical smile crept into her lips.

"'Aye, now am I in Arden, the more fool I; when I was at home, I was in a better place—but travelers must be content.'" And taking a firm grip of her memories, her wits, and her courage, she went down the hill.

XIV

ENTER KING MIDAS

When Patsy at last reached Arden she went direct to the post-office and was there confronted by a huge poster occupying an entire wall:

THE SYLVAN PLAYERS
Under the Management of Geo. Travis
Presenting Wm. Shakespeare's Comedy
"AS YOU LIKE IT"
In the Forest of Arden, on the Estate of Peterson-Jones, Esq.

The date given was Wednesday, the day following; and the cast registered her name opposite Rosalind.

"So that's the answer to the letter I wrote, and a grand answer it is. And that's the meaning of Janet Payne's remarks, and I never guessed it." She heaved the faintest wisp of a sigh—it might have been pleasure; it might have been a twinge of pain. "And I'm to be playing the Duke's daughter, after all, at the end of the road."

She went to the general delivery and asked for mail. The clerk responded with three letters; Patsy almost whistled under her breath. Retiring to a corner, she looked them over and opened first the one from George Travis:

> DEAR IRISH PATSY,—You are a lucky beggar, and so am I. Here comes the news of Miriam St. Regis's illness and the canceling of all of her summer engagements in the same mail as your letter.
>
> Just think of it! Here you are actually in Arden all ready for me to pick up and put in Miriam's place without having to budge from my desk. The Sylvan Players open with "As You Like It." If the critics like it—and you—as well as I think they will, I'll book you straight through the summer. Felton's managing for me, so please report to him on Monday when he gets there. I may run down myself for a glimpse of your work.
>
> Yours,
>
> G. TRAVIS.

> P. S. More good luck. We are just in time to get your name on the posters; and unless my memory greatly deceives me, you will be able to walk right into all of Miriam's costumes.

"Aye, they'll fit," agreed Patsy, with a chuckle. The second letter was from Felton—dated Monday. He was worried over her continued absence. He had not found her registered at either of the two hotels, and the postal clerk reported her mail uncalled for. Would she come to the Hillcrest Hotel at once. The third was from Janet Payne, expressing her grief over Joseph's death, and their disappointment at finding her gone the next morning when they motored over to take her to Arden. They were all looking forward to seeing her play on Wednesday.

Patsy returned the letters to their envelopes and marveled that her new-found prosperity should affect her so drearily. Why was she not elated, transported with the surprise and the sudden promise of success? She was free to go now to a good hotel and sign for a room and three regular meals a day. She could wire at once to Miss Gibbs, of the select boarding-house, and have her trunk down in twenty-four hours. In very truth, her days of vagabondage were over, yet the fact brought her no happiness.

She hunted Felton up at the hotel and explained her absence: "Just a week-end at one of the fashionable places. No, not exactly professional. No, not social either. You might call it—providential, like this."

The morning was spent meeting her fellow-players—going over the text, trying on the St. Regis costumes, adjourning at last to the estate of Peterson-Jones.

Until the middle of the afternoon they were busy with rehearsals: the mental tabulating of new stage business, the adapting of strange stage property, the accustoming of one's feet to tread gracefully over roots and tangling vines and slippery patches of pine needles instead of a good stage flooring. And through all this maze Patsy's mind played truant. A score of times it raced off back to the road again, to wait between a stretch of woodland and a grove of giant pines for the coming of a grotesque, vagabond figure in rags.

"Come, come, Miss O'Connell; what's the matter?" Felton's usual patience snapped under the strain of her persistent wit-wandering. "I've had to tell you to change that entrance three times."

"Aye—and what is the matter?" Patsy repeated the question remorsefully.

“Maybe I’ve acquired the habit of taking the wrong entrance. What can you expect from any one taking seven days to go seven miles. I’m dreadfully sorry. If you’ll only let me off this time I promise to remember to-morrow; I promise!”

The day had been growing steadily hotter and more sultry. By five o’clock every one who was doing anything, and could stop doing it, went slothfully about looking for cool spots and cooler drinks. Burgeman senior, alone with his servants on the largest estate in Arden, ordered one of the nurses to wheel him to the border of his own private lake—a place where breezes blew if there were any about—and leave him there alone until Fitzpatrick, his lawyer, came from town. And there he was sitting, his eyes on nothing at all, when Patsy scrambled up the bank of the lake and dropped breathless under a tree—not three feet from him.

“Merciful Saint Patrick! I never saw you! Maybe I’m trespassing, now?”

“You are,” agreed Burgeman senior in a colorless voice. “But I hardly think any one will put you off the grounds—at least until you have caught your breath.”

“Thank you. Maybe the grounds are yours, now?” she questioned again.

The sick man signified they were by a slight nod.

“Well, ’tis the prettiest place hereabouts.” Patsy offered the information as if she had made the discovery herself and was generously sharing it with him. “I’m a stranger; and when I saw yon bit of cool, gray water, and the pines clustering round, and the wee green faery isle in the midst—with the bridge holding onto it to keep it from disappearing entirely—and the sand so white, and the lawns so green—why, it looked like a Japanese garden set in a great sedge bowl. Do you wonder I had to come closer and see it better?”

Burgeman said nothing; but the ghost of a feeling showed, the greed of possession.

“And it all belongs to you. You bought it all—the lake and the woods and the lawns.” It was not a question, but a statement.

“I own three miles in every direction.”

“Except that one.” Patsy smiled as she pointed a finger upward. “Did you ever

think how generous the blessed Lord is to lend a bit of His sky to put over the land men buy and fence in and call ‘private property’? It’s odd how a body can think he owns something because he has paid money for it; and yet the things that make it worth the owning he hasn’t paid for at all.”

“What do you mean?”

“Would you think much of this place if you couldn’t be looking yonder and watching the clouds scud by, all turning to pink and flame color and purple as the sun gathers them in? What would you do if no wild flowers grew for you, or the birds forgot you in the spring and built their nests and sang for your neighbor instead? And can you hire the sun to shine by the day, or order the rain by the hogshead?”

Burgeman senior was contemplating her with genuine amazement. “I do not believe I have ever heard any one put forth such extraordinary theories before. May I ask if you are a socialist?”

“Bless you, no! I am a very ordinary human being, just; principally human.”

“Do you know who I am?”

For an instant Patsy looked at him without speaking; then she answered, slowly: “You have told me, haven’t you? You are the master of the place, and you look a mortal lonely one.”

“I—am.” The words seemed to slip from his lips without his being at all conscious of having spoken.

“And the money couldn’t keep it from you.” There was no mockery in her tone. “’Tis pitifully few comforts you can buy in life, when all’s said and done.”

“Comforts!” The sick man’s eyes grew sharp, attacking, with a force that had not been his for days. “You are talking now like a fool. Money is the only thing that can buy comforts. What comforts have the poor?”

“Are you meaning butlers and limousines, electric vibrators and mud-baths? Those are only cures for the bodily necessities and ills that money brings on a man: the over-feeding and the over-drinking and the—under-living. But what comforts would they bring to a troubled mind and a pinched heart? Tell me that!”

“So! You would prefer to be poor—more pastorally poetic?” Burgeman sneered.

“More comfortable,” corrected Patsy. “Mind you, I’m not meaning starved, ground-under-the-heel poverty, the kind that breeds anarchists and criminals. God pity them, too! I mean the man who is still too poor to reckon his worth to a community in mere money, who, instead, doles kindness and service to his neighbors. Did you ever see a man richer than the one who comes home at day’s end, after eight hours of good, clean work, and finds the wife and children watching for him, happy-eyed and laughing?”

The sick man stirred uneasily. “Well—can’t a rich man find the same happiness?”

“Aye, he can; but does he? Does he even want it? Count up the rich men you know, and how many are there—like that?” No answer being given, Patsy continued: “Take the richest man—the very richest man in all this country—do you suppose in all his life he ever saw his own lad watching for him to come home?”

“What do you know about the richest man—and his son?” The sick man had for a moment become again a fiercely bitter, fighting force, a power given to sweeping what it willed before it. He sat with hands clenched, his eyes burning into the girl’s on the ground beside him. “I know what the world says.”

“The world lies; it has always lied.”

“You are wrong. It is a tongue here and a tongue there that bears false witness; but the world passes on the truth; it has to.”

“You forget”—Burgeman senior spoke with difficulty—“it is the rich who bear the burdens of the world’s cares and troubles, and what do they get for it? The hatred of every one else, even their sons! Every one hates and envies the man richer and more powerful than himself; the more he has the more he is feared. He lives friendless; he dies—lonely.”

Patsy rose to her knees and knelt there, shaking her fist—a composite picture of supplicating Justice and accusing Truth. She had forgotten that the man before her was sick—dying; that he must have suffered terribly in spirit as well as body; and that her words were so many barbed shafts striking at his soul. She remembered nothing save the thing against which she was fighting: the hard, merciless possession of money and the arrogant boast of it.

“And you forget that the burden of trouble which the brave rich bear so nobly are troubles they’ve put into the world themselves. They hoard their money to buy power; and then they use that power to get more money. And so the chain grows—money and power, money and power! I heard of a rich man once who turned a terrible fever loose all over the land because he bribed the health inspectors not to close down his factories. And after death had swept his books clean he gave large sums of money to stamp out the epidemic in the near-by towns. Faith! that was grand—the bearing of that trouble! And why are the rich hated? Why do they live friendless and die lonely? Not because they hold money, not because they give it away or help others with it. No! But because they use it to crush others, to rob those who have less than they have, to turn their power into a curse. That’s the why!”

Patsy, the fanatic, turned suddenly into Patsy, the human, again. The fist that had been beating the air under his nose dropped and spread itself tenderly on the sick man’s knee. “But I’m sorry you’re lonely. If there was anything you wanted—that you couldn’t buy and I could earn for you—I would get it gladly.”

“I believe you would,” and the confession surprised the man himself more than it did Patsy. “Who are you?” he asked at last.

“No one at all, just; a laggard by the roadside—a lass with no home, no kin, and that for a fortune,” and she flung out her two empty hands, palm uppermost, and laughed.

“And you are audacious enough to think you are richer than I.” This time there was no sneer in his voice, only an amused toleration.

“I am,” said Patsy, simply.

“You have youth and health,” he conceded, grudgingly.

“Aye, and trust in other folks; that’s a fearfully rich possession.”

“It is. I might exchange with you—all this,” and his hand swept encompassingly over his great estate, “for that last—trust in other folks—in one’s own folks!”

“Maybe I’d give it to you for nothing—a little of it at any rate. See, you trust me; and here’s—trust in your son.” Patsy’s voice dropped to a whisper; she leaned forward and opened one of the sick man’s hands, then folded the fingers tightly over something that appeared to be invisible—and precious. “Now, you believe in him, no matter what he’s done; you believe he wouldn’t wrong you or himself

by doing anything base; you believe that he is coming back to you—to break the loneliness, and that he'll find a poor, plain man for a father, waiting him. Don't you remember the prodigal lad—how his father saw him a long way off and went to meet him? Well, you can meet him with a long-distance trust—understanding. And there's one thing more; don't you be so blind or so foolish as to crush him with the weight of 'all this.' Mind, he has the right to the making of his own life—for a bit at least; and it's your privilege to give him that right—somehow. You've still a chance to keep him from wanting to pitch your money for quoits off the Battery."

Patsy sprang to her feet; but Burgeman senior had reached forward quickly and caught her skirt, holding it in a marvelously firm grip. "Then you do know who I am; you've known it all along."

"I know you're the master of all this, and your lad is the Rich Man's Son; that's all."

"And you think—you think I have no right to leave my son the inheritance I have worked and saved for him."

"I think you have no right to leave him your—greed. 'Tis a mortal poor inheritance for any lad."

"Your vocabulary is rather blunt." Burgeman smiled faintly. "But it is very refreshing. It is a long time since naked truth and I met face to face."

"But will it do you any good—or is it too late?" Patsy eyed him contemplatively.

"Too late for what?"

"Too late for the inheritance—too late to give it away somewhere else—or loan it for a few years till the lad had a chance to find out if he could make some decent use of it himself. There's many ways of doing it; I have thought of a few this last half-hour. You might loan it to the President to buy up some of the railroads for the government—or to purchase the coal or oil supply; or you might offer it as a prize to the country that will stop fighting first; or it might buy clean politics into some of the cities—or endow a university." She laughed. "It's odd, isn't it, how a body without a cent to her name can dispose of a few score millions—in less minutes?"

"If you please, sir." A motionless, impersonal figure in livery stood at a respectful distance behind the wheel-chair. Neither of them had been conscious

of his presence.

“Well, Parsons?”

“Mr. Billy, sir, has come back, sir. He and Mr. Fitzpatrick came together. Shall I bring them out here or wheel you inside, sir?”

“Inside!” Burgeman senior almost shouted it. Then he turned to Patsy and there was more than mere curiosity in his voice: “Who are you?”

“No one at all, just; a laggard by the roadside,” she repeated, wistfully. And then she added in her own Donegal: “But don’t ye let the lagging count for naught. Promise me that!”

The sick man turned his head for a last look at her. “Such a simple promise—to throw away the fruits of a lifetime!” Bitterness was in his voice again, but Patsy caught the muttering under his breath. “I might think about the boy, though, if the Lord granted me time.”

“Amen!” whispered Patsy.

She scrambled down the bank the way she had come. For a moment she stopped by the lake and skimmed a handful of white pebbles across its mirrored surface. She watched the ripples she had made spread and spread until they lost themselves in the lake itself, leaving behind no mark where they had been.

“Yonder’s the way with the going and coming of most of us, a little ripple and naught else—unless it is one more stone at the bottom.” She heaved a sigh. “Well, the quest is over, and I’ve never laid eyes on the lad once. But it’s ended well, I’m thinking; aye, it’s ended right for him.”

XV

ARDEN

Summer must have made one day in June purposely as a setting for a pastoral comedy; and chance stole it, like a kindly knave, and gave it to the Sylvan Players. Never did a gathering of people look down from the rise of a natural amphitheater upon a fairer scene; a Forest of Arden, built by the greatest scenic artist since the world began. Birds flew about the trees and sang—whenever the orchestra permitted; a rabbit or two scuttled out from under rhododendron-bushes and skipped in shy ingénue fashion across the stage; while overhead a blue, windless sky spread radiance about players and audience alike.

Shorn of so much of the theatricalism of ordinary stage performances, there was reality and charm about this that warmed the spectators into frequent bursts of spontaneous enthusiasm which were as draughts of elixir to the players. Those who were playing creditably played well; those who were playing well excelled themselves, and Patsy outplayed them all.

She lived every minute of the three hours that spanned the throwing of Charles, the wrestler, and her promise “to make all this matter even.” There was no touch of coarseness in her rollicking laughter, no hoydenish swagger in her masquerading; it was all subtly, irresistibly feminine. And George Travis, watching from the obscurity of a back seat, pounded his knee with triumph and swore he would make her the greatest Shakespearean actress of the day.

As Hymen sang her parting song, Patsy scanned the sea of faces beyond the bank of juniper which served instead of footlights. Already she had picked out Travis, Janet Payne and her party, the people from Quality House, who still gaped at her, unbelieving, and young Peterson-Jones, looking more melancholy, myopic, and poetical than before. But the one face she hoped to find was missing, even among the stragglers at the back; and it took all her self-control to keep disappointment and an odd, hurt feeling out of her voice as she gave the epilogue.

On the way to her tent—a half-score of them were used as dressing-rooms behind the stage—George Travis overtook her. “It’s all right, girl. You’ve made a bigger hit than even I expected. I’m going to try you out in—”

Patsy cut him short. “You sat at the back. Did you see a vagabond lad hanging

around anywhere—with a limp to him?”

The manager looked at her with amused toleration. “Does a mere man happen to be of more consequence this minute than your success? Oh, I say, that’s not like you, Irish Patsy!”

She crimsoned, and the manager teased no more. “We play Greyfriars to-morrow and back to Brambleside the day after; and I’ve made up my mind to try you out there in Juliet. If you can handle tragedy as you can comedy, I’ll star you next winter on Broadway. Oh, your future’s very nearly made, you lucky girl!”

But Patsy, slipping into her tent, hardly heard the last. If they played Greyfriars the next day, that meant they would leave Arden on the first train after they were packed; and that meant she was passing once and for all beyond tramping reach of the tinker. There was a dull ache at her heart which she attempted neither to explain nor to analyze; it was there—that was enough. With impatient fingers she tore off Rosalind’s wedding finery and attacked her make-up. Then she lingered over her dressing, hoping to avoid the rest of the company and any congratulatory friends who might happen to be browsing around. She wanted to be alone with her memories—to have and to hold them a little longer before they should grow too dim and far away.

A hand scratched at the flap of her tent and Janet Payne’s voice broke into her reverie: “Can’t we see you, please, for just a moment? We’ll solemnly promise not to stay long.”

Patsy hooked back the flap and forced the semblance of a welcome into her greeting.

“It was simply ripping!” chorused the Dempsy Carters, each gripping a hand.

Janet Payne looked down upon her with adoring eyes. “It was the best, the very best I’ve ever seen you or any one else play it. For the first time Rosalind seemed a real girl.”

But it was the voice of Gregory Jessup that carried above the others: “Have you heard, Miss O’Connell? Burgeman died last night, and Billy was with him. He’s come home.”

“Faith! then there’s some virtue in signs, after all.”

A hush fell on the group. Patsy suddenly put out her hand. “I’m glad for you—

I’m glad for him; and I hope it ended right. Did you see him?”

“For a few minutes. There wasn’t time to say much; but he looked like a man who had won out. He said he and the old man had had a good talk together for the first time in their lives—said it had given him a father whose memory could never shame him or make him bitter. I wanted to tell you, so you wouldn’t have him on your mind any longer.”

She smiled retrospectively. “Thank you; but I heaved him off nearly twenty-four hours ago.”

Left to herself again, she finished her packing; then tying under her chin a silly little poke-bonnet of white chiffon and corn-flowers, still somewhat crushed from its long imprisonment in a trunk, she went back for a last glimpse of the Forest and her Greenwood tree.

The place was deserted except for the teamsters who had come for the tents and the property trunks. A flash of white against the green of the tree caught her eye; for an instant she thought it one of Orlando’s poetic effusions, overlooked in the play and since forgotten. Idly curious, she pulled it down and read it—once, twice, three times:

> Where twin oaks rustle in the wind,
> There waits a lad for Rosalind.
> If still she be so wond’rous kind,
> Perchance she’ll ease the fretted mind
> That naught can cure—but Rosalind.

With a glad little cry she crumpled the paper in her hand and fled, straight as a throstle to its mate, to the giant twin oaks which were landmarks in the forest. Her eyes were a-search for a vagabond figure in rags; it was small wonder, therefore, that they refused to acknowledge the man in his well-cut suit of gray who was leaning partly against the hole of a tree and partly on a pilgrim staff. She stood and stared and gave no sign of greeting.

“Well, so the Duke’s daughter found her rhyme?”

“I’m not knowing whether I’ll own ye or not. Sure, ye’ve no longer the look of an honest tinker; and maybe we’d best part company now—before we meet at all.”

But the tinker had her firmly by both hands. “That’s too late now. I would have

come in rags if there'd been anything left of them, but they are the only things I intend to part company with. And do you know"—he gripped her hands tighter —"I met an acquaintance as I came this way who told me, with eyes nearly popping out of his head, that the wonderful little person who had played herself straight into hundreds of hearts had actually been his cook for three days. Oh, lass! lass! how could you do it!"

"Troth! God made me a better cook than actress. Ye wouldn't want me to be slighting His handiwork entirely, would ye?"

The tinker shook his head at her. "Do you know what I wanted to say to every one of those people who had been watching you? I wanted to say: 'You think she is a wonderful actress; she is more than that. She is a rare, sweet, true woman, better and finer than any play she may act in or any part she may play in it. I, the tinker, have discovered this; and I know her better than does any one else in the whole world.'"

"Is that so?" A teasing touch of irony crept into Patsy's voice. "'Tis a pity, now, the manager couldn't be hearing ye; he might give ye a chance to understudy Orlando."

"And you think I'd be content to understudy any one! Why, I'm going to pitch Orlando straight out of the Forest of Arden; I'm going to pull Willie Shakespeare out of his grave and make him rewrite the whole play—putting a tinker in the leading role."

"And is it a tragedy ye would have him make it?"

"Would it be a tragedy to take a tinker 'for better—for worse'?"

"Faith! that would depend on the tinker."

"Oh-ho, so it's up to the tinker, is it? Well, the tinker will prove it otherwise; he will guarantee to keep the play running pure comedy to the end. So that settles it, Miss Patricia O'Connell—alias Rosalind, alias the cook—alias Patsy—the best little comrade a lonely man ever found. I am going to marry you the day after to-morrow, right here in Arden."

Patsy looked at him long and thoughtfully from under the beguiling shadow of the white chiffon, corn-flower sunbonnet. "'Tis a shame, just, to discourage anything so brave as a self-made—tinker. But I'll not be here the day after to-morrow. And what's more, a man is a fool to marry any woman because he's

lonely and she can cook."

The tinker's eyes twinkled. "I don't know. A man might marry for worse reasons." Then he grew suddenly sober and his eyes looked deep into hers. "But you know and I know that that is not my reason for wanting you, or yours for taking me."

"I didn't say I would take ye." This time it was Patsy's eyes that twinkled. "Do ye think it would be so easy to give up my career—the big success I've hoped and worked and waited for—just—just for a tinker? I'd be a fool to think of it." She was smiling inwardly at her own power of speech, which made what she held as naught sound of such immeasurable consequence.

But the tinker smiled outwardly. "Where did you say you were going to be the day after to-morrow?"

"That's another thing I did not say. If ye are going to marry me 'tis your business to find me." She freed her hands and started off without a backward glance at him.

"Patsy, Patsy!" he called after her, "wouldn't you like to know the name of the man you're going to marry?"

She turned and faced him. Framed in the soft, green fringe of the trees, she seemed to him the very embodiment of young summer—the free, untrammeled spirit of Arden. Ever since the first he had been growing more and more conscious of what she was: a nature vital, beautiful, tender, untouched by the searing things of life—trusting and worthy of trust; but it was not until this moment that he realized the future promise of her. And the realization swept all his smoldering love aflame into his eyes and lips. His arms went out to her in a sudden, passionate appeal.

"Patsy—Patsy! Would the name make any difference?"

"Why should it?" she cried, with saucy coquetry. "I'm marrying the man and not his name. If I can stand the one, I can put up with the other, I'm thinking. Anyhow, 'twill be on the marriage license the day after to-morrow, and that's time enough."

"Do you really mean you would marry a man, not knowing his name or anything about his family—or his income—or—"

“That’s the civilized way, isn’t it?—to find out about those things first; and afterward it’s time enough when you’re married to get acquainted with your man. But that’s not the way that leads off the road to Arden—and it’s not my way. I know my man now—God bless him.” And away she ran through the trees and out of sight.

The tinker watched the trees and underbrush swing into place, covering her exit. So tense and motionless he stood, one might have suspected him of trying to conjure her back again by the simple magic of heart and will. It turned out a disappointing piece of conjuring, however; the green parted again, but not to redisclose Patsy. A man, instead, walked into the open, toward the giant oaks, and one glimpse of him swept the tinker’s memory back to a certain afternoon and a cross-roads. He could see himself sitting propped up by the sign-post, watching the door of a little white church, while down the road clattered a sorrel mare and a runabout. And the man that drove—the man who was trailing Patsy—was the man that came toward him now, looking for—some one.

“You haven’t seen—” he began, but the tinker interrupted him:

“Guess not. I’ve been watching the company break up. Rather interesting to any one not used to that sort of thing—don’t you think?”

The man eyed him narrowly; then cautiously he dropped into an attitude of exaggerated indifference. “It sure is—young feller. Now you hain’t been watchin’ that there leadin’ lady more particularly, have you? I sort o’ cal’ate she might have a takin’ way with the fellers,” and he prodded the tinker with a jocular thumb.

The tinker responded promptly with a foolish grin. “Maybe I have; but the luck was dead against me. Guess she had a lot of friends with her. I saw them carry her off in triumph in a big touring-car—probably they’ll dine her at the country club.”

The man did not wait for further exchange of pleasantries. He took the direction the tinker indicated, and the tinker watched him go with a suppressed chuckle.

“History positively stutters sometimes. Now if that property-man knew what he was talking about the company will be safe out of Arden before a runabout could make the country club and back.” But the tinker’s mirth was of short duration. With a shout of derision, he slapped the pocket of his trousers viciously.

“What a confounded fool I am! Why in the name of reason didn’t I give them to him and stop this sleuth business before it really gets her into trouble? Of all the idiotic—senseless—” and, leaning on the pilgrim staff, he slowly hobbled in the same direction he had given the man.

One last piece of news concerning Billy Burgeman came to Patsy before she left Arden that afternoon. Gregory Jessup was at the station to see her off, and he took her aside for the few minutes before the train arrived.

“I tried to get Billy to join me—knew it would do him good to meet you; but he wouldn’t budge. I rather think he’s still a trifle sore on girls. Nothing personal, you understand?”

Patsy certainly did—far better than his friend knew. In her heart she was trying her best to be interested and grateful to the Rich Man’s Son for his unconscious part in her happiness. Had it not been for him there would have been no quest, no road; and without the road there would have been no tinker; and without the tinker, no happiness. It was none the less hard to be interested, however, now that her mind had given over the lonely occupation of contemplating memories for that most magical of all mental crafts—future-building. She jerked up her attention sharply as Gregory Jessup began speaking again.

“Billy told me just before I came down why he had gone away; and I wanted to tell you. I don’t know how much you know about the old man’s reputation, but he was credited with being the hardest master with his men that you could find either side of the water. In the beginning he made his money by screwing down the wages and unscrewing the labor—and no sentiment. That was his slogan. Whether he kept it up from habit or pure cussedness I can’t tell, but that’s the real reason Billy would never go into his father’s business—he couldn’t stand his meanness. The old man’s secretary forged a check for ten thousand; Billy caught him and cashed it himself—to save the man. He shouldered the guilt so his father wouldn’t suspect the man and hound him.”

“I know,” said Patsy, forgetting that she was supposed to know nothing. “But why in the name of all the saints did the secretary want to forge a check?”

“Why does any one forge? He needs money. When Billy caught him the old fellow went all to pieces and told a pretty tough story. You see, he’d been

Burgeman’s secretary for almost twenty years, given him the best years of his life—slaved for him—lied for him—made money for him. Billy said his father regarded him as an excellent piece of office machinery, and treated him as if he were nothing more. The poor chap had always had hard luck; a delicate wife, three or four children who were eternally having or needing something, and poor relations demanding help he couldn’t refuse. Between doctors’ bills and clothing—and the relatives—he had no chance to save. At last he broke down, and the doctor told him it was an outdoor life, with absolute freedom from the strain of serving a man like Burgeman—or the undertaker for him. So he went to Burgeman, asked him to loan him the money to invest in a fruit-farm, and let him pay it off as fast as he could.”

“Well?” Patsy was interested at last.

“Well, the old man turned him down—shouted his ‘no sentiment’ slogan at him, and shrugged his shoulders at what the doctor said. He told him, flat, that a man who hadn’t saved a cent in twenty years couldn’t in twenty years more; and he only put money into investments that paid. The poor chap went away, frantic, worked himself into thinking he was entitled to that last chance; and when Billy heard the story he thought so, too. In the end, Billy cashed the check, gave the secretary the money, and they both cleared out. He knew, if his father ever suspected the truth, he would have the poor chap followed and dragged back to pay the full penalty of the law—he and all his family with him.”

Patsy smiled whimsically. “It sounds so simple and believable when you have it explained; but it would have been rather nice, now, if Billy Burgeman could have known that one person believed in him from the beginning without an explanation.”

“Who did?”

“Faith! how should I know? I was supposing, just.”

But as Patsy climbed onto the train she muttered under her breath: “We come out even, I’m thinking. If he’s missed knowing that, I’ve missed knowing a fine lad.”

XVI

THE ROAD BEGINS ALL OVER AGAIN

On the second day following Patsy played Juliet at Brambleside, and more than satisfied George Travis. While his mind was racing ahead, planning her particular stardom on Broadway, and her mind was pestering her with its fears and uncertainties into a state of “private prostration,” the manager of the Brambleside Inn was telephoning the Green County sheriff to come at once—he had found the girl.

So it came about at the final dropping of the curtain, as Patsy was climbing down from her bier, that four eagerly determined men confronted her, each plainly wishful to be the first to gain her attention.

“Well,” said the tinker, pointedly, “are you ready?”

“It’s all settled.” Travis was jubilant. “You’ll play Broadway for six months next winter—or I’m no manager.”

It was the manager of the Brambleside Inn and the Green County sheriff, however, who gave the greatest dramatic effect. They placed themselves adroitly on either side of Patsy and announced together: “You’re under arrest!”

“Holy Saint Patrick!” Patsy hardly knew whether to be amused or angry. With the actual coming of the tinker, and the laying of her fears, her mind seemed strangely limp and inadequate. Her lips quivered even as they smiled. “Maybe I had best go back to my bier; you couldn’t arrest a dead Capulet.”

But George Travis swept her aside; he saw nothing amusing in the situation. “What do you mean by insulting Miss O’Connell and myself by such a performance? Why should she be under arrest—for being one of the best Shakespearean actresses we’ve had in this country for many a long, barren year?”

“No! For stealing two thousand dollars’ worth of diamonds from a guest in this hotel the night she palmed herself off as Miss St. Regis!” The manager of the Inn bit off his words as if he thoroughly enjoyed their flavor.

“But she never was here,” shouted Travis.

“Yes, I was,” contradicted Patsy.

“And she sneaked off in the morning with the jewels,” growled the manager.

“And I trailed over the country for four days, trying to find the girl in a brown suit that he’d described—said she was on her way to Arden. I’d give a doggoned big cigar to know where you was all that time.” And there was something akin to admiration in the sheriff’s expression.

But Patsy did not see. She was looking hard at the tinker, with an odd little smile pulling at the corners of her mouth.

The tinker smiled back, while he reached deep into his trousers pocket and brought out a small package which he presented to the sheriff. “Are those what you are looking for?”

They were five unset diamonds.

“Well, I’ll be hanged! Did she give them to you?” The manager of the Inn looked suspiciously from the tinker to Patsy.

“No; she didn’t know I had them—didn’t even know they existed and that she was being trailed as a suspected thief. Why, what’s the matter?” For Patsy had suddenly grown white and her lips were trembling past control.

“Naught—naught they could understand. But I’m finding out there was more than one quest on the road to Arden, more than one soul who fared forth to help another in trouble. And my heart is breaking, just, with the memory of it.” And Patsy sank back on the bier and covered her face.

“What is it, dear?” whispered a distressed tinker.

“Don’t ask—now—here. Sometime I’ll be telling ye.”

“Well”—the sheriff thumbed the armholes of his vest in a business-like manner—“I cal’ate we’ve waited about long enough, young man; supposin’ you explain how you come to have those stones in your possession; and why you lied to me about her and sent me hiking off to that country club—when you knew durned well where she was.”

The tinker laughed in spite of himself. “Certainly; it’s very simple. I found these, in a suit of rags which I saw on a tramp the morning you lost the diamonds—and Miss O’Connell. I liked the rags so well that I paid the tramp to change clothes

with me; he took mine and gave me his, along with a knockout blow for good measure."

The manager of the Inn interrupted with an exclamation of surprise: "So! You were the young fellow they picked up senseless by the stables that morning. When the grooms saw the other man running, they made out it was you who had struck him first."

"Wish I had. But I squared it off with him a few days later," the tinker chuckled. "At the time I couldn't make out why he struck me except to get the rest of the money I had; but of course he wanted to get the stones he'd sewed up in these rags and forgotten. I began to suspect something when I found you trailing Miss O'Connell."

"See here, young man, and wasn't you the feller that put me on the wrong road twice?" The sheriff laid a hand of the law suggestively against his chest.

The tinker chuckled again. "I certainly was. It would have been pretty discouraging for Miss O'Connell if you'd found her before we had the defense ready; and it would have been awkward for you—to have to take a lady in custody."

"I cal'ate that's about right." And the sheriff relaxed into a grin. Suddenly he turned to the manager of the Inn and pounded his palm with his fist. "By Jupiter! I betcher that there tramp is the feller that's been cleanin' up these parts for the past two years. Hangs round as a tramp at back doors and stables, and picks up what information he needs to break into the house easy. Never hitched him up in my mind to the thefts afore—but I cal'ate it's the one man—and he's it."

"Guess you're right," the tinker agreed. "Last Saturday, when I came upon him again—in an automobile—still in my clothes, we had a final fight for the possession of the rags, which I still wore, and the—" But he never finished.

Patsy had sprung to her feet and was looking at him, bewilderment, accusation, almost fright, showing through her tears. "Your clothes—your clothes! You wore a—Then you are—"

"Hush!" said the tinker. He turned to the others. "I think that is all, gentlemen. I searched the rags after I had finished my score with the thief and found the stones. I brought them over this afternoon to return to their rightful owner. I might have returned them that day after the play—but I forgot until the sheriff

had gone. You are entirely welcome. Good afternoon!" He dismissed them promptly, but courteously, as if the stage had been his own drawing-room and the two had suddenly expressed a desire to take their leave.

At the wings he left them and came back direct to George Travis. "There is more thieving to be done this afternoon, and I am going to do it. I am going to steal your future star, right from under your nose; and I shall never return her."

"What do you mean?" Travis stared at him blankly.

"Just what I say; Miss O'Connell and I are to be married this afternoon in Arden."

"That's simply out of the—"

Patsy, who had found her tongue at last, laid a coaxing hand on Travis's arm. "No, it isn't. I wired Miriam yesterday—to see if she was really as sick as you thought. She was sick; but she's ever so much better and her nerves are not going to be nearly as troublesome as she feared. She's quite willing to come back and take her old place, and she'll be well enough next week." Patsy's voice had become vibrant with feeling. "Now don't ye be hard-hearted and think I'm ungrateful. We've all been playing in a bigger comedy than Willie Shakespeare ever wrote; and, sure, we've got to be playing it out to the end as it was meant to be."

"And you mean to give up your career, your big chance of success?" Travis still looked incredulous. "Don't you realize you'll be famous—famous and rich!" he emphasized the last word unduly.

It set Patsy's eyes to blazing. "Aye, I'd no longer be like Granny Donoghue's lean pig, hungry for scrapings. Well, I'd rather be hungry for scrapings than starving for love. I knew one woman who threw away love to be famous and rich, and I watched her die. Thank God she's kept my feet from that road! Sure, I wouldn't be rich—" She choked suddenly and looked helplessly at the tinker.

"Neither would I." And he spoke with a solemn conviction.

In the end Travis gave in. He took his disappointment and his loss like the true gentleman he was, and sent them away with his blessing, mixed with an honest twinge of self-pity. It was not, however, until Patsy turned to wave him a last farewell and smile a last grateful smile from under the white chiffon, corn-flower sunbonnet that he remembered that convention had been slighted.

“Wait a minute,” he said, running after them. “If I am not mistaken I have not had the pleasure of meeting your—future husband; perhaps you’ll introduce us —”

For once in her life Patsy looked fairly aghast, and Travis repeated, patiently, “His name, Irish Patsy—I want to know his name.”

The tinker might have helped her out, but he chose otherwise. He kept silent, his eyes on Patsy’s as if he would read her answer there before she spoke it to Travis.

“Well,” she said at last, slowly, “maybe I’m not sure of it myself—except—I’m knowing it must be a good tinker name.” And then laughter danced all over her face. “I’ll tell ye; ye can be reading it to-morrow—in the papers.” Whereupon she slipped her arm through the tinker’s, and he led her away.

And so it came to pass that once more Patsy and the tinker found themselves tramping the road to Arden; only this time it was down the straight road marked, “Seven Miles,” and it was early evening instead of morning.

“Do ye think we’ll reach it now?” inquired Patsy.

“We have reached it already; we’re just going back.”

“And what happened to the brown dress?”

“I burned it that night in the cottage—to fool the sheriff.”

“And I thought that night it was me ye had tricked—just for the whim of it. Did ye know who I was—by chance?”

“Of course I knew. I had seen you with the Irish Players many, many times, and I knew you the very moment your voice came over the road to me—wishing me ‘a brave day.’” The tinker’s eyes deepened with tenderness. “Do you think for a moment if I hadn’t known something about you—and wasn’t hungering to know more—that I would have schemed and cheated to keep your comradeship?”

“Ye might tell me, then, how ye came to know about the cottage—and how your picture ever climbed to the mantel-shelf?”

“You know—I meant to burn that along with the dress—and I forgot. What did you think when you discovered it?”

“Faith! I thought it was the picture of the truest gentleman God had ever made—and I fetched it along with me—for company.”

The tinker threw back his head and laughed as of old. “What will poor old Greg say when he finds it gone? Oh, I know how you almost stole his faithful old heart by being so pitying of his friend—and how you made the sign for him to follow—”

“Aye,” agreed Patsy, “but what of the cottage?”

“That belongs to Greg’s father; he and the girls are West this summer, so the cottage was closed.”

“And the breakfast with the throstles and the lady’s-slippers?”

The tinker laid his finger over her lips. “Please, sweetheart—don’t try to steal away all the magic and the poetry from our road. You will leave it very barren if you do—‘I’m thinking.’”

Silence held their tongues until curiosity again loosened Patsy’s. “And what started ye on the road in rags? Ye have never really answered that.”

“I have never honestly wanted to; it is not a pleasant answer.” He drew Patsy closer, and his hands closed over hers. “Promise you will never think of it again, that you and I will forget that part of the road—after to-day?”

Patsy nodded.

“I borrowed the rags so that it would take a pretty smart coroner to identify the person in it after the train had passed under the suspension-bridge from which he fell—by accident. Don’t shudder, dear. Was it so terrible—that wish to get away from a world that held nothing, not even some one to grieve? Remember, when I started there wasn’t a soul who believed in me, who would care much one way or another—unless, perhaps, poor old Greg.”

“Would ye mind letting me look at the marriage license? I’d like to be seeing it written down.”

The tinker produced it, and she read “William Burgeman.” Then she added, with a stubborn shake of the head, “Mind, though, I’ll not be rich.”

“You will not have to be. Father has left me absolutely nothing for ten years; after that I can inherit his money or not, as we choose. It’s a glorious

arrangement. The money is all disposed of to good civic purpose, if we refuse. I am very glad it's settled that way; for I'm afraid I would never have had the heart to come to you, dear, dragging all those millions after me."

"Then it is a free, open road for the both of us; and, please Heaven! we'll never misuse it." She laughed joyously; some day she would tell him of her meeting with his father; life was too full now for that.

The tinker fell into his old swinging stride that Patsy had found so hard to keep pace with; and silence again held their tongues.

"Do you think we shall find the castle with a window for every day in the year?" the tinker asked at last.

"Aye. Why not? And we'll be as happy as I can tell ye, and twice as happy as ye can tell me. Doesn't every lad and lass find it anew for themselves when they take to the long road with naught but love and trust in their hearts—and their hands together? They may find it when they're young—they may not find it till they're old—but it will be there, ever beckoning them on—with the purple hills rising toward it. And there's a miracle in the castle that I've never told ye: no matter how old and how worn and how stooped the lad and his lass may have grown, there he sees her only fresh and fair and she sees him only brave and straight and strong."

She stopped and faced him, her hands slipping out of his and creeping up to his shoulders and about his neck. "Dear lad—promise me one thing!—promise me we shall never forget the road! No matter how snugly we may be housed, or how close comfort and happiness sit at our hearthside—we'll be faring forth just once in so often—to touch earth again. And we'll help to keep faith in human nature—aye, and simple-hearted kindness alive in the world; and we'll make our friends by reason of that and not because of the gold we may or may not be having."

“And do you still think kindness is the greatest thing in the world?”

“No. There is one thing better; but kindness tramps mortal close at its heels.” Patsy’s hands slipped from his shoulders; she clasped them together in sudden intensity. “Haven’t ye any curiosity at all to know what fetched me after ye?”

“Yes. But there is to-morrow—and all the days after—to tell me.”

“No, there is just to-day. The telling of it is the only wedding-gift I have for ye, dear lad. I was with Marjorie Schuyler in the den that day you came to her and told her.”

“You heard everything?”

“Aye.”

“And you came, believing in me, after all?”

“I came to show you there was one person in the world who trusted you, who would trust you across the world and back again. That’s all the wedding-gift I have for ye, dear, barring love.”

And then and there—in the open road, still a good three miles from the Arden church—the tinker gathered her close in the embrace he had kept for her so long.

TRANSCRIBER’S NOTE:

Minor changes have been made to correct typesetters’ errors; otherwise, every effort has been made to remain true to the author’s words and intent.

END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SEVEN MILES TO ARDEN

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