The Lost Angel

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Author: Katharine Tynan

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AUTHOR OF “THE WAY OF A MAID,” “THE ADVENTURES OF ALICIA,” ETC.

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THE LOST ANGEL.

Waring's eye rested on the little image amid the garishness of the fair, and he had a feeling as though he had suddenly emerged into a place of greenness and flowing waters.

It was a little angel in yellowed marble. The edges of the marble were smooth as ivory. It was chipped here and there. Plainly it was very old. How on earth had it come there amid the plaster casts and painted images such as are turned out cheaply by the thousand?

As he took it into his hand something stirred within him, warmed him like a little flame, stabbed him with a resentment which was tenderness wounded to death. The little angel had the rounded cheek, the purity of outline from ear to chin of Mildred, the girl whom he had sworn to forget, whom he had thrust out of his mind as men sometimes thrust away

the patient angel we call Conscience.

He stood there a minute staring at the figure. It was beautifully carved. He said to himself that the face had the moulding of an unsheathed lily. All around him were noise, dust, heat, glare. He heard the screaming of a steam merry-go-round. Just opposite where he stood people were going in and out of the tent of the human leopard. Amid the vulgarities of the fair, its indecencies, the innocence he held in his hand struck him as something curiously pathetic. He felt as though he must snatch the little angel away as he would have snatched an innocent, uncomprehending child.

“How much?” he asked.

The man behind the stall looked at him from under his crafty eyelids.

“The little angel? It was very choice. Monsieur had doubtless perceived how excellent it was.” He asked for the little angel fifteen francs.

Turning the little figure about Waring had discovered on a feather of one delicate wing the price, one franc. But he handed over the fifteen

francs without demur. It was worth a good deal more than that he said to himself, and if the rogue had asked him many times that amount he should have paid it. The little angel seemed to have laid soft constraining hands about his heart.

As he walked home from the fair to his dim old hotel in the Haute Ville he asked himself bitterly why he had made such a purchase. God knows that angels were far enough from him since Mildred and he had parted company.

It was night, and the ill-lit streets with their shiny cobble-stones were more dangerously smooth because of a recent shower. He thrust the little angel which he had been carrying in his hand into his breast, as though he held a child there for warmth and shelter. As he held it with his hand pressed against it he had again the sensation of something warm and comforting. Why? Because the little angel had Mildred's rounded cheek? What unspeakable folly! How dared he think of her! She would go her own honest, honourable way in life while he—went to the Devil. He was going there now as fast as he could. The furies were at his heels.

Suddenly he stopped short in the gloomy street, so suddenly that a

sergent-de-ville slipped into the shadows and eyed him suspiciously for a moment or two. He had felt unmistakably as he thought the pressure of a child's hands on his heart, constraining soft hands that he could not break from if he would.

As he went on his heart began to bleed. If he had not been such an accursed fool—he did not stop to pick his words; if Helen had not cast her beautiful, baleful shadow over his life, Mildred would have been his wife more than three years ago. He might have been holding Mildred's child and his against his breast as he was holding the little angel now. But he had destroyed himself; with his own hand he had cut down the fair fabric of his happiness. He panted like a man athirst in the desert at the dream of water as a vision swam into his mind of that unattainable lost Paradise, the life that should have been his with Mildred. He had said good-bye to all things lovely and of fair report. Helen had called him back to his old bondage, and he was going. He had found that the fetters of sin were harder to slip than any that religion and conscience and virtue can forge.

As he went wearily to bed in his room in the Hotel de France he knew that all illusions were over for him. Even his passion for Helen was a

dead thing. He knew why she wanted him, now that her husband, the simple, good fellow she had cheated and betrayed, was dead. She wanted him not because she loved him—if she had loved him he said to himself that he could have forgiven her—but because she was no longer so young as she had been; because it was time for her to range herself, to become respectable, now that the middle-age she loathed was in sight. She had always kept on good terms with the world. As Mrs. Waring of Wolvercote Place she could hold her head as high as any of them. In time, he thought with bitter mockery of himself and her, she might become a dragon of respectability. And none would know except her husband how corrupt a heart was hers, how her memory was a place of dead bones and ashes of burnt-out passions.

Helen had called him home to an early private marriage. She had no mind to take the chances. They could be married at once, and as soon as a decent interval of widowhood had passed the marriage could be announced. The time had long passed when the thought of marriage with Helen would have fired his blood. He was going to her from old habit, because he had made such a ruin of his life that it was no use considering what was left. He had so little illusion about it all that he said to himself that if Helen could have brought a wealthier, titled suitor to the point

of proposing marriage she would have let him be.

He was going home to atone for the folly and wickedness of his youth. He was going to make Helen the lady of Wolvercote, to set her up there where only good women and honourable men had reigned. He mocked again at himself when he thought of Helen and himself sitting in the places his father and mother had occupied. Why had he ever been born? Why had he not died before he had come to such things?

As he turned on his pillow a little radiance fell on his closed eyelids. He opened his eyes and looked towards the shelf on which he had placed the little angel. There was surely a light about it. Moonlight, it must be moonlight of course, through a rift in the window curtains. He felt the radiance on his face as he fell asleep. It lay palely over all his dreams, which were peaceful ones, dreams of childhood, of his mother and Mildred. It was long since he had had such dreams.

He had a wet and stormy crossing, and when he reached London he found it in reeking rain and heat. No one expected him. He had not even written to Helen to say that he would come. He might obey her, but it was unwillingly. He would make no pretence at eagerness. She herself had

killed his ardour long ago.

He was hungry too. But before he ate he must have dry clothes. He had remained on deck during the passage and had sat in wet clothes ever since.

He drove to his flat and let himself in. It had been unoccupied for some months and drifts of dust were over everything. The ashes of a fire of last winter lay in the grate. What daylight there was from the obscured sky hardly struggled through the dirty windows. The discomfort of it smote him coldly through his unhappiness.

He unstrapped his portmanteau to find dry clothes. One of the first things to come out was the little angel. He had put it away wrapped in a bit of beautiful silk, one of the many things he had purchased in his wanderings, not so much because of any pleasure in acquiring them as from an old habit. Though life was over for him he still could not help buying a beautiful thing when he saw it.

He laid it down still swathed in the silk. The next thing to come out was his case of razors. As he put it aside a thought struck him. Many a

man would have found a way out that way. It might be the decentest thing to do, not by way of the razors—his fastidiousness recoiled from that—but by way of a drenched handkerchief over the face, a pilule, a few drops in a glass. That would save Wolvercote, at least. If there was another world out there among the shades he need not fear the scorn of the clean honourable men, the eyes of the good women, he had sprung from.

There was a chemist’s shop around the corner. They knew him. They would give him what he asked for without a doctor’s prescription.

He changed his clothes and went out. He had forgotten the little angel lying on the floor in its silk wrappings. The thought of the euthanasia so easily procurable around the corner for a few coins had engrossed him. He had not even a dog to miss him when he was gone. Wolvercote would go to his cousin Reggie, that irreproachable parson with a parson’s quiverful. With Reggie, Wolvercote might keep its honour untarnished. He did not suppose Helen would care. She would be angry with him for thwarting her plans—and—she would look for a new lover.

When he came back again, with his key to the great mystery resting

unromantically in the breast-pocket of his coat, his foot knocked against the little angel. The room now was full of the dusk and of shadows. He lifted it with a compunction, as though he had struck flesh and blood, and cleared a space for it on the chimney-piece amid the debris of six months ago. Then he stood regarding it unhappily.

Again he had the delusion that a light came from it. So mild and wavering was it that he could not be sure if it was an effect of the twilight and the newly lit lamp in the street. The outline of the cheek glimmered. It was Mildred: no, it was an angel: it was a praying child: if a man had had a dead child in Heaven he might have thought of it so.

He covered his eyes with his hand and leant upon the chimney-piece. He touched the little figure with a caress and had a feeling as though virtue came out of it. Slowly, slowly he drew from his pocket the thing that was to have procured him his way out. He opened the window and scattered it to the night air. At least he need not add cowardice to his other shames, and Wolvercote might await its deliverance. No child of his would step into his shoes; in time a son of Reggie's would succeed him, and things would go on in the old blameless way.

Well, he supposed he ought to go to Helen. She was in town and must be expecting him every day. He was still chilled and uncomfortable. She would have fire, light, luxury; yet he was unwilling to go.

He dropped into a chair under the eyes of the little angel, and sat there staring at the cold grate. Presently he would summon up energy enough to go downstairs, call a cab, and be carried away to Clarges Street. He shivered and turned hot. His head swam. He wondered if he was going to be ill. Why, if he fell ill there in the flat which had been untenanted so long he might die alone like a rat in the dark. No one had seen him come back. If he were to die it might be months before they discovered him.

He sweated at the thought. Then he was dry and hot again, and he heard his pulses thudding in his ears. The Night folded her shadows in the room. If he were going to die it must not be in the dark.

He tried in his pocket for matches and found none. He felt about the chimney-piece among the rubbish, and found everything but matches. Still there was surely a glory, a radiance in the place. Ah, he saw now that it was coming from the face of the angel. A delusion, of course, he said

to himself, a part of the fever that was coming upon him. Still it was comforting. He could see the face of the little angel plainly. It was Mildred's face and it smiled upon him.

It might have been a few minutes later, it might have been an hour, two hours, when the words that were thudding in his brain took shape.

"Go to Mildred! Go to Mildred!" He heard the words quite plainly, and the voice was like the voice of a little child.

He struggled to his feet and went down the stairs, holding on by the sides because his head reeled. He heard himself giving the cabman the old beloved address as he might have heard a stranger's voice.

A little while later Mildred Chesham, sitting in her room which was like a shrine of good woman-hood, heard his name announced. She went to meet him with the most wonderful smile. It was the smile of the little angel. She held out her two hands to him. Before he could reach her he stumbled. "Ah!" she cried, "you are ill," and the compassion in her voice was like the mother's. There was his mirage of living waters, there in her breast. He had found it at last.

*

A year later, Waring and Mildred, still on their leisurely honeymoon—they had been married as soon as Waring was convalescent from his illness—came one afternoon of summer to a fishing-village in the North of France. After a meal, delicate and dainty, of an omelet, a chicken, delicious fruit, a bottle of white wine, and coffee, they strayed out hand in hand over the sand-hills. They had not yet forgotten to be lovers.

Amid the corn-fields and the sand-dunes they came upon a tiny chapel open to the sea-wind.

They had been talking of the little angel who had gone with them on all their wanderings. When they went home at last to Wolvercote, Waring said, they would build him a shrine. He would have it that the little angel had brought them together—would bring them yet to greater joys if that were possible. Wherever they went Waring would set him up in their room to watch over them. He was beautiful enough to be a miracle, Mildred said, when Waring talked of the light he had seen about the

little figure. To be sure that was an illusion of the illness which was creeping upon him; but even with Mildred the child-angel had found a place in her heart, perhaps with a premonition of the child that was to come.

Waring had been talking half-whimsically of the shrine he would make. They stepped across the threshold of the little chapel on to the blue and white tiles of the floor. The prie-dieus overflowed into the open air. Within there was only space for the garish little altar with its artificial flowers, the screen behind which the priest vested himself, and a dozen chairs at most.

As they went in the full western light streamed within the chapel. As they looked they cried out in amazement. On a little side altar, with a row of votive tapers in front of it, was a photograph of the little angel. There was no mistaking it; the tender little face, the praying hands, the wings—why the very chippings were reproduced faithfully.

While they stared in amazement the small cure with the round good-humoured face and curly hair, whom they had already saluted in the village street, came in behind them. There were a couple of boy acolytes

following him. People came down from the village and took the chairs outside the chapel.

Waring turned to the cure. “The little angel, monsieur?” he said, indicating the picture. “I fancy I have seen it before.”

“Alas!” The cure was vesting himself with characteristic energy. “Monsieur will have seen the little angel in former years. It was a miraculous image cast up by the sea. It had wrought many cures, procured many favours. It was the patron of the village. Alas, it is five years ago since, during the week of the patronage, the chapel had been robbed, stripped bare. And with everything else had gone the little angel. There had been bad seasons since, storms at sea. The people were desolated for the little angel. While he was with them he procured them many graces.”

“If he were to be restored!” Waring was excited with the prospective excitement of the village at the restoration of its angel.

“If it were the will of God!” The cure shrugged his shoulders and flung out his hands. Plainly he expected no miracle.

*

So after all the little angel went back to his shrine amid the sand-hills, between the corn-fields and the sea, where he yet works his beneficent miracles. And Wolvercote was the poorer. Waring had the little angel copied in yellow Italian marble and gave the copy the shrine he would have given the original. But it is not the same thing. It is as a picture of a dead child to the living child.

Yet after all the angel worked the great miracle for Waring. And year after year the simple children of the little angel remember him at the shrine.

*

AN OLD COUPLE.

THE misfortune of John and Ellen Luff was that they had lived too long. Their mistress before she died had made provision for them, counting that they would live to seventy-five or so. But now John was eighty-six and Ellen was eighty-two, and the provision had been spent ten years

ago. During the greater part of these ten years they had been kept alive by the sixpences collected by a charitable soul who had come to be aware of their necessity. But now their benefactress was gone. Who could have imagined that John and Ellen would have outlived her? And there was nothing at all between them and starvation.

They had covered up their poverty jealously. Little by little during these ten years they had parted with the pieces of furniture which old Mrs. Kynaston had left them as part of her legacy.

The young doctor who had attended John for his winter bronchitis had taken a fancy to the Chippendale wine sarcophagus. They had haggled with him over how little they would take and not how much. The doctor had been very kind to them. He had given them medicine and nourishing things out of his own pocket; and had accepted with a delicate understanding the shillings the old man paid him from time to time for his fees. To be sure they found their way straight back to the fund collected for the old people by their benefactress.

The doctor was young and bright-eyed, with a kindly and humorous shrewdness of expression in his keen, clever face. He was on his

probation down here in this slum that once was country. But presently he knew he would be among the great men in Harley Street or Cavendish Square. He knew the things he had done and was capable of doing. Meanwhile he was poor and ambitious, a glutton for work, and head over ears in love.

The love affair made his eyes absent as he hurried from one patient to another. If she hadn’t been so horribly rich! That place of hers, Eastney Park, stood between her and her proud lover. She was rich, she was independent, she was old enough to know her own mind,—thirty if she was a day, said the gossips—her brown eyes had a bewildering softness in them for Dr. Richard Saville. If only he had not been so poor!

This day of spring he was doing something most distasteful to himself. He was trying to persuade the old couple to enter the workhouse. The old man was always so ill in the east winds of spring; the old woman was growing blind and helpless.

He looked around the little bare empty room, fireless although there was still a bite in the air. There was a slip of garden outside. The cottage had once been country till the squalid fringe of the city had overtaken

it and built it in. There were a couple of apple-trees in the garden with their tight buds just ready to burst. A thrush was singing in an elm-tree at the back; and a large bright-eyed blackbird was walking about on the grass plot as though the place belonged to him.

The old couple were very fond of their garden in summer. They had been originally country-folk. The cottage had two storeys. A crooked staircase with a door, the latch of which opened on a string, ascended to the upper storey. There were heavy beams in the walls and ceiling. The place was a rebuke to the hideous little yellow-brick houses, with all their noisy inmates, that encroached upon it.

“It is not so bad there,” he said, looking from one old face to the other. “It is clean and bright and the nurses are kind.”

“I’d rather have my old woman,” said John despairingly.

“You will lie in a soft bed, and be fed with nourishing things and kept warm.”

That matter of the separation of the two was something that did not bear

talking of.

“It would be softer in the grave with her beside me,” said the old man.

“O Lord, Lord, why didn’t you take me when my little Jacky was born!” moaned the old woman.

The young doctor went out feeling their disconsolateness in his heart. All through that day and its busy round the thought of them came between him and his thoughts of Margaret. He imagined them sitting together in the dimness of the bare room. The old woman was so nearly blind that she could do her few household tasks as well in the dark as in the light. How cruel it seemed to part them! And yet … they had been miserably pinched on those few shillings a week. It had not been so bad while the old man could grow a few vegetables and the old woman take in a little plain sewing; but now it was miserably inadequate.

They were on his mind lest they should fall into the fire or down the steep stairs. They were not fit to be left alone. Why had Death forgotten them while he was so busy with his harvest of the young and the much desired?

The thought of them put a pucker between his brows, even while he sat by Margaret Steele's side at dinner that evening. The hostess had sent them down together, perhaps being aware of something more than friendship between the two. Usually it was enough of Heaven for him to feel the fragrance of Margaret's presence about him. Her dress that was softer than down, whiter than the swan's breast, the white roses in her bosom, the beautiful profile, the velvety brown eyes, the soft pale cheeks—their nearness usually filled him with a rapture that left him all the colder and more despairing when he had gone out of that gracious presence and remembered his own poverty.

He crumbled his bread absently and frowned.

"What is it, Dr. Saville?" said her exquisite voice, close to his ear. "You are in trouble about something. What is it?"

In front of them there was a mass of growing lilies of the valley, the electric light which had been pulled low down making transparencies of their leaves and blossoms. He turned round to her and felt suddenly as though the world had left them alone in a blissful isolation.

He had no thought of keeping from her the thing that was worrying him. She had the key of his heart, and could wring from him every secret except one, if his love for her could really be called a secret.

He told her about John and Ellen Luff, as he had seen them and as he imagined them. “Ah!” she said softly once or twice; and there was a world of hurt pity in the exclamation. Looking at her admiringly he thought she had the compassion of all the world in her face.

“Cannot something be done?” she asked, when he had finished.

He prided himself on his common sense, and now in some curious phase of feeling he answered her almost roughly.

“What could you do?” he said. “Supposing we paid for their rent and keep, and for some one to look after them, we should have no guarantee that it would be properly done. No, they had better be where they would receive proper care and attention. They are on my mind. I never knock at the door but I expect to hear that something has happened to one of them since I was there last. The old man ought really to have been in the

infirmary long ago."

She said no more, as though he had discouraged her. They talked of other things, of the newest discoveries in science and medicine, the things that interested him most. She was delightfully intelligent. With such a woman for his Egeria what might not a man do?

"Well," he said to the old couple next day, "have you made up your minds?"

They seemed to him to lean a little closer together, and his heart smote him.

"We've been talking about old Madam," the old man said irrelevantly. "It 'ud trouble her where she is to know what's befallen us. There be some folks that wish for length of days. The Lord might ha' took us while we were yet together."

"Luff drove Madam's daughter to the church to be married," said the old woman. "And I dressed her for her wedding. If Miss Agatha had lived she'd never have seen us brought to this."

“I suppose Luff has had his broth, Mrs. Luff,” said the doctor. “Yes? I hope you haven’t been giving any of it away to that thriftless Mrs. Collier next door, as you did last time. Come, Mrs. Luff, you’d better make up your mind. I shouldn’t be able to look after you much longer, for I think of joining an expedition to South Africa. Sister Gertrude in the infirmary has promised me to be very good to Luff. At your side of the house, Mrs. Luff, there is an excellent woman in charge. You’ll be surprised to find how pleasant it all is when you get there, and will wonder why you ever dreaded it so much.”

The old couple seemed as if they had not heard this well-meant consolation.

“You’ll be ready to go,—Friday, shall we say?” Dr. Saville said with a cheerfulness he was far from feeling.

“Oh, aye, it might as well be Friday as another day,” John Luff said. “Might happen the Lord ‘ud call us before Friday.”

Dr. Saville went away heavy-hearted. He called to thriftless Mrs.

Collier next door and gave her money to provide a good fire for the old people, and something for herself to light it and see that it was kept going. The old Luffs had arrived at a habit of economy which would make them stint themselves even now when he wanted them to be prodigal.

He called at the Co-operative Stores farther on, and sent them in a chicken, some bacon, eggs and butter and a bottle of port wine. He had an odd sense of making reparation for his cruelty to the old couple. But after all it was for the best. If they could be kept in their cottage it would mean some horrible accident one of these days. The thought of Mrs. Luff cooking, and blind with the helplessness of those who have always had their sight, terrified him. Supposing she were to catch fire!

And he had very nearly made up his mind to join the African expedition. The pursuit of the thing that caused one of the most horrible diseases into the deadly swamp where it lurked was fascinating to him. If he came out of it alive it meant reputation. If he didn't—Well, he couldn't go to Margaret now as he was. He must have some equivalent for Eastney to offer her.

The old couple sat as he had left them. Even the incursion of Mrs.

Collier to light the fire did not disturb them, nor the conversation with which she accompanied her task. When she had gone away, and the fire had lit up merrily, the comfort hardly reached their physical sense through the trouble that was come upon them. It was now Tuesday afternoon, and on Friday they were to go into the House. They had just three days to be together, three days in which the Lord might call them.

After a time they began to talk. They had the memories of very old people for things of long ago, while things of yesterday were dim to them. Old Madam and Miss Agatha, and Miss Agatha's baby were in their talk. They wished now they had taken the lodge and the pension as Madam Kynaston had wished, and not set up a house in London to take in lodgers, a venture which had not succeeded at all. They might have been at the lodge to this day. There would not have been rent to think of or fires. They could have kept fowls, and had milk from the dairy at the house. That was a friendly world they remembered. There would have been neighbours and neighbours' daughters to come in and help. London was a terribly unneighbourly place.

John remembered how he had superintended Miss Margot's first riding-lessons. He recalled her in her blue habit, the fair hair falling

about her shoulders, her spirit, her generosity, her daring.

A boy came and knocked at the door and delivered the doctor's gifts. Old Ellen was usually the most stirring of mortals, considering her more than eighty years, but now she let the things lie on the table, while she and John went over and over those good days in the past. In three days' time each of them would be alone. There would be the unhomely white walls of the infirmary. Ellen had been there once or twice to see people. There would be the strange, masterful nurses: and the old people who would have no such honourable memories of the past as belonged to her and John.

If but the Lord would call them before Friday was come!

"'Tis like when I sat under the apple-tree last summer," said John, stretching his fingers to the blaze. "It makes me sleepy-like same as long ago the bees in the hives in the garden. There was a sunny corner back of the lodge where we might have kept bees."

There was a sudden tapping at the door, and a lady came in, bringing a smell of violets with her. The east wind blew aridly outside, and she

was wearing furs over her purple dress. She glowed in them as palely warm as a white rose that has a flush in it.

Old Ellen got up and set her a chair. She flashed a quick glance around the room, almost empty of furniture. Her eyes took in the parcels on the table. Then went on to the wondering faces of the old couple.

“Dr. Saville is a friend of mine,” she said softly. Her voice was as sweet as her face. “He has told me about you. Your names are John and Ellen Luff. I think you must once have lived with my grandmother, Mrs. Kynaston, of Eastney Park, Hampshire.”

“It isn’t Miss Margot?” said John incredulously, while Ellen came nearer and peered with her blind eyes into the beautiful delicate face.

“Yes, I am Miss Margot. I remember quite well how you taught me to ride, John. And I remember you, Ellen, displaying my grandmother’s finery for my delight on wet afternoons. I liked you better than my nurse; and I remember once how we had out all the furniture of my doll’s house, and gave it a thorough spring cleaning. Do you remember that, Ellen?”

"For sure I do, Miss Margot. Many a time me and Luff have talked about it."

"I oughtn't to have lost sight of you," she went on, looking from one face to the other. "Only we spent so many years abroad. And I thought,—I thought—"

"We didn't ought to have lived as long, Miss Margot," cried John apologetically.

She laughed softly, and her eyes were dimmed.

"Ah, well, I am very glad you have lived," she said, "and most grateful to Dr. Saville for finding you for me."

"John wouldn't be here only for him. The bottles of wine he's sent and the medicines! We had no fire to-day till he sent it. And all these things from the Co-operative," Ellen vaguely indicated the table. "May the Lord reward him!"

Miss Margot glowed more than ever, and leant forward a little over her

huge muff. The fire sparkled in the jewels that clasped her sable stole, and set up other fires in the depths of her eyes.

“And now,” she said, “wouldn’t you like to come back to Eastney? The west lodge is empty, but it is in order, and you can come at once. I have a woman who will look after you both and see that Ellen hasn’t too much to do. And we have all the summer before us. What do you think of it?”

“Oh, Lord,” said John, “and we were to have gone into the House on Friday.”

“We asked Him to call us,” said Ellen, “but He has done it in His own way. Back at Eastney before we die! It makes me young to think on it!”

“I must see Dr. Saville and ask him if I may arrange for you to leave to-morrow. I have only to send word to Eastney and all will be ready. I will come back and tell you what Dr. Saville says.”

“We thought we were to be friendless and forgotten,—the doctor going off to that Africa, where more likely than not he’ll leave his bones,”

said Ellen. “We little thought the Lord was sending us you.”

“Africa!” Miss Margot repeated in a startled way. “Who said he was going to Africa?”

“Himself, sitting in that very chair this morning.”

“I will come back and tell you what he says,” said Miss Margot, rising up with a soft rustle. “A carriage shall come for you, so that you won’t be exposed to the east wind. Now, good-bye for a little while.”

Though she kept her voice quiet she was wild with fear. Could it be true that he was going away from her to that deadly malarial country? She remembered now that he had talked of the expedition the other night. If he went her heart would go with him. If he never returned she would be his to her grave. But before he went, if he must go, she must hear him say that he loved her. Without it how could she endure her life? She must hear him say it, and afterwards she thought that she could endure anything else that befel. If he were only hers and she his she could bear anything that was to come.

She was shown into his consulting-room, where he sat writing busily at a table. The room was fundamentally dreary, with its dusty carpet, its heavy rep curtains and wire screens to the windows, its fire almost out, its general air of neglect and dust, as dreary as the mean street outside swept by the east wind. Yet to her it was beautiful because he was there. It was enough for the moment that they were alone in such a solitude as they had never known before.

He sprang to his feet with a little cry of delight at beholding her. The white lids veiled her conscious eyes; the colour flamed in her cheeks.

“You will wonder why on earth I have come,” she said.

“For the moment it is enough that you are come,” he said, setting a chair for her with an exhilarated laugh. This sudden coming of hers had put him off his balance. The smell of her violets was heady, intoxicating.

“I came down to see your old people, John and Ellen Luff. They proved to be, as I thought they might when you told me their names, old servants of my grandmother’s. They are not going to the workhouse. They are going

back to Eastney Park. They will have a lodge to themselves, and a woman I am interested in, a widow, to see that they don't fall into the fire. I came to ask you when they might go. Tomorrow?"

"They must have thought you were an angel," he said. "They may go whenever they are ready. The sooner they are out of their present abode the better,—Eastney will be Heaven."

She looked down at the muff in her lap and a quiver of agitation passed over her face. She opened her lips as though to speak once or twice, and he had an idea that her hands clasped each other nervously in the covering of the muff.

"What is it?" he asked. "What is it—dear?"

"They told me you were going to Africa," she said, "to that place you told me of the other night. Let some one else do it, some one who has less to live for. Not you. You mustn't go. I should—I should—"

She burst suddenly into tears and hid her face. Then she was sobbing in his arms.

“What must you think of me?” she said, amid her sobs.

“What must you think of me? I never meant to have spoken, till I had done something. A rich woman like you, Margaret! But now, if you had not come I should have been strong—now, you have done something you never can undo, Margaret. You have made me tell you that I am yours for ever.”

“Your eyes told me that long ago. But I thought you never would speak. I was starved to hear you say it.”

“You shall hear me say it till the day of my death.”

*

THE JUDGMENT OF SOLOMON.

WALKING up and down his garden between the rows of July lilies that shed their golden pollen on him as he brushed them, Father James sighed in perplexity.

He sighed, and now and again he inhaled a pinch of snuff. It was “Best Blackguard”; but it might as well have been dust for all the pleasure it gave Father James.

His two dogs, Rex and Prince, walked soberly by the side of the shabby cassock. Generally they and Father James could pass an hour pleasantly together. He had taught them so many tricks, and he could always be won to laughter, as fresh as a child’s, by putting the dogs through their repertoire. But now they might not have existed for him. Prince, who was the younger of the dogs, and had had a circus poodle for his grandmother, had turned a somersault or two in Father James’s path. But seeing that the old priest took no notice of him he had given up the attempt to entertain and walked as sedately as Rex, whose increasing figure had put somersaults out of the question for him this long time back.

It was very pleasant in the walled garden, sweet with the scent of the lilies and the old-fashioned cabbage roses. Now and again came a rich fruity whiff from the direction of the white house that showed beyond the gnarled apple-boughs. Eliza Doyle, Father James’s housekeeper, was making raspberry jam in the kitchen.

Now and again as she brought a steaming panful to cool on the table by the window she stood a second or two to watch the pacing figure beyond the tangle of apple-boughs.

“He’s got something on his mind,” she thought. “Lord send there’s nothing wrong with Master James. ‘Tis a while since he’s come to see us: and there was that hussy yesterday. I didn’t like the looks of her somehow.”

Then she smiled, for she remembered how fond Master James was of raspberry jam, and certain boyish raids of his on her store-cupboard.

“Sure,” she thought again, “sure you’ve only to look in the coaxing face of him to forgive him, no matter what he does.”

James Lester was Father James Barren’s nephew, his only sister’s only child, and dear to his uncle’s heart as if he had been his own child. It was quite surprising what a difference it had made to Father James, his possession of a scapegrace nephew. Jim had been given over altogether to his uncle at six years old, when his mother died. Father James had

brought him up. The child and boy had been such a joy to him that he had often wondered why he should have been selected for so much happiness above his fellows. The lot of other priests was a lonely and barren one compared with his. “You see I’m a family man,” he used to say roguishly to the other priests. And indeed his vicarious fatherhood had all the joys, all the possible sorrows of real fatherhood.

Every one loved Jim Lester as every one loved Father James. Allowing for some forty years of difference in their ages they were strikingly alike.

Time had been when Father James’s thinning curls had been like his nephew’s, golden-brown and plentiful. The priest’s eyes yet were nearly as blue as the lad’s. Both faces had the expression of a quiet and roguish humour. Father James was old enough to have had continental training, and although he was only a farmer’s son he was a fine gentleman. Perhaps it was because of their association together that Jim Lester had learnt his uncle’s ways. He had a charming way with women, not common among his class. No wonder that girls had been in love with him from the time he began to make love, and that was very early in his career.

Jim had flitted about from girl to girl as the bee from flower to flower. It had not made his uncle seriously uneasy. Jim had flirted so openly, so universally, that hitherto he had escaped the consequences of his flirtations. Father James had almost ceased to be anxious. He could remember a time, before he had known that the Church was his only love, when he had been gay and irresponsible among the girls himself. He could trust Jim, he thought, not to do any harm, not to hurt any one. Why Jim was the softest-hearted fellow alive. Ask the dogs if he wasn't? Ask the animals that had the good luck to depend on him. Ask the children and the old people in the village. There was no harm in the boy. No harm at all, Father James had said fondly over and over to himself.

Then, trouble had come. Jim had done worse than Father James ever expected of him. He had entangled himself with two girls. And each had brought her claim to Father James. And for the life of him he could not tell which had the better claim to the scapegrace.

Jim had helped him but little. He had been unlike himself, something of a mystery. He had been sullen like a child in trouble. Yes, it was quite true that he had engaged himself to Rose Maguire while he was up in Dublin studying for a profession. He had given her a ring. People knew

about it. He had asked her father’s consent. They had been about together as an engaged couple.

On the other hand there was Nora Fay. Nora was a girl in a shop, much humbler than Rose. He had never intended to go so far with Nora. He was engaged to Rose at the time. Rose had been masterful and exacting; and Nora was gentle and sweet and soft. He had taken refuge with Nora, and things had gone too far between them. He was fit to shoot himself when he thought of hurting Nora.

He looked oddly haggard by the time his uncle had extracted so much from him.

“Of course Rose has the right,” he said, “but no matter what happens Nora shan’t suffer. Rose can cover me with disgrace. Every one will think me a dishonourable cur; but, after all, Rose will not suffer as Nora would. She’s a splendid girl. She could marry any one she liked. I shall have made Dublin too hot to hold me when I throw over Rose. They have so many friends. What matter? I shall have Nora. I am sorry, Uncle James, for being such a disappointment and trouble to you. I’ll fling it all up and go to Australia. Nora won’t mind. It won’t be like taking

Rose into poverty."

"Rose might release you," Father James said, looking with a tenderness that hurt his heart at the haggard young face.

"Oddly enough, she will not," the boy responded with a sudden flush. "God knows why she thinks me worth the keeping, but she does."

"You know?"

"Yes, I know."

Father James mused with his cheek upon his hand. In a lower social environment than that to which Miss Rose Maguire belonged Father James had known a sum of money to prove a solatium for a broken heart. It was unlikely that the young lady could be moved by such poor considerations as had affected her humbler sisters. Still, there was no knowing. If it had to be, if Jim's happiness lay with Nora and not with Rose, Father James was inclined to dare much to secure it. And there was a little nest-egg in the savings-bank,—all Father James could spare from the poor and his own few personal wants—slowly gathered year by year since

Jim had been a little child, and helped of late by a bequest to Father James over and above the money for the poor and for masses.

Jim knew nothing about the nest-egg. He was not to know till the moment came when the nest-egg should be of great value to him—should open him some door, purchase for him some unhoped-for step, accomplish some wonder for him. Perhaps the moment had come now. It would hurt Father James to reduce or to part with the nest-egg;—it was impossible to say what a fine young lady's demands might not be, if she should stoop to accepting money instead of a lover.

Father James wanted to think. He wanted to think and to act quietly, without Jim's miserable eyes upon him.

It was the Long Vacation. While the matter was unsettled Jim was better away. Father James did not like the look of the young face, oddly unfamiliar with its rebellious, unhappy air. All of a sudden Jim had come to his manhood. It was no longer the gay and debonair boy his uncle had to deal with. A passing thought came to Father James that if Jim were well through this he would be a better man for the experience. It was time for the things of childhood to be given up and the affairs of

manhood to take their place.

“Father Denis wants you, Jim,” his uncle said softly. “I’ve a letter from him in my pocket here saying he hoped you’d go to him for a bit of the vacation. Go to him now instead of coming home with me. Let me think the matter out in quietness. You’re not looking over-well, Jim. The sea air will do you no harm.”

For a moment the boy looked hopeful, as though he had had a respite, before his face clouded again.

“You wish me to go?” he asked shortly.

“Yes, Jim, I wish you to go. There’s no use in your coming home with me now. You have your bag packed. Go off to Father Denis and let things be for a bit. Perhaps we’ll find a way out of it.”

Again Jim’s face brightened. So often Uncle James had found a way out of his childish and boyish escapades. Still he went half-unwillingly on the visit to Father Denis in the wild Northern Glen. The new-found manhood in him wanted to stay and see the thing out. Something prevented Father

James telling him that he was going to try what he could do. This new, mysterious Jim might resent being acted for.

Father James had seen Miss Rose Maguire. She was a tall girl, with a hard handsome face, so finely dressed that she had set the village gaping as she came through it from the railway station.

She had turned Rex out of the chair in which he was curled, comfortably asleep. Before she took his place she had looked at the chair as though to say she did not care to occupy it after him; but Prince was in the only other comfortable chair in the room.

Her sweeping glance took in the deficiencies of the room, the threadbare carpet, the shabby book-case, the cheap prints on the wall, the spotted mirror above the mantelpiece, the ormolu clock which had long ceased to keep time. Finally it rested on Father James who was watching her with a gentle air of expectancy. There was that about her which made him suddenly aware that he had dropped his snuff on his cassock. He brushed it away unhurriedly.

“Well?” he asked, with an air of quiet interest.

“You wished to see me,” she said. “I did not feel that there was very much to add to what I said in my letter. I am engaged to your nephew, but he is neglecting me. I don’t know when he has been to see us. Of course people are talking.”

“Yes, yes,” said Father James, looking at her as though from a distance, while he drew Rex’s silky ears between his fingers. “Yes, yes, I see. I am surprised at Jim. I sent him to Dublin to pursue his studies.”

“There is no reason why he should not do that too,” said the young lady sourly. “In fact his engagement ought to be an incentive to him. He promised me that he would work hard to provide such a home for me as I’ve been accustomed to. It wasn’t what my people expected, that I should become engaged to a medical student in his first year. Many of my friends think I am wasting my time. You see I could do much better.”

“Naturally,” assented Father James, with the tips of his fingers together.

His agreement with her seemed to act as an encouragement to the young

lady. She talked quickly, fluently, so fluently that Father James blinked his eyes as though in face of a heavy shower. She said the same thing over and over again in many different ways. She might have done much better than Jim, but since she had accepted him and all the people knew it there was no going back. Father James must make his nephew do his duty by Miss Maguire. She was no more prepared for a long, indefinite engagement than she was for being an old maid. Couldn't Father James help them? He had no one, she understood, but Jim. If he had her by his side it would be an incentive to Jim to work. She would see that he worked.

"Excuse me," said Father James, interrupting the steady flood, "if you knew my nephew did not love you as a man should love his wife, would you still be willing to marry him?"

Miss Maguire stared.

"It is not likely," she said with some indignation; "but if it were so I should still be willing to marry him."

"Would you hold him to his engagement if he cared for another girl more

than for you,—if his happiness was wrapped up in another girl?”

“I should certainly hold him to his engagement.”

Father James sighed.

“That is your engagement-ring, I presume?” he asked, indicating a half-hoop of pearls and diamonds upon the young lady’s square-tipped third finger.

“It is;” she held it for his inspection.

“Jim never had much money,” he said, as though to himself.

Miss Maguire flushed angrily, but before she could find words to refute the vague accusation of the priest’s words, he spoke again.

“Supposing that your engagement comes to nothing,” he asked, his eyes watching her, “it cannot matter to you whether he marries another girl or not.”

“But it does,” she panted. “If he marries another girl I will make him pay for it.”

“You would think it worse that he should do that, loving the girl, than that he should remain unmarried?”

“Am I to be a laughing-stock to the people who know of our engagement?”

“If you were to … excuse me, but sometimes unpleasant things have to be said … if you were to bring my nephew into court the amount of damages would be problematical.”

“Not in my case,” she flashed at him; “I have no fear of the result.”

No wonder that Father James was perplexed after this interview. On the one hand there was Miss Rose Maguire, whom he certainly did not like, but there was nothing against the girl either personally or socially. In fact she belonged to a highly reputable family which had a good social standing. The girl herself was highly esteemed, The revelation of vulgarity in her had been a shock to Father James.

On the other hand there was Nora Fay, a girl in a shop. Would not her connections, if she did not, drag down Jim, who was inclined to be facile and too good-natured? A marriage beneath him would be a black mark against Jim presently when he was qualified and trying to make a practice. It would hinder him as much as a marriage with Rose Maguire would help him, for the Maguires were ambitious and hospitable: they had many friends: the ramifications of the family and its connection were far-reaching.

“Your Reverence,” said Eliza Doyle at his elbow. “There’s a young woman at the door waiting to speak to your Reverence.”

To be sure, it was Saturday afternoon, and he had asked Nora Fay to come when she was free. Doubtless this was she. The shops closed early on Saturday. He noticed the disparagement in the housekeeper’s tone. “A young woman”. Perhaps the poor girl had walked from town. If she had it was a hot dusty road she had taken.

He hurried in, carrying a deal of the golden pollen on his cassock. The blinds were down in his parlour, and it was almost dark, and deliciously cool coming in out of the glare of the sun. The blinds flapped in the

summer wind and stirred the modest muslin curtains. There was some one sitting in one of the least comfortable chairs, who would have stood up at Father James's entrance if it had not been that Rex sprang into her lap.

"There, my child, never mind him," said Father James, taking into his own hand a hand that trembled and was damp. "He's a spoilt dog. He jumped into the Reverend Mother's lap at the convent the other day. She nearly fainted. She doesn't like dogs, and I'm afraid I'm an unwelcome visitor with these two rascals at my heels. They always sit in the velvet chairs and when she turns them out they have a roll and a tumble on her best carpet."

He chuckled to himself at the reminiscence. The blind flapped a little way into the room and the light fell on the girl's face. She was looking at Father James with wide eyes of terror. There were purple rings about them, and the veins in her forehead were too blue. But it was a soft face, an innocent and gentle face. The look of fear in it smote Father James as though a child or an animal were terrified of him. He had a glimpse of things he had renounced. He could imagine how good it would be for a lad, aye, or a man, to turn away from handsome black-browed

Rose to the consolation of this gentle creature.

“Please, Father, I am …” she began, and could scarcely speak for trembling.

“To be sure, you are Nora Fay,” Father James said reassuringly.

He went and pulled up the blind a little and coming back he sat down where he could see her. She was poorly dressed but with great neatness. Like most short-sighted people Father James could make astonishing discoveries sometimes. He discovered now that Nora Fay’s gloves were darned at the finger-tips; that her little black, threadbare jacket was too dingy for the time of year, that her skirt was faded and of poor stuff. She had a little cheap black hat; but Father James had an idea that a lad would not have thought of the hat because of the pale, gold hair beneath it and the tender and innocent face. There was dust on her shoes and her skirt; and no doubt heat and fatigue had done their part in making her paler than she usually was.

“You’ve walked from town, my poor child,” he said, “and you’re tired. Now, wouldn’t you like a cup of tea?”

She looked her grateful assent.

There were no bells in Father James's establishment, and he had usually to carry his own messages to the kitchen.

"I want tea, Eliza," he said, coming in on the good woman, "and a drop of cream for it, and a new-laid egg, and some of the raspberry jam you've been making. And a few of your griddle cakes could come in handy; my visitor has had a long walk."

"It'll take time to bake the griddle cakes, Father."

"Never mind that." Father James had an idea that his visitor would enjoy her tea better when there had been an explanation between them. He did not want the explanation to be disturbed by the coming and going of Eliza Doyle, so he added with great cunning: "and I'll tell you what, Eliza. Put the tea in the summer-house in the garden. And when you're ready for us, just ring your little bell."

When he returned to the parlour he was pleased to see that his visitor

had somewhat recovered herself. Apparently she had dreaded an unfriendly reception, and had been reassured by Father James's kindly way. The colour had come back to her cheeks and she smiled, showing little even teeth. Her smile had the ingratiation of a child's.

"We'll have a cup of tea in the garden," he said. To him women and children were the flowers of the world. He said to himself that Jim was not to be blamed, poor boy. There was character in the face as well as that heavenly innocence and gentleness. Now she lifted her little white chin.

"You're too good to me, Father," she said, and came to the point with a directness he was not prepared for. "'Tis about Jim, Father. He isn't to be blamed. I don't know how you knew. I'd rather die than tell his secret–-"

"He told me himself."

"We didn't know what was happening till it was too late," she went on, her cheeks firing. "He used to come in for his lunch. He was sorry for me because I'd no one to take me out; and he didn't like the town, and I

didn't, being always used to the country. So he used to talk to me and we were friends, and then he took me out and it went on and on, and we didn't know where we were till we were fond of each other."

"Did you know my nephew was an engaged man?"

Her lids fluttered nervously over her frightened eyes, and she looked down in her lap, twisting her fingers together as she answered him.

"He told me; he never kept anything from me. I used to say to myself that it was so little I was having: that it would all be done and over in a little while, and then he'd belong to her for ever. It wasn't so much; just a few walks and talks. He need never have said a word. I wouldn't have asked anything from him. I never thought he was going to like me the best. That was what made the trouble."

Father James drew a deep breath.

"Supposing he didn't like you the best?" he said quietly.

She gasped and stared at him like one who has had a shock.

“Supposing he found he had made a mistake?—a very natural mistake for a young man to make when he is thrown into such a friendship—and discovered that after all his heart was where it ought to be, with the girl who was wearing his ring?”

Plainly she took his question for an assertion. She gazed at Father James for a few seconds, and something like a film came over the blue of her eyes. She shivered as though she were cold. Then she stood up and raised her little hand with a forlorn dignity. The dispossessed Rex fell with a little thud on to the rug.

“If that be so,” she said, “I shall never trouble him.”

“Wait,” Father James said, putting his hand on her arm. “You haven’t had your tea. Besides, I haven’t finished. Supposing he is really fonder of the other girl than he is of you, but that he feels he has done you the greater wrong. Supposing he feels that she can do without him better than you can, and is prepared to give up his own happiness to make you happy?”

“That would be very kind of him,” the girl said gently, “but, of course, I couldn’t take it from him. Will you please tell him from me, Father, that I shall do very well, and that I’m mindful of all the kindness he showed to me; but that the best of friends must part; and I shall be happy thinking of him as happy.”

A small sob broke the heroic speech.

“But you wouldn’t be happy, child?”

“I would not, Father,” she said; and he felt as though the secrets of a soul were laid bare to him in the Confessional; “but he is never to know it. I shall do very well. I have my mother to think of–-”

She held out her hand.

“And you refuse him?” said Father James. “Remember that he will marry you if you say the word.”

“I refuse him,” she said, and made a step or two forward; and her eyes were as though she stepped into illimitable space.

“Oh, depths of love in a woman’s heart!” said Father James softly to himself. Then he put the girl back gently into her chair. Rex saw his opportunity and jumped into her lap again. It was a soft lap made to hold children, and perhaps a man’s hidden face when he came for confession and comfort.

“There, there, child,” he went on soothingly. “You haven’t had your tea yet, and it is a long, dusty walk back. Better wait a while till the coolness comes and the dews. Maybe I’ll be borrowing a pony and trap to take you part of the way. What, you want to be by yourself—to break your heart alone! Child, what did you think of us—of me and Jim? I thank God for the revelation of a pure, unselfish love. Trust me and trust him. He is a good boy, but you will need to watch over him. Ah, there is the tea-bell!”

*

Three or four days after Nora Fay had eaten and drunken griddle-cake and tea and other good things in the arbour in Father James’s garden, with the smell of lilies all about her, feeling as though she fed on heavenly

meat and drink in Paradise, Jim Lester, fretting his life out in the Glen to the trouble and bewilderment of Father Denis, received a small postal packet.

Within it lay the ring he had given to Rose Maguire, with a formal and very cold quittance from that young lady. Fortunately she had discovered her mistake before it was too late; she could never have been happy with Mr. Lester. She therefore set him free and claimed her own freedom. Would Mr. Lester send her letters and she would return his and his gifts.

Jim Lester whistled like a blackbird as he packed his bag. There was just time for that and to write a note to Rose accepting his freedom before catching the mail from the North. He asked Rose to keep the gifts in memory of one who was unworthy of her. He was inclined to be reproachful of himself at that moment for his recent thoughts about Rose. How magnanimous she had been, standing out of the way and leaving the path to heaven free for him and Nora.

He had no idea at all, nor ever had, of the depletion of that little nest-egg which Father James had put by for him by a few hundred pounds.

Father James had shown more diplomacy than any one would have credited him with in that second interview with Rose, in which he had persuaded her that the results in hard cash of a law-suit were problematical, while the depreciation in the marriage-market of a young lady who had set a money value on a broken heart was considerable. Jim asked no questions. He was too delighted with the fortunate issue of his troubles to ask how it had come about. If he was inclined to give Rose too much credit for generosity and high-mindedness that did no harm in Father James's opinion. He rejoiced with his nephew when Rose became a bride within the year; and was inclined to think that the shrinkage of the nest-egg was well atoned for by the excellent results.

"It was a Judgment of Solomon," he used to say to himself when he was once more left to the companionship of Rex and Prince. "I had to give him to the woman who loved him best and had the best right to him, so I had, and sure the Lord guided me. The one who was ready to give him up was the right one after all."

*

ST. MARY OF THE ISLES.

AT half-past seven o’clock on that mid-August Sunday, a few minutes after Mr. Agar had begun his sermon, his old clerk, Saunders, scurried up to the pulpit and made a communication to him.

The rector immediately closed his book.

“My brethren,” he said, “the river is rising fast. There will be no sermon this evening.”

About a quarter of an hour after the congregation had dispersed, the rector and the clerk following them hurriedly,—the river Holme rose with extraordinary rapidity once it had made up its mind—a couple of cyclists stopped at the field-gate from which an asphalted pathway sloped down to the little church.

They were mere casual acquaintances of the road. Amy Greville had punctured a tyre, and was mending it with an insufficient amount of solution when John Tregaskis overtook her, and with an honest blush that did his good looks no discredit asked permission to help her.

A couple of hours back they had had tea at the same inn, and he had wondered at her impatience when there had been a little delay, since her face seemed framed for serenity. She had looked tired even then. Her skirt was splashed with the mud of the heavy road and her bicycle when he caught a glimpse of it was muddy all over its brightness.

She had eaten and drunk hurriedly when the meal was brought and had ridden away. He had enjoyed his meal at leisure; and riding on at leisure had come on his recent companion of the tea-table working away at her tyres with the same air of feverish impatience. While he helped her she stood by with compressed lips as though she were in an anguish to be gone.

The whole country was wet as a sponge. The sodden grey sky was hung with ominous-looking blobs of ragged cloud. As they came up to the gate that led to the church it began to rain heavily.

“Better shelter!” he said to her. He had the oddest distaste for leaving her in this forlorn place, with not a habitation in sight, and night closing in about her. “Better shelter! There is a light in the church; perhaps there is a service going on.”

“There is great need for my hurrying,” she said, turning her beautiful, limpid, grey eyes on him.

“My darling little sister is ill. I am on my way to her. I only heard this morning, and as trains were impossible on Sunday I was obliged to ride. I have been at it all day. Judging by my map I can’t be more than ten miles from the place.”

“If you get drenched it will impede you,” he said.

The sky seemed to take a visible darkness before their eyes. There was a flash of lightning, and the flood-gates of Heaven were opened.

“Come,” he said, holding the gate open. She went through obediently, pushing her bicycle before her.

The path led them down into a dip of ground. They crossed the wooden hand-bridge over the swollen river, from which the path ascended now, till they reached the little Church of St. Mary of the Isles, high and dry amid the pale swamped fields. If they had known its name it might

have suggested something to them, but they did not.

The lightning came again and again, terrific flashes of forked lightning, with deafening peals of thunder. The evening had suddenly turned to night, and the distant hills stood out black against a firmament of running fires. Amy was terrified of lightning. The little church was at the moment indeed an ark of refuge.

The light shone from the vestry window. Old Saunders, the clerk, in his hurry—he had to cross the Holme twice on his way back to the village—had forgotten the light in the vestry as he had forgotten to lock the door.

John Tregaskis pushed open the door and they went in. A glance showed him that the little church beyond was dark and silent, only lit now and again by the flashing of the lightning.

“No one would refuse us hospitality on such a night,” he said gently. “Won’t you sit down? Ah, the stove is alight. That is pleasant. If you will sit here you can dry your skirts.”

She moved and came nearer the fire, taking the chair he set for her.

“You think it will soon be over?” she asked anxiously.

“I hope so. I am going to ask you when it is over to let me accompany you to your destination. You ought not to ride alone after nightfall in this lonely country, and the roads will be worse than ever after this deluge.”

She looked up at him and a little colour came into the clear cheek under the big hat-brim.

“I ought not to–-” she began.

“Accept the escort of a stranger,” he finished for her. “You can trust me, madam. I shall not ask to be less a stranger after I have seen you safely. I once had a sister who died. She had eyes like yours.”

She looked up at him and her colour was steady.

“Thank you; I will trust you,” she said.

He sat watching her without speaking for a long time. The storm showed no sign of abating. Now and again he saw her clench her hands in agitation. Her profile showed clear against the light, a beautiful profile, a delicate little nose, a firm chin, a mouth at once strong and tender. He had noticed at the inn the waves and ripples of her hair behind her ears.

“Will it ever be over?” she said to him at last.

“It will soon be over,” he answered comfortingly: and then he stood up. “Do you hear the little river roaring?” he asked, and his face wore a startled look.

He went to the door, unlatched it and looked out. The lightning was dying away in distance and a wild moon was showing herself through the ragged clouds and the heavy rain that was still falling. As he looked he whistled sharply between his teeth, a whistle of consternation.

“What is it?” she asked, coming to his side.

“Look!”

He indicated the fields without. Since they had come in the waters had risen with tremendous rapidity. They were all about them. The little river beyond the graves was running like a mill-race. Now that the thunder slackened it was like thunder in their ears. The bridge they had crossed by stood islanded in the middle of floods. And it was still rising.

“Oh!” she uttered a little cry. “What are we to do? Can’t we cross? It can’t be so deep between us and the bridge already!”

“There is a tremendous current,” he said, looking down at the swirl of the waters. “I’m afraid it would be madness to attempt it.”

“Let us try the other door,” she said.

He took the hanging lamp from the wall, and they crossed the church to its doors. Before he could take down the bolts he heard the shouting of the waters outside.

“I’m afraid we are on an island,” he said. “All around us is the river valley, and this little hill is in the loop of the river. Ah, I feared as much!”

The bolt had fallen with a heavy clang, and when he opened the door the river was within a foot of them.

“I am so sorry,” he said, “but I’m afraid we shall have to stay till help comes or till it abates. I know this kind of river. It rises with extraordinary rapidity. All the streams are tumbling into it from the hills, and doubtless it takes the overflow from some lake or lakes up there. The only consolation is that it falls as quickly as it rises. What a good thing we have light and fire!”

They went back to the vestry and he replenished the fire. Fortunately he found plenty of fuel. When he had made it cheerful he looked around at his companion.

“Come and sit nearer,” he said. “Won’t you take off your hat and hang it on the parson’s hat peg. We must make the best of the fix we find ourselves in. After all it might be worse. Ah!”

She was sitting with her face in the shadow of her hand and he had not suspected tears, but he had seen a shining globule drop suddenly as though from long lashes.

“Ah!” he said again, with the most curious tenderness. “Is it so bad as that?”

“I’m not afraid,” she said in a low voice. “It is … that I am thinking of Kitty. It is … suffering not to be with her, not to know how things are going.”

He caught his own breath as sharply as she had caught hers.

“That is bad,” he said, “but then she is in the hands of the good God.”

“You believe that?” she asked with eagerness.

“Yes,” he answered, “don’t you?”

“There was a time when I might have said no,” she said, “but that time

is gone. I have been through deep waters and I have come out on the other side."

"That is the great thing," he said with simple heartiness, "to have come out on the other side."

Only her need would have wrung from him that word of comfort. He found it as difficult to talk of the religion that lay close to his heart as any other ordinary-minded young man. Now he turned the conversation to everyday topics, setting himself with all of art his kind heart could teach him to distract her from her griefs and anxieties. She understood, and looked at him with a bewildering gratitude. She did not know herself how it shone in her beautiful eyes or she might have kept them veiled.

He talked in a slow, deliberate, gentle way, feeling all the time the blood in his veins running as strongly as the river outside. Not for worlds would he have let her see that the chance that had thrown them together was a delightful one for him. In fact he said to himself sternly that he was a brute and various other things to be glad of the chance that meant suffering to her, as well as a good deal of awkwardness for both.

His talk was as soothing to Amy Greville as the flowing of a quiet stream. How kind he was, how considerate! She was not used to being treated with this air of tender deference. Perhaps as a teacher in a Girls' High School she put on an armour of office to conceal her weakness; anyhow she had always been treated as a strong-minded person. They did not know the ache there always was in her breast for little Kitty, the one creature who loved her and clung to her and protected her and understood her. Oh! Kitty, Kitty! The name was like a sword in her heart. She turned resolutely from thinking of Kitty. That was a subject that would not bear thinking on.

What was he talking of? Of his boyhood and the mother he adored. Why she too had had a mother she adored; but she was gone and there was an uncongenial woman in her place, whom even motherhood had not softened, who had not wanted Amy and did not want Kitty. It was Amy's dream of Heaven to have a little spot of earth somewhere where she could make a home for Kitty. It did not seem very realisable, considering the amount of Amy's salary. And perhaps, after all, Kitty would never want it. A lump came in her throat.

“Hello!” said her companion, looking down on the floor at his feet. Something like a black snake moved in the dimness. “The water is coming under the door,” he said.

“Fortunately,” she answered, “there is always the organ-loft.”

He looked at her reflectively.

“You are thinking the church would not stand it?” she said, in a half whisper.

“It is very old. But it must have been in many floods like this.”

“It has not known many summers like this.”

“The old builders built strongly.”

“Let us drink to the old builders!” she said, with a little touch of reckless gaiety, filling the parson’s glass with water from the water-bottle and lifting it to her lips.

“Yes, let us drink,” he said. “I have some sherry in my flask and some sandwiches.”

“And I,” she said, “have some chocolate. We shall not be starved out.”

“When you feel hungry we shall have a meal,” he said.

“I don’t feel like feeling hungry,” she replied.

She looked at him wistfully. Then she said with her face averted:—

“I should like, if you do not mind, to say the prayer for those in sickness.”

“I do not mind, not at all,” he said cheerfully. “Supposing we go into the church. It is dryer than this.”

They knelt side by side in one of the dark pews, and said aloud the prayer for the sick. Then he whispered to her. “Let us pray for those in peril on the sea: that would be ourselves, you know.”

They said the prayer, and they returned to the vestry, she feeling oddly comforted.

“I begin to feel … what you said … about Kitty being in the hands of the good God,” she said in a little whisper.

“The river has stopped rising,” he said, looking down at the water on the floor. “See, it has gone no further. Presently it will begin to fall.”

She bent down and poked the fire.

“Let us talk!” she said, “if we talk the time will go more quickly.”

“Certainly,” he assented. “What shall we talk about?”

“What would you like to talk about?”

The flames lit up soft fires in the depths of her eyes, and sparkled in the little jewel at her white throat.

“Will you tell me about yourself?” he said diffidently.

“I have so little to tell,” she answered with a start.

“I said an hour ago,” he went on with quiet steadiness, “that after to-night if you willed it we might return to being strangers. But I hope you will not will it. People thrown together as we have been can hardly ever be strangers again.”

“Friends then?” she said, with a quiet joyousness in her voice.

“Yes, friends,” he answered. “Tell me about yourself. Then I shall tell you about myself. Friends ought to know about their friends.”

He settled himself to listen, leaning back, with his hands clasped behind his comely young head. As she had said there was so little to tell, just the brief bright memory of a happy childhood, then the eclipse of the sun in the sky with the mother’s death; the coming of the stepmother, the hard unloving, unsympathetic rule; Amy’s going to school, her record of hard work, with always that dream of making a home for Kitty to spur her on; her life at the High School; then Kitty’s

illness. The history stopped short there: there was really very little to tell.

She told it all with simple frankness. Plainly there was nothing in the background, no lover; he was relieved there was no lover: plainly that dream of the home for Kitty filled the place in her life which might have been occupied by a lover.

“Thank you,” he said simply when she had finished. “And now here goes for myself.”

His story was hardly more eventful than hers. He was an artist by profession, his work chiefly lying in the direction of posters and black and white work for the illustrated papers. She knew his name quite well when he had told it to her. He painted pictures, too, which hitherto had brought him a little reputation among those who knew, but less money. He lived in a house among fields not far from London, and was looked after by an old housekeeper. He had no relatives at all except a couple of maiden aunts who lived at Tunbridge Wells. He had no end of male friends, and was very busy, too busy to feel lonely, he added.

It seemed easy to talk in this quiet dropping desultory fashion. The night turned round slowly, and the candle flickered and went out. Fortunately there was plenty of fuel, and he was indefatigable in building the fire.

Once he asked her if he should leave her. He could make himself very comfortable in a pew in the church if she desired to sleep. But her eyes asked him to stay. The graves crowding to the church-doors, and more tangible fears, were but awaiting his absence to terrify her.

“I couldn’t sleep indeed,” she said.

“Very well then,” he answered. “I was afraid you’d get tired of me. Supposing we have a sandwich and some of the sherry now! How lucky that I was cautious enough to take them!”

They became quite cheerful over the little meal, and afterwards she closed her eyes unawares. Opening them presently she found her companion watching her in the cold light of dawn.

“I fell asleep,” she said with contrition.

"You've had three hours of it," he said brightly; "and the river is falling."

"And you have not slept at all."

"I dared not; I am such a fellow to sleep once I go off. I had to watch the fire."

"How good you have been to me," she said gratefully.

He turned from her gaze, went to the door and threw it open. The wind blew in with the coolness of the waters in it, and she came and stood by his side.

"In about two hours," he said, "it will have sunk sufficiently to allow us to escape."

There was something like regret in his voice.

"It is now …. I have let my watch run down."

“Six o’clock.”

“We shall be at Hersley by … half-past nine or ten. But perhaps you are not going to Hersley?”

“That is just as you wish.”

The blood rushed across her face in a great flood.

“My stepmother … would not understand…. She would think it was my indiscretion. It was always like that.”

“She need not know. No one need know. We can keep it to ourselves.”

She breathed a great sigh of relief.

“You think so? She can say such biting things.”

“No one need know but ourselves. Let me go with you as far as Hersley. I want to have news of Kitty. What about your bicycle?”

“I will take it to the inn, and leave it there. I have had to stay at the inn before. The house is so full always. There is no room for me.”

“Then I shall come on after you and wait for news. I can hang about till you find time to bring it to me.”

“It will not be very long,” she said sadly. “I have to return this afternoon.”

He fell back when they were about a mile from Hersley and let her ride on to the inn. There was but one. If there had been two, he would have gone to the other to make her position easier. He delayed a little while and then followed her to the Red Lion.

As he went in through the courtyard with its couple of orange-trees in tubs, she beckoned to him from a window. Her face was transfigured. What could have happened to her to make it so joyful?

“Come in here,” she said. “I have good news, and want to tell it to you.”

He made his way into this one of the range of little old-fashioned sitting-rooms that looked into the green court, and took her hands.

“I met Dr. Pendered,” she said, letting him keep them, “outside the inn door. He had been there all the night with Kitty. At last she sleeps. The worst of the danger is over. She only wants careful nursing now. Oh, Kitty!” She turned away her face: then with a shaking voice went on. “I thought that after all, my stepmother being what she is, I had better present myself with the wear and tear of the road and the night washed away from me. I have ordered breakfast.”

“Am I to order breakfast, too?” he asked wistfully. “In another of these little rooms?”

“Why,” she said, “I am happy enough to throw prudence to the winds. Why should I not have recognised a friend? In fact … I had ordered your breakfast. I said a friend was following me.”

“Amy,” said he, suddenly calling her by her Christian name: “supposing, supposing, you were to say that … I was … your accepted lover.

Wouldn't that make things right?"

She turned away her head shyly.

"It would be a very wild thing to do. There would be more to explain afterwards."

"Supposing it were true?" he whispered. "I don't dare think that you feel anything about me, except perhaps a fellow-feeling for one caught by the floods like yourself. But I know what I feel. I love you, Amy, and I am going to go on telling you so till you say you love me. We could take in Kitty, darling. There is a room overlooking the garden–-"

"Oh," she said, "it isn't a piece of wild generous folly because the flood shut us in together?"

He smiled his scorn at the idea, looking more than ever a delightful, gracious boy.

"I was never as wise in my life before. I'm not a person to excite love

at first sight, so I don't ask you to love me yet, Amy, only to trust me, and by-and-by,—I shall try so hard to earn it that the love will come."

"I love you now," she said, with shining eyes. "You don't know how beautifully you behaved when we were imprisoned. Any woman must have loved you."

"Then it is not for Kitty's sake," he said radiantly.

"For my own," she replied.

Old Saunders rubbed his eyes when he found on the table in the vestry the morning following the flood a five-pound Bank of England note, in an envelope inscribed, "In thanksgiving for a refuge ". From that and other signs he gathered that someone had taken refuge there from the floods. About two months later, a second offering was received with the inscription: "St. Mary of the Isles, a thank-offering for twelve hours and what they brought ". It was impossible to associate this with anything, much less with a marriage which took place in Hersley, about ten miles away, that same morning. So the notes and their donor passed

into the region of unsolved mysteries.

*

THE FOX.

THE Ballinacurra property was a very pretty one. It comprehended some miles of wood and water, a grouse mountain, a trout stream. There was a big house, with a courtyard at the back, in a state of disrepair. It had acres of glass, long ranges of outbuildings. Fortunately Sir Adrian Ingestre’s purse was equal to making it all as good as new again. The place was full of workmen: the noise of hammering resounded all day long. As soon as a few rooms were ready for occupation Sir Adrian had moved in. He was delighted with his Irish property, none the less because he had bought it for a song. His English friends were glad to keep him company where there was such sport to be had. The county was ready to receive him. Only two people held coldly aloof. They were his nearest neighbours, the Prince of Erris and his grand-daughter, Kathaleen O’Driscoll.

As it happened the prince’s property made a wedge into Ballinacurra

land. It was a small wedge, but it spoilt any chance of enclosing Ballinacurra within a ring fence. It was a wild over-grown place, a wilderness by Ballinacurra, which had been at some time a well-kept park and would be again, now it was an Englishman's property.

Sir Adrian Ingestre had come into the country with a kindly heart towards all its inhabitants. He had no idea of making a Naboth's vineyard of the prince's wild piece of bog and mountain. In fact he was about to call on the prince to ask him to make one of his party of guns, when another neighbour, Lady Derrymore, warned him of the indiscretion he had nearly committed.

The occasion was a dance following a dinner at Derrybeg. His hostess had been very kind to him. In fact her Irish softness of speech and manner had made him her devoted slave.

"I want to dance," he said to her, "with the little girl in the green frock who has the eyes of a mountain pony."

Lady Derrymore looked the way he indicated. There was a shy child with a golden-brown head, and extraordinary bright eyes under a tangle of

lashes. She was looking their way and at the moment her expression was one of the utmost resentment.

“I daren’t do it,” she said, laughing. “Why that is O’Driscoll’s grand-daughter, little Kathaleen. Don’t you know that they hate you like poison?”

“I didn’t know anything of the sort,” he said bluntly. “May I ask why?”

“Because Ballinacurra is O’Driscoll land. Because they are banished to the waste and derelict bit of the property. Because you’re restoring Ballinacurra. Because we’ve all received you, and with constitutional inertness allowed you to take a leading place among us. Because—you talk of starting a pack of deer-hounds. They do not consider that the sale of Ballinacurra included the deer. My dear Sir Adrian, the deer belong to none of us. Occasionally they swim the river to us, and we might as well call them ours. The original deer-forest, the last bit of it that remains, certainly belongs to the prince.”

“The deer were mentioned in the inventory of my property. They feed in my park all day. After all my project of the hounds was a dim and

distant one. For the present I am quite satisfied with the fox-hunting, especially since you have made me master. They might have postponed their hatred till I had given them cause."

"You've given them plenty," laughed Lady Derrymore. "O'Driscoll hasn't put his leg across a horse these twenty years, yet they resent our giving you the mastership. It's no use telling them that we couldn't afford to keep it ourselves. They'd think we ought to have pawned our last bit of plate to keep the hounds out of an Englishman's hands. They say O'Driscoll won't let the hounds cross his land this winter. I know he's trying to stir up strife against you all over the country; and mind the people look up to him a deal as the last Prince of Erris."

"I never heard anything so unreasonable," said the Englishman aghast.

"My dear man, that's the charm of us," said his hostess, flirting her fan.

"I'll call on him and have it out."

"You'll find the door shut in your face."

“I shall be no worse for that.”

The memory of the eyes under the golden brown tangle of hair followed Sir Adrian long after their owner had coldly refused him the dance which despite Lady Derrymore’s warnings he had been determined enough to ask for.

He called at Castle Erris a day or two later and found the avenue leading to the dilapidated mansion in such a state of disrepair, so littered by the boughs and even whole trees of old storms that he was obliged to leave his dog-cart a little way from the entrance-gate and do the rest on foot.

The door was opened to him by an old man in a shabby suit of livery. When he had heard the visitor’s name his face assumed the oddest mixture of comical perplexity and a dogged determination.

“Whisper, now, dear,” he said, looking furtively behind him. “I wouldn’t take in that name not if you gev me Darner’s fortune. ‘Tis one of the Master’s bad days. He’s sittin’ with his foot laid up in cotton-wool

forenenst him, clanin' his ould breech-loader. An' if I was to mintion your name to him maybe 'tis the contints of it he'd be givin' me in me back. The divil a lie in it!"

Since Sir Adrian Ingestre could not storm the Prince of Erris in his own stronghold he was obliged to retire, not knowing whether to feel more angry or amused.

During the winter that followed there were several unpleasant incidents in connection with the hunting. There were protests against the hunt crossing their lands from farmers who had never objected before. Once or twice the riders were met by a group of rough peasants carrying pitchforks and other unpleasant implements.

"They learnt the way of it," said Lady Derrymore, "in the Land League times: but they haven't been putting it into practice since we declared peace all round. Upon my word, Sir Adrian, it's too bad, seeing all the employment you've been giving in the country, but if it goes on we'll have to ask Colonel O'Conor to sacrifice himself for the rest of us and take the hounds. It's all the old prince. It's surprising what influence he has."

“It’s always easy to influence the people badly,” said Sir Adrian with an outburst of spleen, which showed that he had been hard hit by the failure he had been as master.

It was no later than the Tuesday after that, that the hounds having lost an old dog-fox at the Lohort Spinney gave cry again as they were being led home to the kennels. The members of the hunt had dispersed slowly and sadly. The master, the huntsman and the whipper-in with a few idlers were all that remained. It was a winter afternoon, cold and bright, with the yellow leaves yet shivering on the trees, since there hadn’t been a gale to bring them down.

The hounds were let slip and disappeared into the spinney. The huntsman gave the tally-ho, although there were none but themselves to hear it. They swept through the spinney and out into the open country beyond. Then made for Bargy Woods.

Down the side of a ravine, up the other went the hounds, giving tongue; Sir Adrian riding behind them. It was rough riding, for the woods were full of the stumps of trees which had been lately felled, and once or

twice Sir Adrian’s mare stumbled with him, but regained her footing. Once he was down. By the time he was up again and in the saddle he heard the furious barking of the hounds at a distance. They were evidently at fault; the quarry had slipped into a drain or otherwise baffled them.

Sir Adrian looked round for the huntsman: he was not in sight. He rode on where the yelping of the hounds led him. Presently he came out in the middle of a little glade. The dogs’ voices were deafening by this time. They were leaping like mad below a great chestnut-tree, all their sharp, excited faces turned upwards to the tree, their tongues panting, their tails going like mad.

Sir Adrian rode into the midst of them, looked up into the tree, and then fell to flogging the hounds furiously with his whip. In a minute or two the huntsman and whipper-in appeared on the scene looking rather crestfallen. Sir Adrian roared his orders. The huntsman called his hounds off. In a few seconds they were trotting away to the kennels, disappointed of their sport, but evidently anticipating their coming meal.

Sir Adrian remained below the tree till the din passed somewhat out of

hearing. Then he looked up into the soft golden masses of the boughs.

“Now,” he said in a tone of concentrated emotion, fury, concern, irritation, all struggling together. “You’d better let that thing go; and then be obliging enough to tell me what you did it for. I don’t suppose it was motive enough that you were spoiling the run.”

“Indeed I never thought of you,” said a sweet cold voice out of the tree. “And as for letting the little beast go, why I just can’t. It’s quite a young thing and it has broken its paw. It fell right at my feet, yelping like a pet dog. Do you suppose I was going to leave it to the hounds?”

“You knew your danger, I suppose?”

“Oh, yes, I knew,” said the voice airily. “It was a near thing too. The first hound almost pulled me back out of the tree. I believe he carried a bit of the braid off my skirt away in his mouth.”

“Good heavens! If the pack had pulled you down with the scent of the fox about you they’d have made short work of you.”

“I shouldn’t have liked that sort of death,” said the voice. “Of course I knew it in a way. But what would you have done yourself if the fox had come tumbling at your feet like that?”

“I hope I’d have had more sense than to do what you did,” Sir Adrian replied grimly. “But now are you coming down? Is the little beast’s paw really broken? Didn’t it scratch and bite at you when you picked it up?”

“No more than a pet dog. I have a theory that it is some one’s pet fox; or it has been tamed by the suffering, like the lion in the story. Here, catch it! I’m coming.”

A small sunburnt hand and wrist were thrust from the warm drift of leaves. From the fingers, held by the scruff of the neck, dangled helplessly a little fox.

In the same manner Sir Adrian received it, and laid it down on the moss. The thing showed no inclination to run away. Its anxious face wore the expression of a dog in trouble. Sir Adrian mentally inclined to the theory of the fox being a pet.

“What are you going to do?” asked the voice, at his side now. Miss O’Driscoll had slung herself down with surprising ease and grace from the tree.

“Going to set the paw,” he answered. “I’ve never done as much for a fox before, but I have more than once for a dog. And, as a preliminary, I’m going to muzzle you, old fellow. A fox’s bite is a very nasty thing, Miss O’Driscoll, as fortunately have not been obliged to realise.”

He produced his handkerchief and with surprisingly little resistance on the part of the fox bound up his jaws. Then he looked about for something of which to make his splints, found what he wanted, and performed the little operation skilfully and tenderly.

When he had finished—“Now, what are we going to do with him?” he asked. “Ballinacurra is nearer than Erris. Supposing—I think I could get a donkey-cart close by—I take him there?”

The girl had been leaning over him so intent on what he was doing that her breath was on his cheek; he could see where the upward-sweeping

eyelashes caught the light on their gold; the down on the young roses of her cheeks was like a baby’s.

“That will be best,” she said. “When he gets well–-”

“It must be for you to decide. Perhaps you had better make a pet of him to keep him from being hunted again.”

“I think we shall give him his choice,” she said softly.

“You know, I think it was splendid of you,” he went on. “Perfect lunacy, of course, but splendid all the same.”

She reddened at his praise.

“I think you are very kind,” she said simply, “I don’t know any one else who would have been so good to the fox, and so clever.”

“And you forgive me?” he asked extending a frank hand. “I want to be friends with O’Driscoll and his grand-daughter.”

She put her hand into his.

“Grandpapa was angry because the deer were to be hunted,” she said.

“I shall not think of it again,” he answered eagerly.

She flung back her mane, and her bright eyes looked at him, at once shy and fearless.

“There are other things,” she said, “things of no importance. It was my fault. I did my best to make my grandfather hate you.”

“But you don’t hate me?”

“Not now.” Their hands were still clasped above the little fox, which lay, licking uneasily at the splinted leg, between them.

“Not now,” she repeated, and then her eyes fell.

Down along the woodland road came a donkey-cart returning from the market whither it had carried a family of small pigs. It was easy to

arrange for the carriage of the little fox to Ballinacurra. When they had seen it start, Miss O'Driscoll held out her hand.

"Good-bye," she said.

"We go the same way," he replied, turning to recapture his horse, which was grazing in a glade close by.

They walked on then, side by side, till he had seen her within her own gate.

"I shall let you know how our patient progresses," he said as they parted; and it was with a curious thrill of pleasure he said that "our".

The gout had set its victim free for the time, and the Prince of Erris was in paradise.

"It's almost worth while to have it for the joy of getting rid of it, Kathaleen Mavourneen," he said to his grand-daughter.

"I want to tell you," she said, sitting down on his discarded footstool,

“we made a mistake about him over there—” nodding her head in the direction of Ballinacurra chimneys, just visible among the trees—“the Englishman. We O’Driscolls, we’re too proud not to own when we’ve made a mistake,—done an injustice. He’s a gentleman, if he is rich, and he’s kind, and he has no intention of hunting the deer which are your property, he says, and it isn’t his fault that he bought Ballinacurra, and he desires very much the privilege of knowing you, Grandpapa.”

“Why, child, what do you mean? Wasn’t it yourself that stuffed my head with stories against him, and set me on to make it impossible for him to keep the hounds? If he withdraws about the deer and acknowledges they are ours, why I don’t see anything against him, except that he’s an Englishman, and that he can’t help. It would be ungenerous for us to visit that or his riches upon him, eh, Kathaleen?”

“Quite right, Grandpapa,” said Kathaleen seriously, and then proceeded to tell him the story of the fox, and to repeat a portion of Sir Adrian’s conversation as they walked home together, which showed quite the proper feeling towards the O’Driscolls, who had been a power in the land before ever an Ingestre had followed a Norman robber into England and much more to the same purport. Be sure Sir Adrian’s remarks lost

nothing in Miss Kathaleen’s repetition of them.

The very next day the Prince of Erris’s ancient bath-chair was seen trundling up the avenue of Ballinacurra; and the prince’s apologies for not having made an opportunity earlier of welcoming Sir Adrian Ingestre to the county, which was O’Driscoll country, left nothing to be desired.

The little fox’s paw mended in time; but before he had the choice offered to him of being a pet or having his liberty to be hunted, Miss O’Driscoll had promised to change her name to Ingestre. And the fox, having made his choice, became the permanent inmate of a very comfortable house at Ballinacurra. Only sad to relate he sometimes raided a hen-roost, when he got loose, like any of his wild brethren. But Lady Ingestre’s fox was a privileged beast, and her ladyship’s partiality for him was quite shared by Sir Adrian, to the grief of many honest dogs.

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THE INTERVIEW.

ANTHONY Vance sat in his shady garden on a scorching day and felt the wind from the sea in his face, and sipped at his lemon squash, and wondered how people endured life in London on such a day.

A year ago he had known. A year ago he had been a literary failure, glad if one arrow out of ten hit the mark, content with shabby prices, asking himself day after day why he didn’t go and earn an honest penny as a scavenger; but still somehow sticking to the work because it delighted him for its own sake.

Then had come—success! With success he had realised that the drawers and pigeon-holes full of rejected manuscripts meant solid bullion. He had not yet ceased to wonder at the state of his bank account. Yet his success had not put him at peace with all men. On the contrary, while edition after edition of his novels congested the printing presses, and editors bid against each other for his dogs’-eared manuscripts, his contempt for those who were so ready to bless what they had formerly banned grew steadily. They were not consistent even in ignorance. A famous statesman in his leisure moments had discovered Anthony Vance. And lo! all the silly sheep went after him, bleating their admiration, without knowing what they admired.

He had an idea they might get tired of him presently, so he had put a portion of his year's profits into this house and grounds. He had always had an odd fancy for having a spot of earth which he could call his own. Having discovered just the place of his dreams he secluded himself within it.

London in vain invited the new lion to come and roar. Immensely distinguished persons went after him, to no purpose. He was eight miles from a railway station. He answered none of the letters that asked for interviews or autographs. A hermit he was among his hollyhocks and sweet peas, his plums and jargonelles, except for an occasional visit from one or two struggling literary men whom he had known in the old life, and whom he helped with both hands. If the sheep went after some one else and forgot him, he liked to say to himself, he would still have Dormers. He had bought it out and out. Why, if his pen dried up he could almost live on the fruits and vegetables of its delightful garden.

He sipped at his lemon squash and he watched a bee busy itself in a bed of mignonette. A shade of sadness lay on his expressive face, which was more lined than it ought to be at thirty-seven. He was thinking of Mary

Granger. What a paradise the garden would have been if Mary in her white dress walked among the flowers! How they had dreamt of such an earthly paradise in the old days! How they had planned and saved, putting shilling to shilling, till they should have enough to rent and furnish a little country cottage, with a kitchen garden and a riot of flowers up to the door, under the gabled windows. But before that was reached Mary, exposed to many weathers in her life as a daily governess, sickened and died. He had only the gentle ghost of her left to him as his life-long companion. No wonder he was bitter over the success that had come to him too late.

He must have nodded asleep in the warm, scented air, to the hum of the honey-clogged bees. Suddenly he started awake. Mrs. Hale, his housekeeper, was speaking to him.

“I was … thinking, Mrs. Hale,” he said. “What did you say?”

“I’m sorry to disturb you, sir,” Mrs. Hale said respectfully, “but there’s a poor thing, a lady, if I ever see one, at the hall-door. She ‘ave come to ask an interview with you, and ‘ave walked all the way from Turston. She do look fit to drop. I ‘ave told her that you never gives

interviews, but she looks so pitiful that I've left her sitting down in the porch. With your permission, sir, I'll ask her into the parlour, and make her a cup of tea."

The lion glared.

"Did I ask her to walk eight miles in this broiling sun? The man who sent her to do it ought to be hanged. Do what you like, Mrs. Hale, only, don't let her into my study. I don't want her to describe how picturesque my carpet slippers look under the chair, nor to record that I keep a syphon and a bottle of whisky on a side-table. You'd better lock her in the parlour, or else she'll be creeping round looking for copy."

"Not she, sir," said Mrs. Hale. "I've seen that sort, brazen 'ussies. But this is a sweet, pretty thing and a born lady."

Mr. Vance dozed off again and dreamt that Mary had come to interview him and he had refused to see her and she had gone away. And then, realising what he had done, he made a great struggle to overtake and bring her back, but his feet were tangled in some obstacle and he could not move,

struggle as he would. He realised the anguish of his helplessness to the full, and while he struggled was conscious of the immense waste of loneliness beyond,—the years and days in which Mary would never come again. And then, making one frantic supreme effort, he freed himself and was awake.

“She wouldn’t take the tea, sir,” Mrs. Hale was saying at his side, “though she thanked me as sweet as sweet. But she ‘ave rested a little and is gone again, climbing up that there dusty hill in the sun. ‘Tis enough to give her sunstroke, so it is. An’ how she’ll ever get back to Turston is what I wouldn’t like to say.”

“Good Heavens!” said Mr. Vance, jumping up. “Did I ask her to come?”

He rushed past Mrs. Hale through the glass door and along the cool hall, with its tesselated pavement and green distempered walls hung with water-colours. He seized his Panama hat from the rack as he passed, and rushed forth, quite unconscious that he was wearing his slippers and that his collar had got pushed awry during his slumbers. He was out of the little wicket gate in a second of time. Yes, she was in sight still, thank God! The influence of the dream was still about him.

The little white figure,—she was wearing white as Mary had done in his dream—was nearly at the top of the hill. Well, thank Heaven, he wasn't yet pursy. He was a bit out of training, but he could still put on a spurt; and the girl went slow-foot.

He overtook her on the crest of the hill. "I beg your pardon," he said, "my housekeeper made a mistake. I am Mr. Vance: won't you come back?"

The girl turned and looked at him, and a slow wave of colour broke over her face. She was very young, not more than twenty he judged. She had a soft pale face, not so unlike Mary's, but prettier than Mary's. There was no treachery in his thinking so, to whom Mary's face represented immortal Beauty. She had fine pale hair, held back by a lavender ribbon. Her lips were a soft pale red and her smile was gentle. Her large eyes had a look of wonder, the eyes of the enthusiast. Her temples from which the hair rolled back in silky gold waves were over-thin, her forehead over-developed. She still panted a little from the exertion of her climb and her smile was tired.

As he looked into her face Vance mentally apostrophised himself as a

brute and a pig. She was looking at him with wonder and awe, as though amazed at finding him a mere ordinary mortal.

“You are very kind,” she breathed softly, as she turned and went with him.

He led her straight through the house to the garden, calling to the housekeeper as he passed by the little stairs that led to the kitchen.

“We will have our lunch in the garden if you please, Mrs. Hale, and please to stand a bottle of claret in the sun.”

Mrs. Hale came after them with the claret and set it in the mignonette bed. She smiled benevolently on them. Mr. Vance had put the young lady into the most comfortable chair and pushed a footstool under her feet. She sank among the cushions as though she would never want to leave them again.

The lunch was not long in coming, a roast fowl, an ox tongue, served cold with a delicious French sauce, a trifle and some port-wine jelly; fruit, yet warm with the sun, laid on its own green leaves on blue

plates of Japan. Then black coffee. The claret was warmed to perfection.

The girl ate the meal she so evidently needed with an air of mingled alarm and delight. Her face, now the colour had come to it and she no longer looked exhausted, was very expressive. Her shy glances roamed about her, rested on the flowers and the butterflies, on the red gables of the house with the diamond-paned windows, on her host's face, then came back to the little note-book which lay on her lap all the time.

The meal was over and Mr. Vance drew out his cigarette-case. He offered the contents to her and she declined with a shake of her head. Her face had suddenly become absorbed, business-like, like a child playing at shop, he thought: there was something very quaint about her.

"Well," he said, having lit his own cigarette, "now you can fire away. I will answer any questions you like to ask me. Whether I like my neckties plain or spotted, eh?"

She looked at him reproachfully and a little red came in her cheek.

"I didn't mean to offend you," he said hastily. "But that is how they

always begin."

"Oh, is it? I don't think I could ever do it that way."

She had opened her note-book and drawn forth her pencil. She looked down at her lap and up at him. Her lips opened as though about to speak, then closed again.

"Is there no other way of doing it than that?" she asked in evident distress. "I mean about the neckties?"

"You've never done it before?"

"Never; it was a tremendous thing to do, but then Mother has been so ill, and we are very poor."

"How did you come to do it?"

The eyes fluttered before him like moths in the twilight.

"It was like this. I met an editor, Mr. White of the Langham Magazine,

at our vicar’s house last spring. I always wanted to publish. I’ve written reams and reams of stories and poems. We talked about you. You know I knew your work long before you became famous. I tracked it through the magazines whenever I could—oh, shall I ever forget ‘To Mary Lost’ and ‘Heart-Hunger’ and ‘The Soul’s Bitterness?’”—she named verses of his which not even the literary curio-hunter had yet disinterred from their obscurity. “He said to me, ‘If you could persuade him to give you an interview for the Langham I’d give you twenty guineas for it.’ I thought it was a wild jest at the time. Now that Mother is ill it came back to me. Twenty guineas! Do you think he was in earnest? Why, it would mean Mother’s dear life.”

“And I nearly sent you away!” he said, conscience-stricken.

“But how am I to do it?” she asked.

“Don’t do it,” he replied. “I’ll do it to-night for you. I’ll give you exclusive details. I think that is the word. My child I’ll do a stunning interview for you, so that White of the Langham will think he has got good value for his twenty guineas. I shall post it to you to-night. No, by the way, no post goes out from the village till half-past two

to-morrow. I'll ride with it to you to-morrow if you're not beyond the limit of a cycle ride."

"At Honeybourne," she said. "A mile the other side of Turston. I walked all the way."

"You poor child! And you were going to walk back. It would have been eighteen miles?"

"I ought to be starting to walk back now."

"As though I should permit it. I shall send for a carriage from the inn. Hush, child. I am old enough to be your father. Think of me as a fellow-creature who will not have your death from sunstroke laid to his charge. And your mother—what would she say to the eighteen miles?"

"She thinks I am spending the day at the vicarage. Elsie, my sister, is in charge. I did not dare tell Mother beforehand. I shall tell her when I return, and she will thank you to-morrow."

They talked a little longer. Never before had the much belauded Anthony

Vance received a flattery so unconscious and exquisite. She had indeed tracked his work in obscure places in the old days when he had thought that the seed fell on rocky ground. If he had only known the time need not have been so bitter.

He sent her away in the victoria from the inn, packed in with exquisite flowers and fruits for her mother. When he had watched her across the brow of the hill he went indoors, and wrote such a full and detailed account of himself as he never thought to have done for mortal.

“I know White likes his measure pressed-down and running-over,” he said to himself,—“and the child shall be sure of her twenty guineas.”

He dreamt that night the oddest dream, that Mary came to him with the girl of the interview, whose name was Lucy Marsden, and placed the girl’s hand in his, and with the selfless and radiant smile which she used to wear passed out of sight.

But he was not yet ready to give up the loneliness in which the ghost of Mary had been his pale dear companion. He said to himself as he awoke, heart-whole so far as the living were concerned, that all that was over

for him. His wife, the mother of his children, was lying in Mary's virgin grave. He could not begin over again. Lacking Mary he must be for ever wifeless and childless.

He felt a glow of benevolence as he rode through the white dusty country to Honeybourne the next day, with the 'copy' safe in his pocket.

He found the Marsdens in a tiny house; at least Mrs. Marsden, a frail, pretty woman, looking as though she were or would be the victim of a wasting disease, sat in an easy chair on the lawn. Her daughter was fanning her, and came to meet him as the latch of the gate clicked under his hand. The little house was behind, covered with autumn honeysuckle and the great purple clematis.

The sick woman took his hand into a fervent clasp.

"How shall I ever thank you?" she asked. "The child has told me of her temerity and your goodness. How shall I ever thank you?"

He sat down beside her and they talked. Lucy slipped away to get the tea and left them together. Their hearts went out in friendship at the first

sight of each other. Vance had known very few women; except Mary he had been on terms of intimacy with none. He was a reverent man by nature and Mary had made it simple for him to believe in the goodness of women. Sitting there talking below a chestnut tree he thought the very fragrance of goodness lay about Mrs. Marsden like a faint emanation.

The tea, which brought Lucy and Elsie, a younger, smaller replica of Lucy, made the conversation general; but the air seemed charged with sympathy. He felt loth to rise and go. All of a sudden he became aware that he was a very lonely man.

After that he often found his way to Honeybourne. Mary visited his dreams as constantly as of old. Sometimes she came alone, sometimes with Lucy; always she smiled.

The interview appeared, and was considered by Mr. White of the Langham as cheap at twenty guineas, though he did not say as much to the contributor.

“You were too good,” said Lucy, the day she showed the cheque to Mr. Vance. “I’m afraid I have really no right to keep it. But it will tide

Mother over the worst part of the winter. I think I shall take her to Bournemouth. Mr. Vance—I shall never interview any one again, but—do you think I could get anything published? I have written so much, but have never dared to show it to any one. But now, I want money so dreadfully for Mother."

"You will show them to me," he said. "But meanwhile, Lucy child—I am quite an elderly person by you, and the girl who ought to have been my wife is in Heaven these many years back; her name was Mary: she was the sweetest woman. Meanwhile, Lucy child, will you come again as you did that day in August, and … and stay with me? I am desperately lonely, Lucy, and somehow I think that Mary pities my loneliness."

"You mean–-" she began, stammering.

"Let me take care of you and your mother and Elsie. My life has been so empty since Mary left me."

"It was she that was in the poems," she said, with a tender light on her face. "I think I knew about Mary all the time. I shall never be jealous of her, never want to push her into the background of your life."

"That means, yes?" he asked with a joy in his face that showed him young.

"I have been in love with you since I was fifteen," she said; and her eyes were like Mary's eyes in the days of their love.

*

A HOMELESS COUPLE.

THEY were like a couple of old withered leaves that dance in the sun on an autumn day and only await the storm-wind to blow them into the abyss. They had wandered about the Continent for so long that they were known at pretty well all the cheap hotels of the pleasure resorts of Europe, the old man with the military air, and the tall thin wife, who was not so much younger than he, yet kept the air of youth deceptively, unless one were to see her in a strong light.

It was all very well while the summer lasted, and they fraternised with pleasant people from home who were making holiday abroad. It was another

matter when the holiday-makers went home, so many of them with a joyous air, as though after all home was best. Even at the gayest, however, the two held somewhat aloof from their kind, as though they could not help it. They clung together. They were too lonely on their plank in the great ocean to have anything really in common with those who had struck roots in the world. They wanted to be gay and friendly, but people only pretended that they succeeded. They were a pair of poor old ghosts at the banquet of life, and they were never warmed and fed, however much they might pretend.

Time had been when they had had a home like other people and the warmth of their own hearth fire. That was before Andrew Despard had sunk himself so deeply in prospecting for minerals on his small estate that it was impossible for them to live at home any longer. Years had passed now since they had laid eyes on Bawn Rose, the white house with the green shutters at the head of the glen. It was in the hands of strangers. The grass had covered the gashes Andrew Despard had made in the green places; the pits had been filled in. It was as though the skin had healed over a sore.

Only Nora Despard's heart carried the memory of the place like a live

thing that called her home of evenings and in the quiet hours of the night.

Her heart was always hungry for Bawn Rose, the pleasant, comfortable place in the hands of strangers. She did not talk of it to Andrew as they took their interminable walks abroad because she was afraid to hurt him. But the ache and the pain of hunger never ceased in her breast. No wonder she was thin and haggard, that her brows were hollow under her brown hair, her eyes sunken.

Sometimes people said that if Mrs. Despard had not been so thin she would have been handsome. Only Andrew Despard could have told how handsome she had been when he married her, how bright and brown, and gay, the finest of sports-women, witty, frank, engaging. Half the county had been mad for her. But to be sure to poor old Andrew, Nora had never changed. She was still the Nora of his youth, not the haggard woman, growing old, for whom strangers sometimes felt a pang of pity.

It was worst of all when at the end of the season, all the happy folks gone home, they lingered on in some sea-side place by courtesy or pity of their landlady. It was better for health, Nora decided, than the

stuffy town lodgings to which presently they would have to go.

But how sad it was in October, when everybody was gone away, and the big house was full of empty rooms, and they huddled in warm garments in a bare salon which had been pleasant enough in summer.

Nora thought a deal of health. It was a nightmare of hers that the time must come when one of them should be left alone. Sometimes she faced it shudderingly. When that time came, she prayed–-"Dear God, let me be left, for what would Andrew do without me?" Her lot without him did not bear thinking on: but his without her! Why she could not rest even in Heaven if he was alone on the earth.

Sometimes when they were parted for a little while, when Nora went to the nearest town on matters of business, it was most pitiable to see old Andrew waiting about corners, straining his old eyes when it was time for her to return. Once a very unhappy woman whose husband had outraged and betrayed her had made to a silent circle the remark that she thought Mrs. Despard ought to be a very happy woman. But there were very few to envy poor Nora the devotion of her sad old broken-down husband.

They had never had any children. Perhaps if they had had Andrew would not have been so reckless with his small property. He would have had a sense of responsibility to make him careful.

It had been so easy to go on spending the money when there had been only Nora and himself to think of. It had never occurred to Nora to reproach him in the slightest degree in her own mind because he had not thought of her. To be sure they were all in all to each other. They were so entirely one that she could not have imputed blame to him without attaching it to herself.

“My poor girl,” Andrew would say sometimes, “to think of the life I have condemned you to! Why, if I close my eyes I can see you on Colleen, riding off to the meet of the Slaneys and myself beside you on the Don. Do you remember when we used to have the meet at Bawn Rose? I can see you standing at the head of the table pouring out the tea and coffee, with your hat on your head and your habit held up on one arm, and the portrait of your uncle Nick looking down at you from over the chimney-piece.”

“Those were good times,” Nora would say, pressing his arm fondly.

He liked to talk of the old times. In fact the older he became the more he lived in the happy old days and forgot the sad later years. His memories stabbed her, kept the edge of hunger keen, yet she humoured him as she would have humoured him in anything. He grew old very fast. He was barely turned sixty, yet he was as old as another man at seventy. Sometimes Nora asked herself fearfully what she was going to do when he became really old, and ought to have comfort and nursing. It seemed to herself that there had never been any real comfort, real warmth in their lives since they had left Bawn Rose. Oh, Bawn Rose, with its trout-stream singing and chattering over its gold and silver stones, its million birds, its tangled orchard, its drifts of lovely single roses on the lawn! How comfortable and home-like were the rooms! How pleasant the people, who never forgot that the Despards were an old honourable family, and Nora herself an O'Moore descended from princes! If they could only go home and end their days at Bawn Rose! But it was as far away from them as Heaven.

Her thoughts went on idly to her cousin Dick. Richard O'Moore—The O'Moore. Andrew was talking away at her side of the old days, forgetting while he talked of how far he had travelled away from them. With the

telepathy which often exists between an attached husband and wife he also thought of O'Moore.

"Poor Dick," he said, "I wonder what became of him. You couldn't have done worse if you'd married Dick, Nora."

"I couldn't have done better than marry the man of my heart anyhow," she said cheerfully.

They had often discussed Dick. He and Andrew had been rivals in their love for Nora. She had accepted Andrew and Dick had flung himself away out of the country to the Australian gold-fields. It was a long time ago. There had been neither tale nor tidings of Dick. He must have gone under long ago. And as for his old house, Dysart, it had been a great ruin before ever the Despards had gone into exile. It was quite a long time since they had remembered to talk about Dick.

They walked back to the empty hotel, Nora fiddling absently with the long bog-oak chain she wore about her neck as they talked of Dick. It had been Dick's gift to her long ago. It was not pretty and had little value. Perhaps else it might have gone the way of her other pretty

things. She had an unconquerable habit of generosity. You had but to admire a trinket and it was yours if you would accept it. She had found a good many people at one time or another willing to accept her pretty things and go away and forget her. What was the use of hoarding them, she asked? There was no one to come after her. Why shouldn't they give pleasure to a girl or a pretty kind woman?

Although they were too poor to live in their own country, Nora had never learnt to hold her hand.

Where children were concerned she would give them anything. She adored children. So did Andrew for the matter of that. They never talked of the little life that had fluttered into the world for an hour and out of it again. But Nora had never forgotten it, nor had Andrew if one could judge by the way he blinked his poor old eyes and winced with a quiver of his face when he saw Nora playing with children.

She could never keep away from children. At the summer hotels she might be a ghost among the merry-makers, the tall thin old-young woman with her shabby frocks, but to the children she was welcome. They spoke a common language of the heart. The children never found her drab and sad

and old. As she sat on the sands with them, or in the salon of a wet day, playing rowdy games in which she became flushed and dishevelled, she ceased to be a thin old ghost. Andrew coming upon her one day, with her hair about her shoulders, laughing as madly as the merriest child, went away again with his hand over his eyes. He had seen the ghost of his wife's youth.

"We had better move next week," Nora said, as they went up the steep village street. "Madame grows restive. She wants to shut up the house for the winter. I've written to Madame Cappeau to have our rooms ready."

Andrew sighed. The winter in the Rue des Herbalistes was a melancholy prospect. The English-speaking population of the town were like the Despards themselves, needy and hopeless. Winter used to be good at Bawn Rose. There was the hunting. Andrew had almost forgotten the feel of his legs across a horse. And he didn't like that winter population; Nora didn't. It consisted of people who had escaped their creditors, women with a past, all sorts of needy adventurers. No one had suffered for the Despards' misfortunes, no one but themselves. Amid that winter population Andrew could hold his head high.

But he was lonely as Nora was lonely. There was nothing really in common between them and that winter population. Old Andrew, despite his broken-down air, had a look of clean living; carried his head fearlessly; he was not like those furtive-looking men with the eyes that avoided a direct gaze, any more than Nora was like the cheap, over-dressed women. Andrew and Nora lived their own lives amid the winter population.

Yes, they would be sorry to go. The summer had been long and pleasant. The people had been pleasanter and kinder than usual. They had made friends with some of the fisher folk and the animals. The air, even in October, was not languid. It was living and pure and strong. The narrow streets of the town were evil-smelling. The sun hardly struck down between the high houses; there were abominations underfoot among the uncleansed cobble-stones.

They met M. le Facteur coming down the theatrical street, with its coloured walls and green and white shutters. M. le Facteur was trolling a song in a rich baritone. It was like a scene in an opera; the red and blue uniform of the gendarme, the white cap of an old woman sitting in the midst of her butter and eggs in a long country cart, added to the

illusion.

M. le Facteur swept off his blue cap to Monsieur and Madame with a flash of white teeth. He had left a letter for Monsieur at the hotel.

The letter excited no anticipations. It was not time for the small quarterly dividends on which the Despards lived. Between the arrivals of those their post-bag was apt to be scanty and uninteresting. Sometimes one of those chance acquaintances would write or send a newspaper. An English newspaper, even if it were old, was a great boon to Andrew.

In the entresol of the hotel they found the letter, a blue official-looking letter. While Andrew took it and turned it about, wondering who it could be from before opening it, Nora's attention was otherwise engaged. There was a placid, rosy middle-aged woman sitting in the entresol amid a pile of luggage. On her lap was a beautiful dark-haired, dark-eyed child, a boy of about three years old. Who could these belated arrivals be? Why they were as much out of place at the hotel as would be swallows flying homeward in autumn.

Nora looked at the child and the child at Nora. The boy laughed and then

hid his face in his nurse’s comfortable breast with a bewitching shyness. Nora put out her arms to him. They were comfortable arms for children as many children knew. The nurse coughed and then spoke.

“Be you Mrs. Despard, ma’am?” she asked. The accent was a west country accent; Nora only knew that it was pleasant and homely.

“Yes; I am Mrs. Despard,” she said; but just then old Andrew broke in with a sound between a laugh and a sob. He was holding the letter in a trembling hand.

“Why,” he said, “Nora. Poor Dick, the poor fellow! How odd that we should have been talking of him! The kind fellow, to remember us all this time. This must be Dick’s child. Do you understand, Nora?” He was holding out the letter to her. “Poor Dick is dead. He has asked us to take the child. This little man is heir to a great fortune. Dick gives us the care of the child and a big income, a big income to keep him with. He asks us to buy back Dysart, to rebuild it, for the heir. But he thinks of the child with us at Bawn Rose. See, here is a copy of the poor fellow’s will. The letter is from Knight, Osborne and Barrow, of Lincoln’s Inn Fields. This good woman is anxious to get back to her own

husband and child, once she has fulfilled her trust. She fostered the child, little Dick, too. The lawyers thought the best thing they could do was to send her on to us as soon as they had ascertained our address."

Nora, in speechless wonder, held out her arms to the child and he came to her. He put his arms about her neck. He was of her own kin. If her boy had lived he might have been such another as this one. She looked at the nurse half-jealously. She wanted to have the child to herself.

"You have fulfilled your trust splendidly," she said. Nora had the air of a great lady. That had never fallen away from her. "You were very good to bring us the child across the world, leaving your own home to do it. My cousin, Mr. O'Moore, must have had great confidence in you, and it was well-founded."

"Mr. O'Moore put me and mine beyond the reach of want for ever," the woman said. "In a year or two we look to come home to Devonshire and buy a little farm with what he gave us. There is nothing I wouldn't do for the child of the poor gentleman that's gone."

“You are in a hurry to get back.”

“I have my passage taken by Saturday’s boat. I look to see some of the old people in Devonshire betwixt now and then.”

“Why, you shall go by the evening boat,” Nora said, secretly delighted. “I don’t think the child will make strange with me.”

“Any one would think he’d known you from the time he was born,” the nurse said admiringly.

“You know that it means Bawn Rose?” Andrew said later to his wife. He was in a daze over his own good fortune, over the wonderful salvation that had come to them after all these years. He had to say it over to himself, he wanted to have it said to him, to bring the realisation nearer.

“I know that it means Bawn Rose,” Nora said in a deep voice of happiness. “More, I know that it means the child.”

She was standing looking down at the boy in his little cot. He was fast

asleep. She had her sleeves rolled above her elbows, and her arms were yet white and round. She had given the boy his bath before she put him to bed, and the unwonted task had brought the colour to her face. Why, what change had come over everything? The hotel with all its echoing spaces was no longer desolate. The wind that cried around the house was no longer the keen of a banshee. It made one think how pleasant it would be to go home to one's own fireside. Home! How exquisite the word sounded! They were going home to Bawn Rose, to Bawn Rose! How good God was! God bless poor Dick, the kind fellow, who had requited the pain she had given him long ago by giving her Bawn Rose and the child!

"If I were to wake up to-morrow morning, Andrew, and find that it was all a dream and that we had to go to the Rue des Herbalistes after all, I believe I should die of it," she said.

Andrew placed his hand over his eyes as he looked at her.

"You are a pretty woman still, Nora," he said.

"The joy has brought your youth back."

“I shall have to be young,” she said, “to play with him,” indicating the child.

*

A LETTER OF INTRODUCTION.

WHEN Richard Langrishe walked into the little hamlet of Ravigot it was evident that the place was en fete. An arch of paper roses spanned the picturesque street. The villagers were in their holiday clothes in which they looked less interesting than in their work-a-day garments. A girl in white muslin passed across the street from one steep red-roofed cottage to another. The whole place basked sleepily in the sunshine of an August day, and was brilliant,—blue skies, hot white road, white houses, red roofs, green shutters.

He marched up to one of the half-glass doors which bore above it the legend ‘Restaurant’. In Ravigot people seemed to live by being restaurateurs to each other, so often did the inscription occur. He ordered an omelet, some slices of cold ham, a roll and butter, a bottle of white wine and coffee.

While he waited he walked across to the church to inspect it. It was a new building and had little to show of interest. The general garishness of its decorations was agreeably veiled at this moment by the cloud of blue and white banners which filled the middle distances. Their ribbons fluttered in the sea wind which he had admitted by the open door. There was something appealing, feminine, about the sound.

A bird beat its little wings against the high lancet windows which were not made to open. He had a compunction for the bird, and returning set both doors of the church wide, so that the blaze of real sunlight outside might win the captive from the delusion of the pane. With some anxiety for its fate he waited, hearing the soft body thud against the glass. He measured the distance with his eye, wondering if it would be necessary to capture the bird against its will to restore it to liberty.

His attention was distracted for a moment by the prie-dieu on which he rested his hand while he waited. It was framed in black wood; it had a velvet cushion, and was one of three similarly furnished; there was a brass plate on it. He read the name idly,—“Mdlle. Suzanne de Lorme,” with a feeling that it was somehow familiar.

He was aware all at once that the fluttering and thudding of the bird had ceased. The little creature had found its way back to light and air. He left the church, closing the heavy doors behind him as he had found them closed.

The omelet was excellent. So also was the white wine. The bread and butter said the last word of excellence. When he had finished the meal he found himself in good humour with all the world. He lit his pipe in Madame Hefort's sanded room, its small billiard-table taking up the centre. Madame, from behind her counter and its row of many-coloured bottles, looked at him with as much satisfaction as it was possible to get into her austere face in its framing of snowy cap-frills. Madame had decided in her own mind that the English monsieur was "tres comme il faut".

It was a way Richard Langrishe had with him to propitiate old women and little children and animals. He looked up with a smile presently when the little old woman approached him with his coffee and an intention of conversation. It was the day of the fete. Monsieur perhaps would wish to see the procession.

Yes, he would like to see the procession. He was newly from Brittany where he had seen many pardons, many processions. But he was a smiling, easy-going, good-tempered fellow. He did not suppose the procession was going to be anything but a very small affair in this starved little fishing-village. Still, he was quite willing to be interested in it. And the fragrance of the coffee was delicious. His blue eyes beamed on Madame Hefort. It was a way he had with him, a way which had won him the hearts of all the old women and a good many young ones at home in Ballyinglen. To the people in Ballyinglen there was no one like Master Dick, the nephew and heir of Sir Jasper Langrishe.

Presently the procession came round the corner, down the street. He looked at it with interest: it was not his way to be languid; he was sensible of the artistic values of the old priest and his acolytes in their white and scarlet, of the brass crucifix that caught the hot sunshine, of the girls' faces under their veils, the white and silver of the little child-angels.

Behind the official part of the procession there came people in ordinary attire, saying the Rosary, with the clasped beads in their fingers and

devout, bent heads.

In the front row there were three who attracted Langrishe’s attention. They were in black, and their long veils were flung back from their faces.

A young girl walked between an old woman and an elderly woman. Her face was lifted to the skies while theirs were down-bent. She was so slender, so fragile, so soft, that an odd fancy came into his head about the bird that had beaten its wings against the church windows. There was something about the girl that reminded him of the bird.

The full light fell on her face with its impassioned supplication. It was a small face, fair with a golden fairness. Through the transparent veil he could see the golden hair caught into a childish plait at the back of the head. She had long eyes, heavy-lashed, and of a beautiful brown colour. The shape of the eyes gave her face a look of slumbering passion. The features were small and fine. The golden skin had a downy look like the skin of a young child.

Her two little sunburnt hands held her rosary-beads tightly clasped. She

was dressed in some thin black stuff through which one guessed at her slenderness.

The women between whom she walked were as unlike this golden child as possible. They were dark and heavy-featured and their faces, despite the religious feeling of the hour, kept a look proud and unhappy. The old lady indeed had begun to yellow through her darkness with the yellow of old ivory.

She bent forward a little and leant on a stick. She had a perceptible moustache. The younger woman, evidently her daughter, was what she had been thirty years earlier: in the elder woman you saw what the younger would be in thirty years to come.

Langrishe stared at them till they were out of sight. Then he turned to the little old woman at the adjoining window.

“Those ladies there, following the procession, who are they?” he asked, and waited for the answer with an eagerness that surprised himself.

“Madame la Comtesse from the chateau, Mdlle. Marie, Mdlle. Suzanne.”

“Ah, Mdlle. Suzanne de Lorme?”

“Yes, Monsieur was right. It was Mdlle. Suzanne de Lorme, the grandchild of the Comtesse. Mdlle. Marie was Madame’s daughter. They were a great family, the De Lormes, although poor in these latter days. It was but lately they had buried poor M. Jacques, the brother of Mdlle. Suzanne who now, alas, was the last of the De Lormes.”

Again a vague memory of the name stirred in him. Where had he heard of it before and in what connection?

“Monsieur would doubtless have seen the chateau? He had passed the entrance-gates as he came into the village. It stood in a little wood.”

Yes, he remembered. The wood was a small sparse wood, beaten all one way by the sea-wind. There was a rusted iron gate. He had given a passing admiration to its scrolls and finials, its initials interlaced, its crest and motto. But the thing mouldered, as plainly the house beyond mouldered. He had caught a glimpse of a house-front that ought to be white. The tears of the years had streaked it with unwholesome green.

One of the green shutters hung loose on its hinges and creaked with a melancholy sound. The place had daunted him as he passed by. It had a churchyard air. Who would live retired in that close little wood when all outside it the pure strong wind revelled and blew?

“Madame la Comtesse de Lorme—Madame de Lorme.” What was the association in his mind?

Suddenly it flashed upon him. Why he had a letter of introduction to the lady. She was one of Aunt Kate’s friends. Aunt Kate had loaded him with introductions when he set out on his leisurely walking tour through the north of France. He had not had the strength of mind to refuse them. He carried thirty letters of introduction, if he carried one, to the fine ladies whom Aunt Kate had known when Eugenie ruled the Tuileries with the spell of an enchanting beauty and grace.

He had not been able to resist Aunt Kate and refuse the introductions, although he had had a passing thought that a good many of the fine ladies might be dead and gone by this time. Aunt Kate—she was really Richard Langrishe’s great-aunt—was a little, flighty, pretty old lady

who had had a most brilliant past, and who was yet dearly loved by a large circle of friends and relatives of whom her grand-nephew was among the most devoted. No one could ever have suggested to Aunt Kate the possibility that many of her contemporaries had ceased from their charming on this planet. And her nephew had taken the letters of introduction with apparent gratitude, apprehending all the same her stormy indignation when he should return to her without news of her old friends.

Madame Hefort's voice broke in upon his thoughts.

"Mdlle. Suzanne is to be affianced to M. le Comte d'Herault. M. le Comte is a brave gentleman, handsome and stately; not so young perhaps as might be desirable. In fact it was some years since he had lost Madame la Comtesse, and he was already a grandfather. Still, what would you have? The De Lorme's were so poor. There would be nothing else for Mdlle. Suzanne, except the veil."

Ah! So that was why the poor little thing had suggested to him the captive bird that had beaten its wings against the pane. He understood better now the supplication of the gaze lifted to Heaven. He knew now

that it prayed for deliverance. Poor child, poor little thing! There would not be much mercy for her, he said to himself hotly, remembering the Comtesse's gloomy face. He had ever been something of a Quixote and hot-headed like his country people.

Madame Hefort wondered why the sunny face had suddenly become grim. He turned to her and there was something that sparkled and smouldered in the shadow of his eyes. He thought of staying a little while in Ravigot. Could Madame tell him where he might procure a bedroom?

Madame could. She herself had a bedroom in which Monsieur could be comfortable. It was good, Monsieur said, his face clearing.

He followed Madame up a little steep flight of stairs. The room was excellently clean under its low ceiling. It looked on a red-roofed stable. There was a side view over a garden of hollyhocks to the sea and the sand-hills. As he opened the little window the strong pure breath of the sea came into the room.

He had only a hand-bag to unpack. He carried little more than a change of linen. In an inner wallet of the bag he discovered Aunt Kate's

letters of introduction, and selected the one he needed. He looked down ruefully at his homespuns that carried the traces of wind and weather. He wished now that he had arranged for some more ceremonious garments to follow him. But it was no use regretting now. He was on fire,—why, what was the matter with him?—to come face to face with Mdlle. Suzanne and her captors, as he called the stern old grandmother, the forbidding-looking aunt, in his own mind.

He brushed the dust from his garments and from his shoes carefully. He had an idea that his unceremonious appearance might not commend him to Madame la Comtesse. Still it couldn't be helped. Perhaps after all a very proud person would be less particular about such matters than those less sure of their position.

As he walked up the street Madame Hefort's eyes watched him from the door with approval. A couple of cowed-looking dogs came to him for a caress. The flaxen-haired children looked up at him with a "Bon jour, Monsieur," and he answered "Bon jour, Mesdemoiselles," lifting his hat as he passed on.

He was but half-way up the village street when a shabby little old

carriage with a leather hood, drawn by a lean grey horse, turned out of the gates of the chateau. For a moment his heart sank with a sense of disappointment. Then uplifted again as he recognised Madame de Lorme and Mdlle. Marie as the occupants. Was it possible that by an unheard-of chance he might see Mdlle. Suzanne alone?

He knew by what barriers French girls of rank are protected. Probably he would be refused admission to Mdlle. Suzanne's presence in the Comtesse's absence. Still—some lucky accident might befriend him.

He turned in at the open gates of the chateau. The grounds were of no great extent, but the carriage drive wound in and out the little wood with an ingenious deceptiveness. As he followed it he saw down a side-path the slender figure of the girl he sought. She was apparently sitting on a rustic seat. Her chin rested on her hand. Her attitude was one of the utmost dejection.

"Mdlle. Suzanne," he said, coming up to her.

She looked up at him with a terrified air. "Monsieur," she began. There were traces of tears on her cheeks: her bosom was yet heaving with

agitation. This coming face to face alone with a strange young man was a new experience for her, a terrifying one she would have felt it if somehow Dick's kind, young brown eyes had not expressed the most tender pity and sympathy for her.

He explained in fluent French—it was something he had acquired early from Aunt Kate, who loved the polite language; it was one of her little affectations to talk in French half the time—the reason of his appearance, extending to her at the same time the letter of introduction. He noticed for the first time that it was sealed, with a little wonder. Aunt Kate was always so particular about doing the right thing. He wondered what it contained. Old memories, old secrets, absurd loving praises of himself. Aunt Kate, who had done very comfortably without Madame de Lorme and her other fine friends for thirty years or so, had been moved to tears by her memories of them when she recalled their names as those of people who might be useful to Dick.

Mdlle. Suzanne took the letter and looked down at it shyly, a little colour coming and going in her cheek. Madame de Lorme would return about five o'clock. After that hour she would welcome Monsieur.

He left her most unwillingly. There were two mortal hours to be got through before five o'clock.

What on earth was he to do with them? However, plainly he could not ask to stay as he might have done with an English girl. He went away with a tender compassion aching in his breast for Mdlle. Suzanne. If he could only have taken the poor little thing in his arms and comforted her!

He strolled about the village, making acquaintances as he went. He turned into the little grave-yard on the cliff, and wondered over its bead wreaths and garish ornaments. The humbler graves were dominated by the great stone crosses and monuments of the De Lormes. Over all the Calvary by the gate spread its protecting arms to gather all the graves, "as a hen gathereth her chickens ".

He had no intention of intruding again on Mdlle. Suzanne. In fact, he was rather overwhelmed when he came upon her standing by a new grave. It was covered with artificial wreaths, but in the midst of them lay a cross of sea-holly which had apparently just been laid there.

He felt that he ought to go, but he stayed. When he said a word of

sympathy her tears began to flow, and having no words he touched softly a fold of her dress.

“It was my brother, Monsieur,” the girl said, turning to him as though she were hungry for sympathy. “When he died I thought the worst had befallen me—alas!”

The young fellow muttered his inarticulate sympathy. They stood there looking into each other’s eyes, while the intimacy between them grew with every second that passed. They were quite away from human eyes, alone amid the sand-dunes and the corn-fields.

“If but he had taken me with him!” she said, with a tragical hardening of her little soft face. “Indeed there are worse things than death, Monsieur.”

Then the colour flooded her cheeks. “I do not ask so much of life,” she said. “Only that I might be at peace in the Convent of the Carmelites at Arras. But that will not be granted me.”

“The convent!” he repeated in a horror-stricken way. “The Carmelites!

That living death! Indeed it is not for you, not for such as you who are made for love and life and happiness.”

When he was shown into the salon of the Chateau de Lorme he found Madame seated in a high-backed chair, her daughter by her side, her grand-daughter on a low tabouret, waiting to receive him. In her hand she held the letter of introduction.

It seemed to him that he came through a great space of bare austere room, past many screens and embroidered chairs, in and out of little tables, that he saw himself in many mirrors, before he reached the stately little group of ladies. He felt Madame’s eyes upon him. Was she staring in haughty amazement at his unconventional garb? If she could only know what thoughts were in his mind; if she could but guess at that interview in the churchyard, where his youth and tender pity and Mademoiselle’s youth and need had been fire and tow to each other! What matter! He was going to rescue Mdlle. Suzanne if he carried her off by force. He felt like Perseus, like St. George, like any knight who has had to slay dragons for his lady.

If but he had known he had never looked better than at this moment when

his eyes and his uplifted head were a declaration of battle. His little love was sitting with her eyes down—perhaps she did not dare lift them, lest their secret should be read—her attitude as submissive as that of a child. Mdlle. Marie! Why, it was a kind face if a plain one, and it was looking kindness at him. And Madame! Madame's voice was like silver rain as she welcomed him. Looking at her for the first time he saw that she had bright piercing eyes beneath the heavy lids. She was smiling. And somehow the ugliness and the gloom had fled away.

What a stupid fellow he had been to have thought Madame ugly! She was putting out the power to charm which is the happy gift of French women of all degrees. When Madame de Lorme chose to please none remembered that she was heavy-featured, yellow, old. Langrishe was impatient with himself that he had thought her forbidding. Yet,—he knew something of the prickly hedge which is formed about a French girl. If Madame could but know he had broken through it! And after all there was the marriage between the old man, the grandfather, which Madame had arranged, and which the poor child had protested against in vain, imploring rather the protection of the veil of the Carmelites.

After that the days passed in Ravigot village, sleepily, sunnily,

happily, for Dick Langrishe. He broke through no more hedges. He saw Mdlle. Suzanne only in the presence of Madame and Mdlle. Marie. He was eager to win Suzanne if he might according to their ways, if they would but let him.

“The betrothal is spoken of no longer,” she conveyed to him in a whisper. “I do not understand it. The name of M. le Comte d’Herault is no longer spoken by the Comtesse. What does it mean, my friend?”

He knew no more than she. He only knew that he came and went, as he would, at the chateau, that he was treated with an almost motherly kindness by Madame, that Mdlle. Marie smiled at him, with a vague sympathy and encouragement in her eyes.

No more did he think of the chateau as gloomy, like a grave. It was poor certainly, everything was poor; they ate and drank sparingly; everything was worn and faded. But there was such a suggestion of purity and peace; it was so spotless; the furniture so beautiful if it was old, the things for use so fine and delicate if worn thin. This was such poverty as St. Francis dreamt of—my Lady Poverty, beautiful and delicate and austere.

He was treated like a son of the house. Madame consulted him about many things. The days of his visit extended themselves to weeks. It was early August when he came to Ravigot. It was late golden September when at last he spoke. And Mdlle. Suzanne was become a golden rose. There was a little significance in the air, in the way people looked at him. He read in the eyes of M. le Cure, of Madame Hefort, of all his friends of the village, what they knew was coming: the smiles were full of a roguish congratulation.

Madame made a fine stately little speech. She had known that Monsieur desired the hand of Mdlle. Suzanne since she had received the letter of her dear friend, Mdlle. Kate. Monsieur’s family was ancient, of great consideration, like the De Lormes, and Monsieur himself had won her affection and esteem. She had the pleasure to consent to the marriage.

There was a word of Mdlle. Suzanne’s dot which was not a large one. Langrishe desired no dot with his beloved. Why, Mdlle. Suzanne was the treasure of all the world. In England, in Ireland, the dot was not necessary, certainly in his own case not desired—unwelcome. He waved away the question of the dot loftily.

And so Aunt Kate had helped to bring the marriage about after all. She had anticipated his desires. He smiled radiantly as he thought of Aunt Kate. People called the little old spinster crazy. Well, this special bit of craziness was the very height of wisdom.

It was long afterwards that he saw Aunt Kate's letter in which she commended him to Madame.

"It would be the wish of my heart, dear friend," she had written, "and it will be his, that there should be a marriage between him and your daughter, the delightful Georgette. Our family as you know is of distinction: my nephew will inherit the title and estates. He is excellent in every way, and charming, although he would not thank me for saying it. And an alliance between our two houses would be to me and to Sir Jasper, the boy's uncle, a source of the greatest gratification. I look with effusion to embrace the sweet Georgette."

"I have never had a Georgette," Madame explained placidly, turning the letter about, "and, to be sure, Mdlle. Kate forgets how the years have gone by, so that you must marry my grand-daughter and not my daughter."

“Seeing that she is always young herself,” Langrishe answered, with a throb of gratitude in his heart for her who had so smoothed his path.

As for M. le Comte d’Herault he passes quite out of the story. Some few months later he married an American, which fact might or might not shed some light on his withdrawal from the affair. Only once Madame referred to him and that was in terms of icy contempt. As for Mdlle. Suzanne, become Mrs. Langrishe and the most charming of matrons, she came and went between Ravigot and Ballinglen Hall with so happy and blooming an air that none could have believed she was ever so sad. She was the apple of their eye to so many people, and not to be dispossessed with them even when an heir presumptive came to make a new world for half a dozen old people as well as his parents.

One thing Dick Langrishe often wondered about was whether in those other letters of introduction Aunt Kate had suggested alliances for him with the children of her other friends. He thought it extremely probable. However, since the letters had been destroyed, he had no chance of finding out; but he often congratulated himself on the happy fortune that brought him to Ravigot carrying that letter of introduction.

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A TELEPHONE MESSAGE.

AN amazing thing had happened to Amy Foster. Some one was ringing her up on the telephone. A breathless small boy had brought her word from the post-office, which was apt to curl itself up like the dormouse and go asleep once winter had descended on Berenz. Indeed it was only during the short summer season that the post-office was at all awake; and even then there were hours during which the exacting visitors from the outer world knocked in vain, since Madame Jollet and her cat had retired for the afternoon siesta.

In a state of quiet wonder Mrs. Foster followed the bare-legged urchin up the street. Who could be ringing her up on the telephone? She had cut herself off so utterly from her old life, she had snapped the few and slender ties that held her to England so entirely. Who could want her now?

She had been strong to resist friendships even when they were pressed eagerly upon her. She had fled here in such utter sickness of heart,

such disillusionment with life, and had found at least such a quietness that she had no mind to go back.

Time after time it had happened to her that she was called upon to render some service or other to the few English-speaking people who found themselves in Berenz. Once she had nursed a sick child back to health. The nearest doctor to Berenz was fourteen miles away. In Berenz if folk became ill they recovered of themselves or they died.

Because she knew the place so thoroughly and its resources, such as they were, she had often been called into counsel when the strange needs of the foreign visitors required satisfaction. A good many of those she had so helped would fain have pursued the acquaintance. A good many people had been interested in the young English widow with the clear grey eyes and warm colour and masses of red-fair hair. What had brought her into such a solitude? Why did she shun her own kind? What suffering was it that had set those lines about her mouth, and given her that tragical look when she thought she was unobserved, which was yet so ready to become all softness for her thousand and one friends among the villagers or the animals?

Mrs. Foster had shown no inclination to enlighten any one on these points. Her service rendered, she had retired behind the iron lattice-work of her little hall-door. She had a cottage in the steep street of the village into which she never invited the summer visitors, no matter how insistent they were. While the visitors remained she worked a deal in her garden among her fruits and vegetables, going as little outside her door as might be. She was often to be seen in the church, with her long black veil sweeping over the prie-dieu in front of her. When she wore her veil down the most persistent were kept at a distance.

It was an easy explanation that she had had a great sorrow in her widowhood; but somebody who was not satisfied with easy explanations, a brilliant man of letters, of whom his admirers said that he had the heart of a woman as well as the heart of a man, having caught sight of Mrs. Foster one day when she had cast back her veil, suggested that she had suffered a great wrong rather than a great sorrow.

“It is not the face of a woman who has seen her one ship go down,” he said. “She has not used up life although she thinks she has. She has been crushed, but not broken. Perhaps Berenz is as good a place as any

in the wide world to recover from such experiences as she must have had.”

She was standing before the sounding-board in the little post-office with the two trumpets of the telephone to her pretty ears. Madame Jollet, standing by, for once had suspended her eternal knitting, so lively was her curiosity. There was a little crowd in the doorway. The news had spread about the telephone message for the English Madame. Such little excitement did not often come the way of the village.

“Qui parle?” called the voice at the other end of the telephone.

“Mrs. Foster. Who are you?”

“An English gentleman is taken ill at the Lion of Flanders in the market-square of Courcelles. He asks for you. I am his physician.”

A sudden colour leaped to Amy Foster’s cheek.

What was this that was being forced upon her? Who could there be in all the world who in his extremity would have thought of her? Perhaps,—her

mind ran over the list of visitors to whom she had rendered slight services during the half-dozen years of her rest in Berenz. Some one had remembered and in need had sent for her.

Why the need was enough. The villagers to whom she had always been ready to go in illness knew that well. The elucidation of other matters could wait.

“His name?” she asked again at the telephone.

“M. Jacques Silvestre.”

James Sylvester. There was no such name in her memory. But still … if she had hesitated at all before she was certain now. The sick stranger had the name of her child, her baby, her little Jim, the one thing she had saved out of the shipwreck of her married life, and saved only to lose.

“Tell him I will come,” she said; and having listened a moment for a further message, none coming, she left the post-office.

It was a good fourteen miles over the hilly inland country to Courcelles. She found the baker in the midst of a batch of bread, but smiling over his shoulder at Madame while he assured her that the voiture should be got ready immediately. She returned to her own little house then, and began to make preparations as though for an absence. It might be necessary that she should stay at Courcelles.

When she arrived at the Lion of Flanders she followed the waiting maid down the long flagged passages to the room where the sick man lay.

There was a hush about the little hotel where it lay basking in the sunshine of late autumn. Germaine, with her finger on her lips, whispered to Madame that the English gentleman was very bad. Dr. Lefevre was to return in a little while.

Mrs. Foster followed her into the darkened room and stood at the bed-foot. She tried to make out the stranger’s features, but could not for the gloom. The room smelt stuffily.

She went to the window and pulled the curtains aside. After a struggle with the refractory bolt she opened the window and a clear shaft of air

and sunlight came in. Then she removed her bonnet and going to the bed-side she looked down at the man who had sent for her.

He was a stranger, an absolute stranger. She was quite certain that she had never seen that lean resolute face before. Perhaps resolute was hardly the word for it now that heavy illness had relaxed it. There was a dark stain on the cheeks; the head tossed restlessly from side to side on the pillow. As she stood looking down, the eyes opened and looked at her without seeing her. Beyond the blur and the dimness, the eyes were brown, brown with yellowish whites to them. Her little Jim had had the eyes of a gipsy.

The door opened and Dr. Lefevre came in. He glanced at the open window; then at Mrs. Foster.

“You are the poor gentleman’s friend?” he said, taking off his hat.

She inclined her head gently. Already she was removing the long widow’s cloak and folding it preparatory to putting it away. Underneath it she had a dress with short skirts, of fresh pink cambric. While Dr. Lefevre talked she opened her bag, found a large holland apron and put it on.

“You are going to nurse him?” the doctor said, nodding his head approvingly. “You have then some experience in nursing?”

“Much,” she replied. She was already collecting cups and glasses and empty medicine bottles, the debris of a sickroom, and placing them on a tray. Her movements were soft and swift and gentle. No one would have imagined from the calm of her face that she had just been called upon to nurse an absolute stranger.

“A good nurse, it is half the battle. But he is very ill,” the doctor said.

He was devoutly thankful that this relative of his patient’s, as he took her to be, had not arrived, as he had more than half-feared, weeping and wringing her hands. He rubbed his hands together softly as she listened to his instructions and obeyed them. It was very good: it was excellent.

The doctor was not quite sure about the open window, but then the English would have it so; they were accustomed to it; it would not be fatal to them as it would be to a French person. He said something about

keeping the patient out of the courant d'air; and Mrs. Foster smiled her assent. As the patient's bed was in a curtained alcove it was not easy to see how he could get into the courant d'air.

The next time the doctor came he found the room transformed. The curtains and the curtain rod were gone. So were the heavy curtains from the windows which were all open. The room had been thoroughly scrubbed. There was a little fire in the grate. By the window Mrs. Foster sat sewing. She was of the women who find comfort and refreshment in a long seam. The quietness of the room was something that could be felt.

The bed no longer stood within the alcove. It had been turned round with its foot towards the room; a clear passage round it was open now. The dusty alcove had had its share of cleaning. It had lost its musty smell. A screen at the bed-foot kept the light from the patient's eyes.

In that room at the Lion of Flanders the days slipped by in an amazing quietude. In the doctor's opinion never was there such a nurse. He had a wide and vexatious experience of many kinds of nurses. Never had he had one so silent, so deft, so reliable.

“She has the sympathy too without which all is lost,” the doctor said to himself on a day when the patient was very bad indeed, “and yet she never shows what she must feel.” Sympathy and self-control: with those two qualities one could do anything; but how seldom Dr. Lefevre had found them in juxtaposition!

There came a day at last when as Mrs. Foster sat in her accustomed place by the window the patient opened his eyes and slow speculation grew in them. Something too of memory and understanding. There was a clear brisk autumn air in the room. The year was some weeks older than when he had arrived at the Lion of Flanders. Slowly, slowly, he began to piece things together.

“You are the nurse?” he said at last, his eyes resting on the quiet figure and face. Then he repeated the question in halting French.

“I am the nurse,” Mrs. Foster said, coming to his side. “I am so glad you are awake.”

He looked at her with an air of satisfaction.

“You are English,” he said. “What luck!” She nodded her head. Then she brought him something in a cup, and lifted his head while he swallowed it. A few minutes after she had laid him down gently he was asleep again.

Several days passed before she got to the heart of the mystery.

“My aunt, Mrs. Forrester?” he asked in one of those talks which gradually he was allowed to extend by a sentence, or part of a sentence, each day, as his condition grew more and more satisfactory to his doctor and nurse. “I sent for her at the last, when I felt how it was going to be with me. Did she not come?”

“Mrs. Forrester! To be sure! She stayed at Berenz this summer. I remember to have seen her and heard her addressed by that name. She had left before your message came.”

“How then….?”

He looked at her in bewilderment and the colour swept her cheek.

“The message came to me. My name is Foster. I live in Berenz all the year round. It was a blunder, of course. I answered the message, seeing that it was a case of illness. There was nothing else for me to do, was there?”

“I suppose not,”—his face showed his stupefaction. A light came on its leanness. “What an angelic thing to do! Why, I should have been dead, only for you.”

“Hush, hush,” she said, and bent to smooth his pillows. “You are exciting yourself. A good nurse will not excite her patient. You are to be quiet now, and I shall read to you. Anything else?”

“Yes,” he had an air of pleading. “Don’t think me impertinent. How did it come that you were able to leave your home?”

His eyes glanced at the wedding-ring on her finger.

“I have no one belonging to me,” she answered quietly. “I am a widow. I live quite alone in Berenz. I have been living there for five years.”

“Why,” he said, “I too am all but alone in the world.”

After that he was quiet while she read to him, and presently she found that he was asleep.

The days of the convalescence slipped by gently. Presently James Sylvester was sitting up in his room, a gaunt and shadowy image of what he had been, would be in health, yet coming more and more to his own day after day. Already he had made an effort at shaving himself. While Mrs. Foster held the glass in front of him she had laughed at the woe-begone face with which he regarded himself, and his speech, “What an unspeakable looking scoundrel!”

As the sound of her own laughter reached her it startled her. That laugh belonged to a girl dead long ago, not to Amy Foster. Why, she had not laughed like that since, since … oh, not for long years. He looked at her shyly as she laughed, shyly, yet with a delight in her mirth.

“Am I horrible?” he asked, as he essayed the first unsteady stroke. There was something boyish and innocent in the shyness of his eyes.

“I think you are very pretty,” she said, with an unwonted gaiety, “and a credit to your nurse.”

A little later she said to him that her work was nearly at an end.

“Dr. Lefevre thinks that you will be able to travel in a week or two,” she said. “You will be glad to get away from the Lion of Flanders. Courcelles is indeed the back of God-speed, and the Lion of Flanders has been asleep these thousand years or so back.”

“I have never been so happy,” he answered, “as at the Lion of Flanders. No doubt you are anxious to get back to Berenz?”

She had been saying to herself that she would be glad to get back to her cottage, to the friendly simple people, to her books and her piano and her solitude. She had been feigning that the place had a home-like feeling for her. Now suddenly she realised that Berenz had served its turn. She was no longer a wounded creature desiring only a quiet place to creep into and be at rest. She saw vividly for an instant the cottage as it awaited her return. Dust and drifts of sea-sand on everything, the garden in the sadness of autumn; the decayed and dying holyhocks, the

mouldering vegetables, the drift of dead leafage everywhere, the air full of a rank and mouldering smell. She turned away from the picture. Berenz had served its turn. How was she to live through the long winter with its endless nights?

“Berenz has been very good to me,” she answered with a little wavering smile.

In an instant he had caught at her two hands.

“I am going back to England,” he said, “but I’m not going without you. Don’t tell me that you have only nursed me back to life in order to condemn me to loneliness and desolation. I know—I have seen it in your face when you thought that I was not watching you—that in some other life you have suffered shipwreck. Let me build a new life for you. My dear, I love you.” She let him hold her hands; she yielded to him when he put his arms about her and drew her to him.

“You know nothing at all about me,” she sighed with a sigh of great content. “Yet you love me. You ask me to be your wife. I have suffered so much in the past. I thought life was over for me.”

"It is only beginning. I have an old house in the Weald of Sussex, amid woods and pastures. I have neglected it. A lonely man has little use for a home. You will make my home there, my beloved. You will tell me your sad story and after that we will forget it. Our life together is to hold nothing but happiness. And I must tell you about myself. You are taking me on trust also."

Her eyes danced with a new merriment.

"You forget that I have seen Mrs. Forrester," she said demurely.

"Ah, I am Aunt Grace's unworthy nephew. Still, oh, yes, I am quite a respectable member of society. You can trust me. And I shall be good to you."

"Why," she said, with a sigh of exceeding happiness. "I thought the only good left to me was rest. I thought nothing else was possible. But,—I am a young woman still. There are better things for me than rest."

"Much better than rest," he answered. "Joy and love and life. We will

make the world over again for each other.”

*

THE CHILDKEN AT OKEOVERS.

IT was a lovely afternoon of May. Every bank was pale and sweet with primroses. The low apple-trees in the little orchard were dressed in pink. The black pigs rooted and grunted in the long grass. Wild hyacinths stood tiptoe in every coppice, making a cloud of blue. Birds were singing, and the leaves were out in their tenderest green. Okeovers stood on the side of the hill overlooking the valley, a two-storeyed, ancient, red house with seven windows abreast in the upper storey. Over the hall-door, which was reached by a single step, there was a name and a date:

GULIELMUS OKEOVER ME FECIT, 1682.

The house was rather like a small manor-house than a farm-house. To be sure the Okeovers had been yeomen farmers and very highly respected in Stansted parish even before Okeovers was built. The church records were

full of Okeovers, nearly as many of them as of Percevals at the Place.

Just round the corner of the house where the neglected garden sloped down to the orchard there were a group of children crouched on the grass, playing with white stones, that afternoon of May.

There was something oddly stealthy and quiet about their play, such as it was, for indeed they did not seem accustomed to play even with the white stones so aimless were their movements.

A little way from them, her back turned to them, her face looking in the direction of the little-frequented road that climbed from the valley and ran straight past what had once been the lawn of Okeovers, was a girl of about sixteen, older than the others, with a wild mane of black hair about her shoulders and face.

She was Molly Okeover, John Okeover's eldest daughter, and the mother in a sort of her little sisters and brothers, doubly orphaned since John Okeover had been killed by the fall of a tree he was taking down in the preceding autumn.

Through the veil of Molly's hair Molly's eyes flashed, fierce, in

torture, burnt up with tears that had no refreshment in them. Molly had been keeping those tears in her eyes—none had seen them fall—for some three weeks now, ever since her baby step-brother had been laid away in Stansted churchyard.

“A good thing, too,” said the neighbours, nor thought themselves hard to say it. “It would never have grown up like other children. Any one could see that it hadn’t been right from the birth, with its eyes that never could keep still, and its mouth always hanging open.”

Others had said that the child was a judgment on Sarah Jane Okeover for the way she treated her stepchildren.

Anyhow it was gone, and Molly who had been its only nurse was in savage pain for the loss of it; her thin arms empty night and day for the feel of it, her childish breast hungering for the warmth of it.

One would have thought that Molly would have had enough to do to be fond of her own brothers and sisters without attaching herself to a child of Sarah Jane Okeover’s. But then Molly had nursed the uncanny child, had walked the wide draughty bedroom night after night with it, had washed

it and fed it and tried to win recognition from it for many a month.

How often she had refused to let people look at her baby—it was always hers. What could they want to see him for but to say cruel things of him? He was not what they said, Molly was sure of it. He began to know her. She was sure she felt his relaxed little fingers cling to hers.
Then he had a teething fit, and the frail life was over, almost before Molly had realised the danger.

It was a sad life that John Okeover's children led under the second wife's rule. For the matter of that his own life had been sad enough. He had been a burly black-bearded, black-haired man with a ruddy complexion; a man of a great build although not tall: and easy-going to weakness.

He had remained a widower so long that no one ever thought of his marrying again. He had seemed happy enough, though his beautiful old house was neglected for want of a mistress. Molly had done her best after her mother's death, but Molly herself was only a child.

Then one day he had surprised them all by bringing home a new wife.

Heaven knows why he had chosen Sarah Jane. She was a thin woman with a complaining mouth and thin, faded wisps of dull light hair falling about a colourless face. She was rather small and her back had a crooked line. All the same she was as strong as a horse, but in her quiet way she was a born shrew and tyrant. She was one of the busy slatterns we have all known who keep their houses in a ferment yet never attain to either cleanliness or comfort.

What possessed John Okeover? asked the neighbours. Perhaps Sarah Jane had presented herself to him in a different light during the courtship. Anyhow she made him in time quite as miserable as she made the children, so that perhaps he was not very sorry when that tree fell and his life with it.

There were five children in all, two boys and three girls. They were loving, passionate children, who had inherited the gipsy looks of the Okeovers, with a certain gentleness and refinement which perhaps came to them from their mother who had been a poor governess when John Okeover married her, but a lady born, being a parson’s daughter.

The house to which John Okeover brought Sarah Jane had been the pride

and joy of the parson's daughter as of many notable housewives who preceded her. It was a beautiful house, within as without, with spacious lofty rooms, oak floors and oak-panelling, an oak staircase, great fire-places lined with old Dutch tiles. The principal bedroom had a powdering closet. The parlour had deep cupboards for china and deep windows. But the pride and glory of the house was its kitchen, with its enormous fire-place for logs, its great screen of oak, its tables and benches of oak, polished with age and blackened, its walls of innumerable cupboards entirely panelled with oak.

In the beautiful old house the parson's daughter had lived gently, had brought up her children to live gently. There was always some one to do the roughest work. Mrs. Okeover cooked daintily and swept and dusted and made beds; and Molly had delighted in helping her when she was permitted.

In those happy days Molly and Robin and Lucy went to the dame school in Stansted village. Roger was only a baby then, and Bella was not yet born.

The quiet influence of the first Mrs. Okeover had made a paradise of the

home. No wonder John Okeover had drooped and pined after she had left him, with a fretful baby added to his household of small children. There were people who said that John Okeover had grown stupid after his loss: and that perhaps explained how he had come to let Sarah Jane marry him.

The house appealed to Sarah Jane's housewifely instincts as it had done to the first Mrs. Okeover. But her way of showing it was very different.

To be sure things had grown a bit slatternly during the years since the mistress had died. Sarah Jane set herself to remedy that. She inaugurated a tremendous cleaning in which, to do her justice, she did not spare herself. Neither did she spare the children. She sniffed contemptuously when she discovered that they had never learnt to clean grates or scrub floors. They should be taught differently. She wasn't going to have any idle flesh on her floors.

The cleaning was accomplished with a vast deal of discomfort. It was Sarah Jane's way to throw every room into chaos at once and keep it so as long as possible. But when finally it was accomplished Sarah Jane discovered that the house proper was too fine for living in. Why not take lodgers? The kitchens and the garrets over the stables were quite

good enough to accommodate the family.

Sarah Jane had her way, though at first John Okeover resisted her. She had the deadly persistence which always has it own way in the end. What if the Okeovers had never been accustomed to live in the back kitchen? It was time they began. What if John Okeover perceived no need for taking lodgers, since the land was doing very well? There was only one pleasure possible to Sarah Jane's meagre nature and that was to add penny to penny till they mounted to pounds; and Sarah Jane meant to have it.

She had her way about the lodgers. She advertised and they came. There were a good many relays of them, for Sarah Jane's cooking was indifferent, and her pinching ways offended people. Still the rooms were always full; the house and its situation were so beautiful that they attracted people; and some were patient with other deficiencies because of the charm and quiet of the place.

Meanwhile, the Okeover family huddled into the back kitchen, where the stone floors oozed damp perpetually and the economical fires of green wood made the eyes weep. There were no windows, and light was only

possible when the door was opened, so that it had to stand open all day, however the wind was. The odour of the back kitchen was compounded of green-wood smoke, washing, and the smell of the pigs in the farmyard. But in time the young Okeovers became insensitive to such a small matter as the atmosphere, having worse things to put up with.

The three older went no more to school. Sarah Jane had had no more schooling than enabled her to add up cheating accounts and that seemed to her as much as any one need know. And she had plenty of occupation for them. Her plan of keeping lodgers did not include any additional service in the house. On her first introduction to her stepchildren her cold eye had rested on them appraising the strength of their handsome young bodies in so far as she could use it.

To be sure the humblest kitchen slut would not stay with Sarah Jane. No creature that had any loophole of escape would bear the deadly driving, the incessant quiet nagging of Sarah Jane Okeover. The dogs that had lain on the hearth in the easy years were driven out of doors and half-starved now. Even a cat was not permitted under the new regime. And the odd thing was, seeing what an insignificant wisp of a woman she was, with so quiet an air, that she managed to inspire every creature that

came in contact with her with a deadly fear.

The children in time became her unresisting drudges. What was their puny rebellion against her quiet persistence? They did all the work of the house, scrubbing stone stairs and passages on their small knees, carrying coal and water, washing, scrubbing acres of rooms with their small, unformed hands. Besides there was incessant work among the pigs and fowls and in the cow-houses outside. And the children did it all.

At first, Molly rebelled with all her passionate heart, and more for the others than for herself. Too wise for her youth, she saw the deterioration in the other children; how Robin—who when he had ridden to hounds by his father's side had looked as fine a young gentleman as Mr. Spencer Perceval himself—grew shock-headed, sullen, dirty. He became friends with the labourers, who sympathised with the children as all the world did and were ready to alleviate his hard lot with a pint of beer or a pull at a dirty pipe.

She saw that the little ones grew stunted, coarse looking; that they learned to lie cleverly so to avert their tyrant's wrath. To be sure they could not remember their own mother as Molly did.

Molly had few opportunities for prayers. The children, who were up at peep-of-day and drudged all day like the most hard-used animals, were ready to tumble into the deep sleep of exhaustion the minute they reached their miserable beds at night. But Molly sometimes lay awake at night, her fierce soul chafing her tired-out body, praying passionately that she should not forget Mother and the things Mother had taught her, in these horrible new days.

The coming of the unhappy baby made all the difference to Molly. It was not drudgery to her once she came to love the elfish thing, to walk the room with it at night, to carry it about all day where a gleam of sun might help it to live. Molly had loved the baby with maternal passion, intensified because of its need. After the first she had not remembered that it was the child of the cruel stepmother. She pushed Sarah Jane out. Maternal love had been indeed only a starveling growth in Sarah Jane's arid heart. The baby was Molly's. When the little half-awake spirit had flown it was Molly's hands that made the little body ready for its coffin and placed it there. It was Molly who grieved with a primal passion for the little face laid away under the clay.

She was possessed with her passion of grief this afternoon to the exclusion of other things. The children,—Molly always called the younger ones the children, as though she herself were not a child,—were playing their timorous games in Sarah Jane’s absence. Robin had stolen away, to some of his friends among the labouring men most likely. Sarah Jane was gone to see her lawyer at Brumleigh. The children had done their work for the day. But even when the work was done Sarah Jane’s rule admitted of no relaxation. The children set out their white stones in patterns, heaped them upon each other, all the time their ears listening, like the ears of a startled hare, for the wheels that should herald the tyrant’s return.

Molly knew what Sarah Jane’s business was with the lawyers and had hardly the heart to care John Okeover had left everything in Sarah Jane’s hands and Sarah Jane was tired of Okeover. Even such as she may sometimes desire popularity and the air about Okeovers was distinctly inimical. The countryside resented her treatment of the children. She was minded to be done with Okeovers and the unfriendly neighbours. The midland town that had cradled her was more to her liking. And lodgers had fallen off of late. She proposed to sell Okeovers for what it would fetch and buy with it a public-house in her native town.

Molly had listened to Robin’s passionate protest against the scheme, feeling coldly outside his anger. To be sure she loved Robin and Lucy and the little ones, but none of them needed her as the baby had needed her. And Okeovers wasn’t the same since Sarah Jane had brought in the lodgers and degraded them all, and planted hen-coops all over the velvety lawn that had been the first Mr. Okeover’s pride, with its roses and arbour and sundial and pigeon-cote.

Molly had a thought that brought her an odd comfort, that perhaps Baby and her own Mother had met in Heaven. Molly was sure that Mother would never remember against the baby that Sarah Jane had a part in him. He was Daddy’s and he was Molly’s. Sarah Jane was only an inessential accident in Molly’s eyes.

Suddenly as Molly stood there she heard the rattle of wheels. She turned a little pale from force of habit—since the baby had died she had not seemed to care for Sarah Jane’s frown—and turning she gave the word to the children. Then she whistled sharply.

The three children flung their stones into the garden-bed under cover of

the rhubarb-leaves and fled into the house. A few seconds passed and Robin came round the side of the house, his hands in his pockets, with an air of not being in a hurry.

“She’s coming,” Molly said, with a backward glance at the boy. His beauty and air of distinction, even in his rough clothes, struck her suddenly, like a revelation. He was the image of Mother’s brother, the fine young gentleman in uniform whose picture hung in the parlour, presently no doubt to be auctioned off with all the other belongings of Okeovers. Robin was very like Uncle Rupert, Mother’s darling heroic brother, who had been killed in battle. It all seemed worlds away to Molly.

“She can’t be back yet,” said Robin, corning to her side and looking down the hill. “It is someone else. The doctor most likely; Briggs’ children are all bad with sore-throats from drinking the pond-water. Daddy promised to sink a pump, but SHE wouldn’t do it. I’m going to run away, Molly I shan’t go to that dirty town with her.”

For a moment Molly forgot the baby and her heart gave a sudden throb of alarm for Robin. She put out her hand and drew him to her side. For a

moment she arraigned her father who had left them to Sarah Jane. Then she reproached herself. Poor Daddy, how miserable he used to look! And how tender he had been to them when Sarah Jane was not looking! And what if Robin ran away. Why he could do no worse for himself than Sarah Jane was likely to do. Molly had an odd terror of that town public-house for Robin.

The vehicle they had heard came slowly into sight. It was not the doctor’s smart gig, neither was it Sarah Jane’s governess-cart with its lean old pony, whose bare ribs Sarah Jane was won to belabour unmercifully as she drove him up the steep hills.

“It is a station-fly,” said Robin.

“Some one about the lodgings,” suggested Molly.

“Perhaps not for us at all,” said Robin.

The other children came creeping back, having reconnoitred from the upper windows and seen that it was not the thing they dreaded.

The fly came on, between the gates that crossed the almost private road just before it wound by Okeovers house-front, stopped nearly opposite the children, and the lady, who was its one occupant, alighted.

She came towards them across the untidy lawn, holding her skirt daintily uplifted in one hand. She was quietly but beautifully dressed. She had soft brown hair parted under her bonnet, a tranquil forehead, large blue eyes that had a look of shining, a tender yet strong mouth. Her air as she came was soft and motherly.

Molly gasped something under her breath, was it–-? But, no, of course Mother was dead. Then who was this lady that was so like her? Who,—who but Aunt Lucy, Mother’s only sister, who had married long ago and gone to Australia.

“My poor children,” said the lady, bursting into tears, and sobbing and holding out her kind arms. “I came as quickly as I could, after receiving your father’s letter, but it took time. And now I hear he is dead: but he told me to come before he died. I never had any children of my own. Oh, Robin,—is this Robin or is it our dear Rupert come to life again? And you are Molly, my darling. And which is Lucy, my namesake?

And little Hilda, my god-child. Oh, my poor, poor children!”

She was sobbing it all out half-inarticulately, and embracing them one after the other, and then all in a heap. She never seemed to notice the coarse clothes and the grimed hands, and the disordered hair, nor how Robin smelt of the stables and of coarse tobacco. Perhaps she was not very squeamish for all her pure and dainty look, seeing that she had spent a good many years in the Bush. Anyhow she no more shrank from the children than their own mother would have shrunk if God had permitted her to return as the children had often dreamt. Molly shut her eyes. Even the ache for the baby was lost for the moment in the sense of comfort and sweetness that Aunt Lucy seemed to have brought with her.

“And I hear Okeovers is in the market,” she went on. “At least it was in the market. I saw the advertisement as soon as I landed and stopped long enough in London to see an old friend of mine who is a lawyer, and tell him to buy it for me. I expect he has made an offer by this time. What a sweet old house! I have a photograph of it which your mother sent me. How happy we shall be here all together!”

At last Molly remembered to fetch a chair from within doors and ask Aunt

Lucy to sit down. The stolid coachman was feeding his horse, giving no sign of the lively curiosity which burned in his breast. The dogs crept round the corner of the house and fawned on the children and the new-comer.

“The little ones must have a nurse,” said Aunt Lucy. “And you, Robin, must go to school. I should like you to be a soldier like your Uncle Rupert, and you must work hard, for you have not very much time. But I can’t spare Molly; I want Molly for my companion, so she must have a governess. Do you think I could sleep here to-night, Molly? I daresay I really own the house at this moment. And I will send word by the driver of the fly to the big draper’s in Brumleigh to send out a dressmaker to-morrow with dress-materials for you children, and suits for Robin and Jock.”

With what relief the children saw the fly drive away, leaving Aunt Lucy behind it; for if she had gone they could never have believed she could come again!

Then Sarah Jane arrived, her mean face puckering and frowning as she saw that the children had a visitor with whom they seemed so much at home

and happy that they forgot to scatter at her approach. She had returned in a gracious humour because she had learned that Okeovers was sold, but she forgot about it in her indignation at the sight of the idle children.

“I suppose you’ve come after the lodgings,” she said sharply, “but there isn’t any use. I’m not letting lodgings now. I’ve sold the house and farm. Be off about your work, children. How dare you be idling like this!”

“Excuse me,” said Aunt Lucy, keeping the children from scattering by a sudden protecting gesture, as though she extended around them a pair of wide invisible wings. “I have not come after the lodgings. I’m Mrs. Rodney, these childrens’ aunt, and I’ve bought Okeovers. I’ve come to stay. My luggage will be sent on from the hotel. Their father gave me the guardianship of the children in a duly signed and sealed document a few days before he died. I’d have been here before only I had to wind up my affairs in Australia. The will that was found after his death, Mrs. Okeover, I don’t know that it would stand in a court of law if any one had been sufficiently interested in the children to question it. However, I’m a rich woman. I don’t care to drag the name in the dirt.

You can have the price of Okeovers; but I want my house to myself and the children as soon as possible."

The children did not follow it all. They only saw that the tyrant was vanquished. Looking suddenly ill Sarah Jane crept within the house and put her belongings together.

When she left Okerovers for ever she took with her a good many things to which she had no right. Even her fear of the woman who had discovered her iniquity and scorned to take advantage of it, could not keep her from carrying off silver forks, and a silver soup tureen, with various other unconsidered trifles of the same sort.

But it mattered nothing to the children, nothing to Aunt Lucy, nothing to Okeovers, returning to its ancient dignity and comeliness. Perhaps it needs a season of bitter adversity to make one realise the full meaning of happiness. Molly never forgot the things she had endured, any more than she forgot the baby, the poor little maimed innocence that had helped her to bear the trouble. But Robin, become a young gentleman, and soon to be a soldier of the king, forgot, and the children forgot. The new happiness was enough for the children.

*

THE KIND SAINT.

I HAD been at the convent since I was a little one, since my dear parents had sent me home from India to the nuns, one of whom was my mother's school-friend. And I was happy there, although the most without ties in the outside world of all that happy family of children. For the dear father and mother had died, leaving me alone in the world except for my father's Aunt Sarah; and of her I had but a terrified childish memory, of an old person who wore gay colours, and shook terrible grey curls at me, and spoke in a loud, harsh voice, so that I sobbed as I hid my face in Mother Margaret's robe.

It was a memory of a visit once paid to me by Aunt Sarah, the one and only visit at the convent. I think she was very angry at my mother's choice for me, holding that I should have been sent to her. She did not like the nuns or their religion, and was unbelieving when Mother Margaret assured her that my religion would not be meddled with. Nor was it during all the years that I was the child of the house, dear to the

motherly nuns because I had no mother or father upon earth. It was not their fault if I grafted on to my own religion certain observances of theirs. Seeing how I loved them I wonder that I went no farther.

But now it was all over, all the long placid years illumined as though with the hidden light that made the faces of the nuns like so many veiled sanctuary lamps. Over the games in the high wind-swept garden, with the cemetery of the nuns at its heart. We did not shout the less nor laugh the less whole-heartedly because that was there. To the young Memento Mori means only a warning for the old. Over the lessons and lectures in the big, sunny, school-room, the meals in the refectory where we listened to the Lives of the Saints in silence till the pause of the reader's voice set free a babel of chattering tongues. Over the girlish passions for the nuns, the good school-girl friendships, the quiet sleeps in the dormitory at nights where the eye of the lamp before the angel's statue watched like a star.

Aunt Sarah's house was great and gaunt and turned a blank face to the road with but one eye of window. As it happened that eye fell to me, but it was no concession on her part. Indeed there was nothing to see from it but a wide waste of moor and bogland. A tree had been welcome, but

there were no trees. A few cattle browsed over the marshes. Sometimes I saw a brown-faced herd-boy driving them afield. I had a glimpse of the sea beyond where the pearly sky melted into mother-o'-pearl, and when the wind blew from it I smelt its sweetness and heard its monotonous song on the stretch of sandy beach.

I liked to turn my face that way. It was the way into the world; the way back to the convent, the gay and gentle life of which I thought upon with tears.

A little road wound by the wall of the house, but I hardly ever saw any one pass there except the herd-boy, and now and again a peasant, and once a farmer driving in his gig; which was not wonderful seeing that the road went nowhere but to the marshes and Aunt Sarah's house, being a mere loop from the main road. And yet we were but thirty miles from a great town.

There were none but old people in the house. There was Aunt Sarah, and her companion, Miss Maddox, a rosy-faced, small-eyed woman, whom at first I looked upon as a friend, But later I did not think that she was so, but suspected her of winning my confidence so that she might embroil

me with Aunt Sarah. The poor wretch was jealous of her hold upon her employer, and was attached to her in a way, so that I forgive her.

Then there was old Fairy, an old old dog, who lay in a basket and was blind and cried piteously if any hand touched her but Aunt Sarah's. And there was Peter, the cat, who had had half his fur burnt off in an accident. And there were two ancient and sour women-servants; and Matthew, the man of all work, who was ever ready to run with complaints to my aunt if I so much as plucked a flower.

It was very sad between them all. We went to church on Sundays, driven by Matthew in a coat three sizes too big for him and with one of its brass buttons missing from the back. The carriage smelt moudily; and the church had a pinched and withered congregation. The parson, poor thing, was hunch-backed and had had sore trouble of his own, which doubtless embittered his views. His was a fierce and unlovely creed. I never remember to have heard him speak of the Love of God, although constantly of His wrath, painting which he would lash his poor little twisted body into contortions of despair.

Once when he visited us and my aunt reported to him that I had a foolish

scheme for covering the gable of the house with a climbing rose he bade me beware of the lust of the eye, and he defended some piggish cottages of the neighbourhood, where children withered amid filth, because it was well that human bodies should be mortified by having to bear with the things they least liked.

I think he had not forgiven me the convent. I sometimes caught him watching me as though I were a daughter of Heth: and he liked to discourse in my presence of the Scarlet Woman and her abominations, with a fierce little dull eye upon me.

I can see myself sitting there now in the bleak room full of the cold northern light, on a stiff chair, with a little flowered silk kerchief about my shoulders, my hands in mittens clasped in my lap, my young body clad in a straight gown of silk, my white-stockinged feet with their bronze shoes meekly placed together.

So I saw myself in the girandole which swung downwards above the high red-silk piano-back, fluted in rays. Ringlets fell by each cheek and there were little ringlets coming down to my forehead. I seemed as though arraigned before my three elders, for they had withdrawn to one

end of the room and left me alone; and I remember Aunt Sarah's back in the girandole which seemed to lean forward as though she were partly upon her face.

I must confess that I abstracted myself during Mr. Burnett's discourse, and was away in spirit in the convent playing-fields, or anywhere that I could imagine out of this dull world.

Aunt Sarah's own maid, Hepzibah, had, I was sure, been crossed in love, so bitter was she. And surprising me one day before the glass, where I looked at myself, wondering to find no visible change in my countenance because of the dull months since I had left the convent, she said with a sour smile that I might as well be ill-favoured as well-favoured since no gentleman would ever come my way to see it. I was provoked to a dignified retort, but before I could utter it she was gone; and it was no use to complain to Aunt Sarah, who would have told me doubtless that Hepzibah was a much more necessary inmate of the house than I was.

For as the months passed without any fault of my own that I could discover I grew more and more out of favour with my aunt. I was preached at and prayed for every day; and there was not a face in the house that

did not look condemnation at me.

Even Fairy to whom I turned one day for consolation had such a fit of whimpering and shaking that I thought she would have died, and made haste to my room, because I felt sure if Fairy died through my fault my aunt would look upon me as a murderer.

My aunt had ideas of her own as to how a girl should grow up. I lived with a Spartan plainness, being denied all luxuries and comforts, slept hard with scanty covering, washed in cold water, even when I had to break the ice upon it, and when I would sit in my room sat there fireless.

But what grieved me most was that my aunt would have every minute of my day accounted for. I had great numbers of coarse woollen garments to make for the poor, hideous in colour and shape and texture. Often I smiled to myself over the benefactions of Aunt Sarah's unloving charity, remembering the little garments of fine woollen and linen we had been used to make at the convent for Christmas babies, over-delicate perhaps for their state in life, yet not too fine when one remembered Whom they represented.

The work kept me from my letter-writing, a thing Aunt Sarah abominated, and from those walks in the bleak garden which constituted all my exercise.

But at least I could not be forbidden to think: and while I sewed the shapeless and hideous garments I thought my thoughts.

Occasionally there came a letter from the convent or the friends I had made there. Aunt Sarah would watch my letters with such a frowning brow that I sometimes wondered she did not prevent their reaching me, until I overheard one day a scrap of conversation between her and Miss Maddox which showed me that the latter had urged on her to read and prevent my letters; but Aunt Sarah had refused. After that I thought that she and I might have been happy together if it were not for the spite and bitterness of those by whom she was surrounded.

It was Louise Duvernay first put it into my head that I should pray for a delivery.

“Thou know’st, petite,” she wrote, “that I have grieved because my

marriage had not been arranged for, and seeing that I am eighteen I should soon enter on the path of old maidenhood. So I invoked the blessed St. Joseph. I made a Novena before his statue: and scarce is it concluded before the fiance arrives. Such a fiance, little cabbage, with the most adorable little black moustache and black curls, handsome, rich, polite, ardent. We have only spoken in the presence of others, but … his eyes say such things. I am transported with joy; and as soon as I am married I shall give a fine silver statue to St. Joseph."

What would Aunt Sarah have said to it? I was grateful as I hid away the letter in a hollow place I had discovered behind the window-frame for that unexpected magnanimity in her that would not permit her to tamper with my letters.

As I stood tiptoe on the chair to reach my hiding-place, my fingers groped about for something and my cheek burned as though I did something to be ashamed of. I found the thing I wanted, and returning to earth with it I stood looking at it, an image of indecision.

It was a little statue of St. Joseph which Mother Margaret had given me when I left the convent, which I had smuggled in my clothes, and had

hidden from sight ever since, lest it should provoke Aunt Sarah's scorn and indignation. It was a cheap thing of plaster, roughly gilt; but, as I looked at it, I was attracted by the kindliness which perhaps I read into the blurred lines of the face.

The good St. Joseph; was he not the patron of happy married people? I fell on my knees, holding the statue before me, and prayed the Saint to send me a deliverer, a kind husband who should love me and take me away from the place which had proved so unloving to me. I had had my dreams like other girls, perhaps the more for my lonely life; and as I fancied the hero of my dreams riding to my deliverance, my cheek burned and my heart throbbed. "A young lover, dear Saint," I prayed, "and handsome and good. And I, too, will give thee a silver image."

I had barely time to put away the statue when my aunt's step was at my door; and very bitter she was with me because the little progress I had made with the garment in hand proved my idleness. She threatened then that I should sew with her and Miss Maddox, or under Hepzibah's eye: and at that I trembled and burst into tears, promising repentance. Aunt Sarah looked at me for a moment and then turned and went out of the room, and I had the strangest idea that I had seen a softened expression

on her face under the purple cap-ribbons and the hard grey curls.

However she was not less harsh with me as the days went by, so I supposed I was mistaken. Day after day I made my petition to St. Joseph till the nine days were full, and I confess I was very hopeful. At the convent we had a simple faith in miracles as things that happened every day. If the kind Saint had remembered Louise, surely he would not be the less mindful of me, even though I was a heretic. But a convent child for all that; and the convent was named from the Saint.

I had finished the Novena, and was living out the days in a hopeful expectancy when one day I was summoned to my aunt's parlour where there sat together Mr. Burnett, Miss Maddox and herself. I wondered as I went in what new sin I had been guilty of, since Miss Maddox looked at me with an eye of hatred; but Aunt Sarah, strangely enough, seemed to behold me with complacency.

However it was the little man himself whose aspect was strangest of all, for he was flushed and perturbed, yet wore a smiling, self-satisfied air which made him more distasteful in my eyes than when he had been tragical.

Aunt Sarah motioned me to the chair I remembered, facing the girandole; and then a silence fell upon the room during which I had time to discover that Miss Maddox had been weeping. She had not been kind to me, but I pitied her out of the arrogance of my youth; though Heaven knows that youth had not much to boast of. And I hope the arrogance was not unkind.

“Clarissa,” began my aunt. “I have to tell you that a great and unexpected honour has befallen you. I confess I did not hope that you would be so favoured, being, as you have proved yourself to be, giddy and forward and a disturbing element in this godly household, for which I blame not you, child, so much as the unhappy circumstances of your upbringing. However, all that shall be forgotten. I am about to commit you to the hands of one who is far fitter to deal with you and to undo that mischief than I.”

She paused impressively, and I stared at her in amazement. Was it possible I was to be sent away, to be delivered from this odious imprisonment? I observed with wonder the unctuous, smiling face of Mr. Burnett, the well-pleased air of my aunt, the efforts of poor Maddox to

control the trembling of her lips. Still I was not enlightened, but at last the whole horrible truth was sprung upon me.

“Mr. Burnett desires to make you an offer of marriage,” said Aunt Sarah.

What else she might have said I know not, for I hurled myself from my chair in a tempest of passion and tears.

“How dare he! how dare he!” I said, choking. “That old man! I would rather die first.”

My aunt’s face whitened with anger, and I saw the dark blood rush over the face of my suitor and then ebb, leaving it steel-grey and malignant. Only Maddox stared at me with an incredulous surprise which had something in it of the air of one who has received a reprieve from the gallows.

Then I flung myself passionately from the room and up the stairs, and had reached my own room and bolted and locked the door before I collected myself to listen for following footsteps, but there were none.

I took the statue of St. Joseph from its hiding-place and rated it soundly.

“Perfidious Saint!” said I. “Is it so you answer me? with this husband who is worse than none. Go! I cannot bear to look upon you!”

With that I hurled him from the window which stood wide open on to the hard road below.

And then a terrible thing happened, for I heard a sharp cry, and rushing to the window and looking out I saw some one below, some one just striving helplessly to staunch the great rush of blood from a wound in his forehead where the statue had struck him. The blood was all over his face. He seemed to be blinded with it. As for the statue it had broken in fragments and lay barely distinguishable from the shards and broken shells and sea-sand whereof the road was made.

While I yet stared in horror I saw Mr. Burnett, who was leaving the house, come to his aid. I withdrew my head hastily lest I should be observed, and then I heard Aunt Sarah’s voice and Hepzibah’s, and I gathered they were bringing the injured man into the house. There was a

commotion downstairs and a slamming of doors; but I could scarcely distinguish the sounds because of the hammering of my heart in my ears. Surely never was any girl so frightened before. And after a time I heard a horse ride away, and looking from the window I saw Matthew on one of the old carriage-horses and suspected that he had gone to fetch a doctor.

I do not know how I got through the day, fearing, I knew not what. But some time in the afternoon a gentle tapping came to my door and when I opened it, palpitating, there stood Miss Maddox, and her face was not unfriendly.

“You may come down, Clarissa,” she said. “Your aunt has forgotten your offence. There has been a gentleman wounded outside our doors in some mysterious manner, and she is with him. You must be hungry, child.”

So my greater transgression had not been discovered, might yet pass without discovery, since a heavy rain had begun to fall which would wash the fragments of the plaster image into the earth.

I followed her tiptoe to the dining-room, where I found that she had

procured some food to be laid for me; and in spite of my perturbation of spirit I ate it greedily.

We were still there when my aunt came into the room. She looked at me with a new mildness which almost overcame me.

“He is sleeping,” she said. “And Dr. Crabbe says that if the wound does not fester it will do well. He has had a narrow escape; his eye was just spared.”

After that I grew to think that the trouble in the household had arisen from the fact that we were all women together, and I daresay it is often so.

My aunt was always in the sickroom, and when, summoning up courage, I crept to the door with an inquiry she looked at me with eyes from which the old stern condemnation had quite departed.

“Come in, child,” she said. “He is asleep.”

We stood side by side looking at the young dark head on the pillow. The

hair rippled slightly as though it would have curled if it had not been so close cropped. Even under the disfiguring bandage it was easy to see that the face was handsome. I looked at him, troubled and stirred to the utmost depths of my being. His cheek was darkly flushed. He had a slight, dark moustache which did not conceal the sweetness of his mouth. And to think that I had all-but blinded him!

“He is as like my son Willie who was killed at Torres Vedras as though they were twin brothers,” said Aunt Sarah in a trembling voice.

Then Dr. Crabbe came and I was banished from the room, but I heard him say to Aunt Sarah that there was fever from the wound, and that she had better have a woman to help her nurse him and Aunt Sarah’s strange answer.

“Hepzibah will do that,” she said. “She nursed my Willie, and we have missed him sorely all these dreary years.”

But perhaps it did not seem so strange to Dr. Crabbe who was Aunt Sarah’s old friend.

Another day Mr. Burnett called, and he and Aunt Sarah quarrelled about her devotion to the sick young man, and because she would not send him to a hospital or his friends. And when he was leaving the house in a great temper Miss Maddox came out from the drawing-room and persuaded him to come in, and fed him with the hot tea and buttered toast which were the only things that seemed to rejoice him.

Now Aunt Sarah under her changed aspect touched me greatly. I came and went in the sickroom as I would, even when the wound had festered, and the patient seemed like to die, and I was the most unhappy wretch on the planet. And afterwards when the wound took a favourable turn she would talk to me, while the patient slept, of her son who had been killed gloriously in that old war. We had discovered by this time that the young stranger was of the same noble profession of arms. And ever I felt that I ought to make confession of what I had done, and would have found courage, I think, only that I could not endure to confess what had caused my anger against the poor Saint.

But at last the wound began to heal, and then when all danger was past I was seized with a shyness of Captain Hugo Errington, for that was his name, and nothing would induce me to enter the sickroom, to meet the

quiet gaze of his eyes.

While the wound healed another old wound was healing too, for the sourness and gloom that I had known in my great-aunt disappeared like the snows that were giving way before the April sun. Her face altered so that I would not have known it. And the same thing on a lesser degree happened with old Hepzibah.

“It seems as though Master Willie were come back, Miss Clarissa,” she said to me. “Lord bless you, child, I couldn’t bear that any one should be young, seeing how he was taken in his youth.”

And since I had grown fond of my aunt a thought troubled me of how she would bear it when Captain Errington went away and left us a houseful of lonely women,—for old Matthew was not to be counted as a man; and I wondered if we would go back to our old unhappy ways. Why, even Maddox in these latter days had grown comely, and her face had worn an open expression since the day when she had defended Mr. Burnett to Aunt Sarah and been answered with an unexpected forbearance.

I remember that it was Easter and all the Lent lilies were out in the

garden, and I, coming in with my arms full of them to decorate Aunt Sarah’s little parlour, became suddenly aware that Captain Errington was in the room. It was the first day he had come downstairs, and I had meant to make the room gay for his first sight of it; but I was too late.

I stopped short with the deepest sense of my own guilt staining my face with red. There I stood, not daring to lift my eyes, till Captain Errington came and stood beside me and called me by my name.

“Clarissa,” he said, and took the daffodils from my hold and laid them down, and then led me to a couch where he sat down beside me. “Clarissa! You see I know your name. I saw you come and go in the sickroom, even when I lay with closed eyes. How am I to thank you? And why have you absented yourself?”

“You have little enough to thank me for,” I said, raising my eyes, but immediately lowering them again because of something I read in his.

“It is the kindest house in all the world,” he answered, “but none is so kind as you.”

Now at this I was somewhat shocked and grieved for Aunt Sarah's sake, but the next words changed the current of my thoughts.

"Because," he went on, "that opportune missile of yours was the key that opened the door of this house to me. Do you know I had haunted the place for weeks and days, ever since I had caught a glimpse of your face where you sat at the window and looked away over the sea-flats to the setting sun. I loved you, Clarissa, from the first minute I beheld you. But tell me, little one,"—his hands were holding mine—"why did you wound me?"

And after a little while he drew the story from me, and was greatly pleased with it, although the telling had confused me beyond saying.

"The kind Saint!" he said. "To think you should have so misunderstood him and maltreated him. And yet you need not reproach yourself, since it was so he brought you your husband. We shall give him a silver image for our wedding Clarissa."

And so we have done, somewhat to Aunt Sarah's scandal, till she knew the story, which I should not have dared to tell her, but Hugo may dare

anything with her. And when she had heard it she smiled. She is with us now, since her companion, Maddox, has left her and married Mr. Burnett; and Hepzibah nurses our babies and has grown sweet.

*

AUNT BETTY.

WHEN, at thirty-six, Betty Egerton committed the unpardonable sin of marrying “a young man from the ironworks,” her brother, Algernon Egerton, turned her portrait with its face to the wall in his wife’s boudoir and decreed that she should be as though she had never existed to himself and his children.

Betty’s letters were returned to her unopened. She sent two or three. Then she seemed to acquiesce in her brother’s sentence upon her and wrote no more. She was always gentle and easily rebuffed. You had only to turn round that water-colour portrait and look at the frightened brown eyes, the soft, pale cheeks and sensitive mouth to recognise that fact.

Her name was never mentioned between her brother and his wife. But it was not so easy to extinguish her for the children.

To the elder ones she was a distinct memory; to the younger, a faint, beneficent shade.

Mr. and Mrs. Egerton were engrossed in themselves and each other to the exclusion of the children. Algernon Egerton with his impossible pride, his absurd want of business habits, his capacity for muddling away the wreck of a great fortune which his ancestors had left him—the Egertons had never realised that they were on the downward slope and could not lose the habit of living in semi-state—might be a ridiculous sort of Don Quixote to the hard, cold eyes of the outer world. To his wife he was an idol as he had been to Betty long ago.

His children shared in the worship with reservations. He was a thoroughly spoilt person, and in his little circle of adulation was not likely to hear what the outside world was saying of him. And in the years when things grew more and more desperate with the Egertons, Mrs. Egerton but adored her husband the more; set herself the more absolutely to see things with his eyes. Doubtless there was the ‘passionate duty’

of the poet in her love, for she was by nature a clear-sighted little woman enough; and if her husband’s eyes were filled with gold dust she was not the one not to share his blindness.

In the absorption of the couple in each other the children were left out in the cold. When they were little they had not felt it; there was Aunt Betty to whom they were so many small sons of her sky.

Tell the children to forget Aunt Betty! Rubbish! Why every book in the tall school-room book-case had its tender inscription: “To my little heart, Otho, from Aunt Betty,”; “To my pet, Laura, from Aunt Betty,” and so on.

There was a dolls’ house in the school-room, the ownership of which would keep any girl-child from feeling lonely. It was more than half-way up the school-room walls, and it was furnished with all the modern conveniences as they were understood in the sixties. Time was when Laura could curl herself up in the rooms. It had been Aunt Betty’s gift. So had the regiment of dolls who now occupied it, and turned it into a sort of conventual establishment.

The great rocking-horse had been Aunt Betty's gift to Otho. The engine and train she had given to Marcus. The French doll with the elaborate trousseau had been brought home from Paris to Clotilde.

There had been years and years after Aunt Betty's beneficent presence had disappeared from the horizon when the children were obliged to comfort themselves with her gifts, for as times grew more and more pinched at Combe Egerton the children were somewhat neglected.

There was no doubt at all that Algernon Egerton was very much to blame in the way he made ducks and drakes of what was left to him. In the end he made frantic efforts to retrieve his position, taking shares in this and that company which promised impossible profits, only to find that he had been gulled like many another, and that the company promoter had swallowed up his scanty thousands.

At last the day came when Combe Egerton had to be left behind for ever. The house amid its beautiful hills and hollows was to its neck in debt. Even when it was sold there would be hardly anything left for the Egertons. But when they turned their backs on the place it was doubtful if any one of them cared greatly about the details of their trouble. To

have lost Combe Egerton was enough. It had broken their hearts, the children said. Their elders said nothing, huddling themselves and their belongings away to London as though it was a secret flight; but Mrs. Egerton, looking at her husband's face, saw death there; and her own, faithful mirror as it had ever been, reflected his.

They had taken little away with them; but among the little were Aunt Betty's books and the nursery book-case, the doll's house, the rocking-horse and engine. Clotilde wrapped away among her scanty belongings the French doll and her trousseau. Poor Mrs. Egerton, in a cloud of disaster, hardly knew what they took and what they left. At the last, Laura, who remembered Aunt Betty best of all, ran downstairs, unhooked the water-colour portrait from the wall and packed it in her trunk between her dresses.

The Egertons had fallen incredibly low. They had not realised it till they drove up in the cold light of a winter early afternoon to the little house in a London suburb which had been taken for them, by a distant relative of Mrs. Egerton's, who had been coldly compassionate of his kinswoman and her children, while contemptuous in his heart of Algernon's pretensions and folly.

Mrs. Egerton had pleaded hard for a country cottage; but the man’s face had been adamant.

“Those great boys and girls must go to school,” he said. “They will have to earn your bread as well as their own presently. If the elder lad does creditably I can get him a stool in an office. The girls had better learn dressmaking or go into the post-office. You can’t give them schooling in the country. You’d better look realities in the face.”

By this time poor Mrs. Egerton’s pride had been swept away in a flood of sorrow. If she could only keep these terrible realities from Algernon as long as he lived!

As long as he lived! She could see by her kinsman’s manner as well as his speech that he thought Algernon’s days were numbered. And a good riddance too, he would have said, no doubt. She put the thought away as intolerable. That any one could think she would be better without Algernon. Algernon, who even yet, if he would only stay with her, could make life beautiful for her!

There was no fog the day they entered into possession of 106 Cremona Gardens, nothing so merciful to hide the dwindling perspective of hideous little red-brick houses, some two hundred of them absolutely the same, with grotesque little touches of pretentiousness that made them more intolerable. The Egertons shut up in beautiful Combe Egerton had never dreamt there could be such places in all the world. The first sight of it turned the boys dark and silent, made the girls pale and anxious.

They had hardly arrived when Algernon took to his bed.

“You should have let me die at home,” he said to his wife, as he turned his face to the wall.

The next day the fog was down on them and he was strangling for breath.

Mrs. Egerton, in a panic, sent for the nearest doctor. He was an over-worked, ill-paid, chronically tired and irritated man.

“If you can get him to Algiers,” he said, “you’ll save his life. He’ll never last out the winter here. A clay soil and a jerry-built house.

What were you thinking of to bring him here?”

After he had gone Mrs. Egerton stood looking after him from the stair-head like one stupefied. Presently she opened her purse and looked into it. It contained exactly thirteen shillings and two-pence which had to do for her housekeeping till Saturday. This was Wednesday. On Saturday three pounds would come to her from the relative who was engaged in unravelling the tangled skein of the Egertons’ affairs, and three pounds every succeeding Saturday. Oh, to think how they had spent money in the old days at Combe Egerton, the carriages and horses, the senseless luxury, the troops of idle servants! And now Algernon must die for want of a little money!

She went back into the room noiselessly. All sorts of wild projects were chasing each other through her brain. But there was no trace of her perturbation on her face as she approached the sick bed.

Algernon Egerton was lying back among his pillows, worn out by the struggle for breath.

“I haven’t … been … so bad,” he said, panting, “since I … had

pneumonia at fifteen. Betty … nursed me through it.”

The old long-disused name startled Mrs. Egerton violently for an instant. Later, when he had fallen into a tired sleep, and she sought her children in a forlorn reaching after comfort, she found them in a room at the back which they had made as much as possible a replica of the old school-room.

They had lamplight there, and a tiny fire in the grate, and they were all busy setting things to rights in the room. Bright as it was with fire and lamplight a thin curtain of fog hung in the room and wavered to and fro with the opening of the door. Outside in the passage it was colder, more choking. She had left it behind in the sick man’s room, despite all the efforts of a bronchitis kettle to conquer it or disguise it.

Laura was putting up the books in the book-case. If they had only known it there were first editions among them of famous children’s books of the sixties which were worth a good deal of money. But when did an Egerton know anything to his or her worldly advantage?

Mrs. Egerton glanced towards the fire-place and started at what she saw. Why it was fifteen years ago since she had seen Betty's picture. It was a pretty thing, with the brown ringlets falling about the face, the hands clasped in the old-fashioned silk lap, the whole air so gentle and appealing.

"I thought it was time Aunt Betty should be forgiven," said Laura, prepared to defend herself. Laura was now nineteen and very like her Aunt Betty.

Mrs. Egerton came a little nearer and peered at the picture.

"She would never have let us be in such straits," she said, "I wonder if she is living."

"You don't know, Mamma?"

"I have never made any inquiries. Your father did not wish it."

"I wish she would come back. Dear Aunt Betty, how happy she made us when we were little ones."

Mrs. Egerton did not speak. She was gazing intently at the portrait.

“She adored your father,” she said at last.

“What was her name, Mamma—her married name, I mean?” asked Otho, who had come over and stood at his mother’s side.

“I believe it was Robinson. John Robinson, I think, was the young man’s name, but I am not sure. Your father would not let it be spoken of. It was something common and insignificant like that. I think Betty must be dead. I am greatly afraid Betty is dead. I daresay if she lives she is poor enough, perhaps as poor as we are. She brought six thousand pounds to that young man. I don’t suppose he made any good use of it. It was a little fortune left her by her godmother. Otherwise she depended on us. Yes; I am sure she would be poor. Betty always gave away with both hands.”

“What are you thinking of, Mamma?” asked the tall lad.

Mrs. Egerton burst into tears.

“Your father is very ill, children. The doctor says he will die unless he can go to Algiers. As though people in Cremona Gardens ever went to Algiers. Betty would never have let him die. Betty worshipped her brother.”

A gust of wind blew open the ill-fitting door. Through the quietness of the house there sounded a single knock on the hall-door.

“It is some one for money,” said Mrs. Egerton in a panic, “and I have only thirteen and two pence.”

Otho went over and closed the door, as the stout charwoman who was helping in the house undid the street door.

In a second they heard her heavy steps ascending. Lighter steps followed and a swishing of silk. An expectant pause fell over the group. The door was opened by the charwoman.

“There’s a lady,” she began.

“Oh, my dear,” said some one, pushing by her into the room, “I couldn’t wait. You’re not going to turn away from me, are you? We only found out when we saw that Combe Egerton was in the market. And we hurried home—we were at Salsomaggiore—and tracked you here. And, oh, are these my boys and girls? And how is Algernon?”

A little pale lady in sables to her feet was hugging Mrs. Egerton to her breast, and pouring out all this explanation disjointedly. The charwoman stood in the door watching the scene with a benevolent grin. No one noticed her. The young Egertons were clustering up to the strange lady. Something remembered from long ago; something warm and home-like and loving had entered the room with those silks and sables. It was Aunt Betty, it must be Aunt Betty. No one else could carry that air with her.

When she had done hugging their mother she turned and put out her arms to them. With a shout Otho was into them, as he had been sixteen or seventeen years ago. She was hugging them all by turns, and crying over them, and asking in the intervals for Algernon.

“You have come in the nick of time, Betty,” said Mrs. Egerton amid her tears. “Algernon is dying because we have no money to take him to the

South. He has just spoken of you, how you nursed him through pneumonia when he was a boy."

"Ah!" cried Aunt Betty. "I was wrong to stay away so long. I might have known he had forgiven me. Let me see him. Oh, indeed, he won't die for want of the South, or anything his old Betty can give him."

"He is asleep. You shall see him the instant he awakes. But tell us, Betty, your husband … these—" Mrs. Egerton touched the sables,—"you dress like a rich woman."

"And so I am. John is a very rich man. What! didn't you know? He is in Parliament. I thought you must have known. He is the best husband in the world. 'Do what you like with it, my girl,' he said, only this morning. 'I'd never have been the man I am, only for you. And your six thousand gave us the start.' I left him just starting off to buy Combe Egerton … for me. To think it should fall to us to buy it."

"You have children?"

"Neither chick nor child. I always had these in my memory. I waited and

waited for Algernon to call me back. Oh, children, how I have missed you!"

"How we have missed you!" cried the boys and girls in chorus.

"And to think you had me set up there,"—she nodded at the portrait. "And the doll's house, and the rocking-horse. Oh dear, oh dear! we must find bigger rooms for them. I have a great house at Hampstead. Oh, room for all of you ten times over! It has been aching for you these half-dozen years back, as my heart has been all these years. What a home-coming! I want to see Algernon now. Oh, Alice, can't I carry him off now, as soon as he can be dressed, to Hampstead? There is no fog there; and my carriage is at the door. These children can follow in hansoms. You are never coming back here again."

Aunt Betty swept them off their feet. From the moment she took her brother into her arms it was all settled between them. They were hers henceforth. Alice must take Algernon off to the South at once; but the children were hers, and were to keep her company at Hampstead through the winter till they could all go back to Combe Egerton. All their futures were in her hands, such soft, bountiful, giving hands.

"It is just as I often dreamt," said Clotilde, "that Aunt Betty had come, and everything was heavenly."

In her rapture Clotilde had forgotten that she was fifteen, and had taken to nursing Aunt Betty's French doll.

And after all Aunt Betty never had the pain of knowing how for all those years her portrait had hung with its face to the wall. The date of Algernon's forgiveness was mercifully indefinite. Her one regret was for the wasted years in which she might have come and did not.

*

PRINCESS MOLLY.

THERE had originally been three of the Misses Tyrawley, but in course of time Miss Jemima, who was the youngest, and had fair ringlets and a pretty complexion, married the village doctor. It was a thing that Miss Bella or Miss Georgie would never have done; but they were patient with Jemima. She was so much younger than they and not at all cut out for

spinsterhood.

Jemima had only laughed at their claim to be remote cousins of the great family at the castle. What good did it ever do them? asked Jemima. The Earl and Countess drove by them in splendid carriages and never took any notice of them, perhaps hardly knew of their existence. What could Bella and Georgie find to be proud of in claiming kinship with those haughty people?

Holding such views it was not surprising that Jemima should have married Tom Gray, whose father kept the general shop at Ballymace. To be sure the marriage connected the Misses Tyrawley with shopkeepers and farmers all round the country; and that was a bitter pill for the proud spinsters. However, they swallowed it for Jemima's sake, and because they were not without a grain of common sense for all their fantastic pride and delicacy. They brought themselves to be quite friendly with Tom Gray. The little man used to make jokes about it to his Jemima, but he behaved very well when he was with his sisters-in-law.

In time he had his reward, for Miss Bella said to Miss Georgie that Tom Gray was a gentleman in spite of that stinging memory of him driving

round in a donkey-cart to deliver the groceries. Miss Georgie repeated the speech delightedly to Mrs. Gray, and Mrs. Gray repeated it, with soft bursts of laughter, to her Tom.

“I knew it,” he said, slapping his knee. “I never looked in Bella’s eye that I didn’t see the ass and cart, and myself sitting on top of a sack of potatoes with my hair sticking out through a hole in the caubeen. But for all that Bella’s the right sort and so is Georgie. There aren’t many of the right sort in the world, Jem; but your sisters are of the few.”

They proved themselves of the right sort presently, when Tom Gray killed himself doctoring and nursing—aye and burying—typhus patients over in Iniscarrig; and Jemima brought her fifth child into the world a month after Tom was under the sod and slipped away through the open door into the world that held Tom before any one could bid her stay.

It was no easy task to the two elderly spinsters—there had been a good fifteen years between Georgie and Jemima—to take charge of five children and one of them newly-born. However they didn’t stop to think about it. There was no one else to take the children. Tom’s father had gone bankrupt and had lived out the last years of his life on the help

his son was able to give him. Tom hadn't left a penny. The sale of his few possessions barely sufficed to pay his debts.

Of course it meant a complete alteration in the way of life at the cottage, but the children's aunts never grumbled. The tiny income which had barely sufficed the two elderly ladies must now be made to provide for five healthy children as well. For the children throve; despite the inexperience of his nurses even the newly-born one throve. To be sure they had a cow to themselves at the cottage and they owned the paddock on which she fed. Miss Georgie kept fowls, so there were new-laid eggs. And the cottage garden was always full of vegetables and fruit.

Still, with all these aids the income was too attenuated to take in the five additional members of the family, to say nothing of Bob, Dr. Gray's Irish terrier, with any degree of comfort!

Something had to be done, and in these circumstances Miss Bella did the last thing any one in the world would have expected her to do—she opened a shop. That odd streak of common sense in her suggested to her that the village had no shop, except the public-house, which belonged to a cousin of Tom Gray's, and one or two cottages where bull's-eyes and

sugar-sticks and farthing dips and onions and apples and oranges were to be seen in the little windows.

Miss Bella planned out her shop and had it built by Larry Conroy, the handy-man of the neighbourhood.

The cottage was quite away from the village. It was on the side of a green little-frequented road which lost itself in a wood farther on. Behind the cottage, its orchard, garden and paddock, the ground fell steeply away to a delightful valley through which a little river ran. The cottage had a pretty verandah in front of it, glazed above, and a big bush of heliotrope and some climbing rose bushes covered its walls and made the little rooms inside dim and sweet.

These rooms had been something of fairyland to the children when they had come there from the square, red-brick, commonplace house which had been their home. It was such a little nest of flowery, bowery rooms, full of such delightful things.

There was a dolls' house that had belonged to their great-grandmother into which a child could creep. There were the aunt's work-boxes and

writing-desks, and work-tables, with a row of little satin-covered receptacles around a deep pocket of scarlet silk. There were shell boxes and cardboard houses and glass balls with snowstorms inside them if you gave them a shake. In fact there was no end to the delightful things.

The children were perfectly happy at the cottage, “But,” said Miss Bella, with a terrible frown at Miss Georgie–-“every day their appetite increases. Wait till little Owen is on the baker’s list! And already Kathleen eats nearly as much as the elder children. I’m not going to starve them, and we’re not going to starve ourselves, because we come of a good family. I tell you that plainly, Georgie, my woman.”

That was when she was about to spring on Georgie the project of the shop. Not that Georgie ever thought of disputing Bella’s will, or the rightness of Bella’s views about anything. But when she seemed to accept the shop too eagerly, out of loyalty to her sister, Bella was the one to snub her, asking her sardonically if she supposed the Tyrawleys had always kept village shops.

Larry Conroy was an artist, although very often a rather muddled one; and the shop he built for Miss Bella was a triumph of artistry. It was

built of wood, and had a delightful window of many panes, with a little door and a little bell. Inside it was a maze of drawers and pigeon-holes and all manner of receptacles, with little white china labels on all the drawers; and it said much for Larry's resource that he had been able to obtain these. When the shop was finished, and the shining scales stood on the little white counter, the children clapped their hands in delight. It was like an enlarged toy. So Larry Conroy had seen it in his artistic vision, a shop of toyland, not a common everyday shop.

Larry had built the verandah over the cottage. When he had added a little seat under the window for the customers to sit on while they waited—for the shop hardly allowed for customers to step inside—so far from detracting from the prettiness of the cottage the shop added to it.

The villagers were very glad of the new shop, which was soon doing quite a flourishing little trade. While Miss Bella concerned herself with it, Miss Georgie took charge of the fowls and the garden and the dairy. Soon the elder children were able to help, and Miss Georgie could employ a big boy to dig or to clean out the cow-house or do anything she herself was not equal to doing. In time they could have a girl from the village for rough work.

Altogether the Misses Tyrawley managed to keep up the small refinements of life, without which life would have been intolerable to them, if they were shopkeepers.

Should you pass the cottage of an evening, you might see the scarlet-shaded lamp illumining the heads of the children clustered about the fire, with their books or their sewing. Miss Bella might be reading to them or Miss Georgie playing on the old piano. You would know that it was the home of gentlefolk from that one glimpse.

There was nothing Miss Bella so much dreaded as that the children should go back to the class from which their father had sprung. Her dread was never revealed in the slightest degree; but she strove to set up barriers for the children by the thousand and one little refinements of habit and thought to which she accustomed them.

There was no playing with the village children. Miss Bella wished her children to be kind and courteous to every one, but since they could not have friends and playmates on an equality with themselves, to find their happiness at home. And this was easy enough since the village was some

considerable distance away; and the wood and the valley held a very fairyland of delights for the children.

When Molly the eldest was sixteen, she went to the convent school. Molly was blue-eyed and fair-skinned, soft as a white rose-leaf, with magnificent blue-black hair.

She was full of dreams and fancies; and her Aunt Bella felt pretty certain that Molly would not fling herself into unconsidered friendship with any of the school-children, who were sure to be unlike herself.

Molly indeed attached herself to a nun and was ardent about her, making her the centre of all her romantic dreams. And after two or three years had passed, and Molly had learnt all the accomplishments the convent could impart, Molly's nun, Sister Genevieve, who had been a great lady out in the world, wrote to her sister who was ambassadress at the Russian Court to find an employment for Molly.

The employment was not long in coming. Molly went off to Russia as English governess to three little boys.

Her salary sounded fabulous to her aunts. When presently she could write home and tell them all about it, it seemed to them, as it seemed to Molly, that the luxury of her surroundings was almost incredible. She was learning to ride so that she might ride with her pupils; she was to have a horse of her own. She had a little suite of apartments of her own. The life was a mixture of almost barbaric splendour and luxurious refinement. The father of the children, whom Molly wrote of as the Prince, treated Molly with the most wonderful consideration.

When Molly arrived the winter had just broken up into the sudden miraculous spring. Molly had no words for the beauty of it. She was happy,—to be sure she missed them dreadfully, but she was happy.

From time to time money and gifts of all kinds came from Molly, who was always the giving sort. The children became acquainted with all manner of strange Russian sweetmeats, as the aunts with strange Russian delicacies and condiments. Beautiful enamels, beautiful embroideries came home. Molly's generosity perturbed her aunts, lest she impoverished herself to make them gifts.

For a time Molly's letters were heart-whole; hardly one came that did

not speak of a time when she should come home to see them. Then the letters became more infrequent; there was nothing in them about coming home. And then quite suddenly they ceased.

Miss Bella wrote many times, before she received a scrap of a letter:—

“Molly is well and happy, but she asks you to forget her. It is necessary for her happiness that she should break with her old life.”

The letter contained a money-order for quite a large sum.

When Miss Bella had read the letter she handed it to Miss Georgie and her eyes flashed.

“What do you make of it, sister?” the weaker Georgie asked trembling.

“She has made a fine marriage and she is ashamed of us,” said Miss Bella grimly. “Let us talk of Molly no more. The Molly we loved is dead.”

After that she did not talk of Molly. She discouraged the children’s talk of her. If any one asked after Molly she replied that she was

married and quite well and happy. She felt Molly’s desertion like an actual wound in her breast, and as time passed the wound, although it throbbed less, never healed. Molly had been her darling; she had always believed in Molly’s true heart. And Molly to cut off the old ties coldly and carelessly! It was necessary for Molly’s happiness that she should be forgotten. Well, she would do nothing to recall the old home and the old love to Molly. She would seem at least to forget her.

She put away Molly’s portrait and all the little things that reminded her of her. But she was not allowed to forget her, nor after that first pause did the cessation of Molly’s letters give the village something to gossip about. Four times a year an envelope came addressed in Molly’s hand-writing. The envelope contained every time Bank of England notes for fifty pounds.

In her first pain and resentment Miss Bella vowed that they would have none of Molly’s money. She put the notes aside, turning an apparently deaf ear to her sister’s suggestion of how useful they would be. Why should not Owen go to a good school, and perhaps later find his way to Dublin University?

Ah, that touched a tender spot with Miss Bella. Owen was a clever boy, as clever and imaginative as Molly herself. More, Owen had been sought out by his father's first cousin, the owner of a prosperous shop in Kilcolman, who having no children of her own desired to adopt Owen.

She had been shown the door with haughty contempt by Miss Bella, who had never mentioned her preposterous proposal as she called it, even to Georgie.

Still, that troublesome little grain of common sense would keep asking irritating questions of Miss Bella. The shop had been all very well to rear the children, but what was the shop to provide careers for them? Besides the shop had been a cause of anxiety for some time back. Trade had fallen off. A new line of railway was being opened through the green wood, across the dim valley. It had brought rough men in its wake who gave another character to the peaceful and innocent countryside. They lived for the most part in shanties run up for them by the new railway company. Hard in their wake followed a shop, a vulgar, glaring busy shop, crammed to the door and beyond it with all manner of things the village had never dreamt of, tinned fruit and meats and fish, jams and marmalades, sauces and all manner of queer things.

From the time the shop was established Miss Bella's trade fell away. It was as far in advance of hers as hers had been in advance of the little village shops, and it was close at hand for the villagers, not a good three-quarters of a mile away like Miss Bella's.

Soon the customers were so few and so far between that with a great sinking of the heart Miss Bella realised that if things went on as they had been going she might as well shut up shop altogether.

Molly's store had to be drawn on in these days. That was another bitter pill to Miss Bella, but Molly's sisters and brothers must be fed and clothed and kept warm. And there was the question of sending Owen away to school. That was an idea that had taken possession of Miss Bella's heart. Owen had brains enough to make a career for himself, if but he was given the chance. What a barrier it would be against the Kilcolman widow and her shop if Owen were to be educated like a gentleman!

One day she was turning over Molly's bank-notes—by this time there were a good many of them—when Owen came into the room. At this time he was a handsome, spirited boy of sixteen, and he had something to go upon in

the way of education, for Miss Bella had employed an old schoolmaster who was past his work, to teach the children.

“What a deal of money you have there, Aunt Bella!” he said.

“How would you like to go to school, Owen, and to college?” she asked, turning to look at him.

For a moment his eyes were eager. Then the light died in them.

“Out of that?” he said, indicating the money. “Why, that is all you have. How do we know Molly will go on sending? I have wanted to talk to you about things, Aunt Bella. It is time I earned for myself, and a little for you.”

“You, Owen! Why, what could you do?”

“Anything. Even if I were to take a job on the railway it would be better than being idle. You won’t spend any of that money on me, Aunt Bella.”

He looked at her with his proud handsome young head flung up, and her heart was high with pride for him and anguish that she could not give him the chance he wanted. It was true that Molly might fail them any day. The grain of common sense agreed with Owen that the sole provision for the children, as well as for herself and Georgie, old women both, could not be handed over for Owen's benefit. And she had known all the time that sooner or later she must tell him of Mrs. Brophy's desire to adopt him. Mrs. Brophy was a rich woman. Owen must choose if he would reject or accept the fortune offered to him, with its distasteful condition that he must go into the shop and carry on the business across the counter.

"I have something to tell you, Owen," she said; and told him.

"I think I must go, Aunt Bella," he said, when she had finished. "College and a profession are too good to be true. After all a fellow needn't be a cad if he does sell butter and bacon over a counter."

Miss Bella knew how it would be. She remembered Mrs. Brophy, sleek, comfortable, purse-proud. Owen was so young. He would forget her teachings. He would marry some young woman who would grow in time to be

like Mrs. Brophy. The thought had the bitterness of death to Miss Bella.

“I shall ask her for a salary,” he said, “and I shall send every penny to you. Tomorrow I shall go to see her. I can take the long car at the cross-roads, and be back again before nightfall.”

But that to-morrow never came. A few hours later Miss Bella was turning over Owen’s clothes, shabby, weather-bleached clothes, which the lad had carried with an air of proud distinction. They would do for Owen behind the counter. The thought caused Miss Bella a positive sickness of loathing. But after to-morrow Owen would be Mrs. Brophy’s, hers no longer.

She had not noticed the unusual sound of the approach of a carriage and pair along the road. But as it drew up at the cottage she heard it, went to the window and looked out. It was the barouche from the castle. The footman was opening the door for a lady and gentleman to alight. They were coming up to the little door with its little brass knocker. Was it Lord and Lady Inishmore? Miss Bella put on her glasses hastily and peeped from behind the lace curtain. Was it? Could it be?—Molly!

Miss Bella forgot her wound. She was a woman of impulses, and although she believed herself unforgiving, she really forgave royally; at this moment she only remembered that Molly had come back.

She herself opened the door and drew Molly into the tiny drawing-room. Only then did she notice the gentleman who followed Molly—a very splendid person.

“This is the Prince, my husband,” said Molly, flinging herself on Miss Bella. “And oh, can you ever forgive me? You must have thought me the meanest wretch alive. And all the time it nearly broke my heart.”

Molly, indeed, now that the first colour was ebbing, looked paler than the old Molly.

The Prince had taken Miss Bella’s hand, and having kissed it, as though it were the hand of a queen instead of being toil-worn and discoloured, he was holding it in one of his own and softly patting it with the other.

“The Princess,” he said in English that was the clearer for the most

delicate foreign enunciation, “did not trust my love. She knew that we were proud, very proud, but she did not know that we were far too proud to be ashamed of a lady who kept a shop so that she might provide for the helpless orphans committed to her care. She has told me everything, that her excellent doctor father came of a race of peasants. As though I should love her the less. The Princess is the Princess. How shall I ever thank you for making her what she is. At last she confessed, when we were on the eve of making a visit to Lord Inishmore. I was in despair about her. She was fretting herself to death. You will forgive her, dear friend, when you see what it has cost her—that folly.”

Miss Bella looked from Molly to the Prince. Somehow she had an intuition of what Molly had suffered. Molly’s eyes looked with a certain timid worship at the Prince.

“Poor child!” she said, “poor child!”

So Owen did not go to Mrs. Brophy’s after all. Instead he was sent off to school to prepare for the university. His career afterwards would be the Prince’s affair. The Prince’s munificence was like an Arabian Nights’ tale. It was nothing to him to provide for the Princess’s

family; and he did provide for them right splendidly.

Indeed, if the aunts would have consented, he would have carried off the whole family to Russia. But they were not to be coaxed from their cottage, so Molly had to be content with her little sister Nora's company for the time being.

Now that the shop was no longer needed Larry Conroy once again showed his skill and talent by turning it into a room for the two young people who yet remained at the cottage, and who were not yet quite outside the age of toys and fairy-books.

So, through the agency of Molly's Prince, the Misses Tyrawley at last came to enjoy that social consideration which was their due. Through his splendid generosity they were able to add to the resources of the cottage. For instance, a pony-carriage became a very necessary thing once Lord and Lady Inishmore had taken up their distant cousins, and there was visiting to be done, not only at the Castle, but at several other houses of importance, the owners of which had never known of the existence of the Misses Tyrawley, but were very pleased to be civil to the family of the Princess and the cousins of Lord Inishmore.

Miss Bella often reproached herself for her former anger against Molly, reading the loving letters in which the Princess poured out her heart. Miss Bella and Miss Georgie, by the way, travelled to Russia, and saw for themselves the state in which Molly lived and were witnesses of the great love with which her husband surrounded her.

“To think,” said Molly, on one occasion, dashing away some radiant tears, “that I could have so misjudged him! As though his pride were such a poor thing. I believe indeed the only time I was in danger of his frown was when he discovered my folly about you. I believe I might have taken him all round Ballymace, and introduced him to the various cousins who run the trade and commerce there. He is so splendid; he would stand any test.”

But Miss Bella, with Molly’s son on her knee, and Molly’s three adoring stepsons standing round, gazing at Molly with an absurd resemblance to their father’s fond and faithful gaze, was glad that Molly had not so cheapened her Prince.

*

HIS LORDSHIP AND THE POET.

His Lordship, from the time he wore a velvet suit and his hair in golden curls falling upon a lace collar, had ever and always been an egoist, a handsome and pleasant egoist, but an egoist all the same.

The woman who suffered most from his egoism, Mary Ancaster, was the one who would have been the first to deny its existence, although somewhere at the back of her clear mind she must have known that Lord Portlester in his dealings with her proved himself cold and selfish.

He had begun to engross her when they were both neighbours' children, and she had had the small girl's devotion for the big boy. She had fagged for him in those days till he came to that age when the code of honour forbids a boy allowing a girl to fag for him.

Then came Eton and Oxford, with a year or two at a German University. The gap brought home to his Lordship, as contiguity might not, Mary's exceeding charm.

Hers was the benignant type of beauty. A fair oval face, softly-banded brown hair, an expression serene and beneficent, a figure of soft curves and gracious lines. Lord Portlester showed himself a man of taste when he selected Mary Ancaster for his attentions.

Every one said it was the most suitable thing possible. Their lands adjoined. Their fathers had been friends. Both were handsome, well-liked, clever, healthy, high in every one's esteem. The county looked for the marriage to take place within a very short time of Mr. Ancaster's death, which occurred some three months after Lord Portlester had settled down on his estates. Of course there must be a period of mourning; but then,—there would be a wedding, and Portlester would once more be open to the county as it had not been these many years, both Lord Portlester's parents having died early in his minority.

The county watched in vain for the marriage,—the engagement. After a time people began to murmur, to say that it was a shame. If Lord Portlester did not mean to marry Miss Ancaster he should not be a dog in the manger. He had a way of driving off possible and probable suitors—for Miss Ancaster's calm beauty no less than her lovely character brought her many lovers.

As soon as one began to show himself as a lover, to claim privileges, his Lordship would come on the scene and drive off the intruder. It was Mary this and Mary that with him—she was always Mary to him as he was always Roy to her—and the defeated aspirant would retire into the background. None had ever been quite strong enough to challenge his Lordship's claim. There was something in Mary's eyes as they rested on him which was more effectual than anything his Lordship could have done in persuading the suitors that their cause was a lost one.

The years passed and people had grown used to the queer state of things in which his Lordship kept all other men at bay, claiming the place at Mary's side without ever going any farther. They said among themselves that if Miss Ancaster would but turn his Lordship out of doors she would soon bring him to her feet. As it was he had all he wanted, some one to listen to him, to smile on him, to appreciate his sallies and his more serious moods—there was no doubt his Lordship had plenty of brains; they walked together and danced together and rode together and hunted together. To do his Lordship justice, if he never let another man approach Miss Ancaster as even a possible suitor, he himself was coldly uninterested in the various pretty girls who would have detached him

from Mary’s side.

“You spoil a man for other girls, Mary,” he had often said to her; and she would smile her bright serene smile on his handsome self-sufficient face.

To be sure Mary was very unlike the other girls of the neighbourhood. She was interested in the things in which they were not, in politics, in art, in literature, in science. If she had not been she would hardly have satisfied his Lordship, as it would hardly have been possible for the attachment to remain at the point of friendship all those years. His Lordship belonged to a good many learned societies. He wrote occasionally in the reviews. He was a brilliant, eloquent, intemperate talker. A thousand pities people said that he didn’t go into public life, beyond the petty concerns of the rural life over which he took as much pains as though the infinitesimal affairs were of world-wide importance.

He was very candid about it to Mary,—when was he less than candid with her?

“Old Chasefield asked me to-day,” he said, with a laugh, “why I hadn’t made more use of my abilities, gone into politics or something of that sort. I didn’t tell him the real reason, Mary; because I could not have you constantly to talk to. You’ve tied me up firmly to your apron-strings all these years.”

She smiled at him again, a smile of infinite patience. How was it that he did not see, did not desire the natural ending of such a necessity? He probably never would see it now. They had both left hot youth behind them. He was writ in the Peerage for all to read—thirty-five years old. She would never see thirty again. He would be satisfied till one or other of them died with that anomalous bond between them; he would never now want to make her his wife. She was always ready to listen to him, always cheerful and sympathetic and understanding. He never could have guessed at the regrets that ached in her heart when she thought of what she ought to have had, the husband, the home, the children.

There were tastes into which he did not follow her. One was her love of poetry. His mind was more practical. Somewhere at the back of it he thought that poetry was a poor thing for a man; all very fine for women to write about their thoughts and feelings, but a man! The whole egoist

in him rose to rebuke the poet.

It was therefore an unpleasant surprise to him when Mary told him that she had asked Geoffrey Chapone, the young poet, to visit her at the Ivy House. Mary had grown independent of late, claiming the privileges of her years. Besides there was her Aunt Sophie, a scatter-brained elderly spinster who had played propriety for Mary during the years since her father's death. Portlester had often laughed over the humour of Miss Sophie Ancaster's sinecure. Mary had been looking after her since she was seven.

"What on earth do you want him for?" his Lordship asked with a frown. "He's a tiresome poseur. Why I was introduced to him half a dozen times last season, yet invariably the next time we met he failed to recognise me. Am I so very much like all the rest of the world then?"

"He is always in the clouds," said Mary, repressing a smile. "He hardly ever knows any one, I believe. Then, though he has such beautiful eyes, they are really purblind."

His Lordship felt annoyed—a very unusual feeling for him, for he was

generally too well-pleased with himself not to be pleased with the world.

Beautiful eyes indeed! What the deuce did a man want with beautiful eyes? Not that Chapone was a man. No, he was a consummate ass and various other things. The ill-temper surged in his head.

“I shan’t be able to stand him very long, Mary,” he said, “so I give you frank warning. I might have to kick him one day. I beg your pardon, Mary.” She was looking at him in amazement. “I can see he’s going to spoil everything. It has always been so ideal in this house. I think I’ll run up to town while he’s here.”

But he did not run up to town. Instead he was more at the Ivy House than ever. To his bewilderment he found that, for the first time since he had known and claimed Mary, some one had the incredible hardihood to push him out, and that some one, a lantern-jawed, hollow-eyed, starveling poet, who seemed amazingly unconscious of the fact of Lord Portlester’s existence; had a way of looking over him and through him; of not hearing him when he spoke. Incredible! Incredible! And though his Lordship called him an insolent poseur, in his heart he knew that his attitude

was not pose at all but perfectly genuine; that, incredible as it might seem, he, Lord Portlester, counted for absolutely nothing to Geoffrey Chapone, whom some one had picked out of a garret, starving, only a year or two ago.

Geoffrey Chapone seemed to like his position at the Ivy House so much that the weeks passed and yet he showed no sign of a desire to be gone. Nor did Mary seem to wish to get rid of him; that was the worst of it. All the old intercourse and companionship which had grown as necessary to his Lordship as the breath of life had come to an end. The fellow was always there; always lolling at Mary's side or her feet, reading poetry to her, always being cosseted by that absurd person Miss Sophie Ancaster, who looked after the poet as though he had been a convalescent child, feeding him up with all sorts of dainties, hanging on his utterances. Why, confound it, for the matter of that Mary hung on his utterances too! She never seemed to get too much of the poetry.

Life was altogether spoilt for his Lordship in those days. He grew short-tempered. The rankling sense of injury was always with him. He wouldn't have believed it of Mary. She had disappointed him. She was like the rest of the women.

While he said it he knew in his heart that he uttered a heresy.

It was the Rev. Samuel Smee, the freckled, snub-nosed parson of a neighbouring parish, who put the coping-stone on the edifice of his Lordship’s discomfort.

His Lordship detested Smee. They had been at school and college together, and Smee had never treated him with proper respect. Smee was the sort of person to poke you in the ribs with a forefinger to point one of his fatuous jokes, no matter how aloof your manner was with him.

“Well,” said the Rev. Samuel, intercepting his Lordship as he walked home from the Ivy House, in, if it must be confessed, a horrible temper, “so our lovely Miss Ancaster is to marry the poet. We are all inconsolable. We used to think it would have been you, Portlester, but you were too dilatory. Dilatoriness in love is a crime.”

Lord Portlester walked away from him, not trusting himself to speak. He had nearly felled the harmless little man as he chattered.

Unconsciously he walked back the way he had come. His mind was in a ferment. Not that he believed the little ass. Mary would never do such a thing, never. But, good heavens, that any one could suppose it possible! Mary! his Mary!

A sudden passion of jealous ownership surged in his breast. What an ass he had been! He had deserved to lose her, his one priceless woman.

He knocked at the door of the Ivy House which he had left half an hour before, and asked Green the butler if he would tell Miss Ancaster that he wished to see her. “On business, Green,” he added, and blushed. He and Green were old friends.

“I shall wait here,” he said, turning the handle of the bare, austere room where Mary’s father had transacted all his business, a room sacred to his daughter.

In a few minutes she came in, glowing in a trailing gown of autumn-leaf coloured velvet from which her beautiful shoulders rose snowily.

“I am so glad you changed your mind and will dine with us, after all,”

she said: then paused in a little bewildered alarm at some subtle change in the face which had been too self-satisfied all those years to be altogether pleasing.

“Mary,” he said, “I’ve come back—not for my dinner, although I’m a hungry man—but for your love, Mary. I’ve discovered that I’m head-over-ears in love with you. I always have been, though I must have seemed as cold as a fish. Something has come awake in me. I want you, darling.”

Red as a rose she gave herself to his embrace.

“I thought you were going to let me die an old maid,” she whispered. “Because, of course, you would not speak, yet I was yours, and there never could be anybody else.”

“I met Smee,” he said laughing triumphantly. “He said,—confound his impertinence!—that you were going to marry the poet. I very nearly punched his head.”

“But you did better,” she said, smiling up at him. “The poor poet! He is

so comfortable for the first time in his life! One didn’t grudge it to
him, although it has rather spoilt things for us, Roy.”

“No, poor devil!” said his Lordship magnanimously.

*

THE KING COPHETUA.

MURIEL HARDY went along with a dragging step. It was an intolerably hot August, and the house-fronts smoked like an oven. From day to day they had not time to cool. The pavements burned her feet through the thin soles of her shoes. Her eyes ached from the greyness and whiteness of the flags and the dust. The trees and bushes in the square were parched and miserable. Day after day went without the clouds that would bring the rain. Would it never rain again? In the country there were dews and greenness. The dews never fell over London town. To Muriel’s ear, delicate and sensitive, the air was full of the crying of little voices for the blessed rain.

It was six o’clock and she was on her way home from the last of her

tuitions. She had come to this, that she was daily visiting-governess to the children of people who never went out of town, of shopkeepers in this dreary and decayed part of London, where the houses seemed to reach the sky, and you saw the dry-rot eat like a visible thing into one after another of the old crescents and squares and roads that had once been places of some consideration.

This hot day the children had been especially wearing, the mothers had been more interfering than usual. Mrs. Jelf, the grocer's wife, had complained that the children's accent had not improved with Miss Hardy, and had even suggested that the governess was in some way responsible for their Cockney pronunciation. Mrs. Leys, the chemist's wife, had mentioned that a friend of hers had a young lady at a smaller rate than Muriel's starveling prices, who had languages and drawing. Doubtless children and mothers alike were affected by the intolerable heat and glare. Yet since there may be a flower in the dreariest places, Mrs. Haywood, the greengrocer's wife, had pitied Muriel's pale cheeks as she passed out through the shop, and had slipped into her hand a paper bag containing two pears.

Muriel's way lay across the square. Such a hard climb as it was from one

side of it; such a sheer descent on the other. The square kept something of its old grandeur and was inhabited chiefly by old-fashioned people who had built their palatial houses there when there were yet fields within a stone’s throw. The square grass-plots were rolled and watered and mowed by a small army of gardeners, and kept still something of freshness when all the world panted and scorched.

The square was on top of so high a hill that it was possible to get a breath of air there most days. On either hand London lay in the mist of heat and smoke and was invisible. There might have been better things than chimney-pots in that lurid and shining mist.

For a wonder Muriel found a seat vacant just outside the square railings. She had had no thought of sitting down. It was the good hour of the day when she got home to Elsie and she was not minded to delay it. But just as she reached the friendly seat she swayed a little. The mists became a mirage in which she saw green fields and the waves of the sea. She had barely strength to totter to the seat, to sink down on it and close her faint eyes.

A dusty tree that had carried pink may in its hey-day projected over her

head, giving her shade from the sun. She opened her eyes languidly and looked across at the grey church opposite with its slate roof shining and the vane on top of the steeple flashing in the sun. She was glad to close them again.

The faintness had passed off leaving her languid and glad of the rest on the sheltered seat. Presently she must hurry home to Elsie who would be watching for her. Elsie must have found the day very hot. She would enjoy one of Mrs. Haywood’s pears. Muriel put out her hand and touched the bag where it lay on the seat beside her, and sent a languidly grateful thought towards that good Samaritan. And presently the sun would go down, and she would help Elsie up to their roof-garden as they called the little nook they had made among the chimney-pots, and they could breathe.

While she sat with closed eyes a picture came out of the darkness and remained with her. It was the tennis-lawn of an old Norfolk house. The grey gables and chimneys of the house looked over walls of yew and hornbeam. Through arches cut in those walls one saw an old-fashioned formal garden. The tennis-lawn was shaded by great trees to the west, and was in velvety shadow and coolness.

There were roses at one side of the lawn like little lamps of fire in their gloom of leaves. She saw herself playing tennis, a long-armed, graceful girl, in a white frock, her pale-gold hair piled on top of her head in a mass, fine as spun silk. Her grace, her hair, her violet eyes were beauties that did not make up for her insignificant features and colourless complexion. Yet when the game was over, and she stood swinging her racket at the end of the lawn while another set was being formed, the lads were round her thick as bees.

There were others in the picture. There was Mother presiding over the tea and coffee and the claret cup. There was Elsie in her invalid wheel-chair. There was Father talking to Archdeacon Phayre and Lady Phayre and they were laughing heartily. Father was holding his pince-nez in one hand and emphasising his story with the forefinger of the other. And other people pressed close to hear what Father was saying,—very fine, blue-blooded exclusive people. The county which had turned up its nose at Robert Hardy's reputed great wealth capitulated to the man's charm, the charm which they were saying had been a few months later a wile to lure his victims to destruction.

But meanwhile who thought of calamity and death that golden summer afternoon?

Muriel looked curiously at the picture on her dazzled retina of the girl in a white frock swinging her tennis-racket. It seemed now that there could be no possible relation between her and that girl.

Two faces amid the group of masculine faces stood out clearly. One was a dark, handsome reckless face, no longer young, the face of such a man as often takes captive a young girl's fancy: she thinks of Rochester, of Guy Livingstone. There were a good many lines on the handsome face; the fine mouth under its moustache was cynical and cold. The man had at once terrified and fascinated that golden-haired girl in the white frock. He had kissed her once secretly, and the memory made the girl's eyes fall and the colour come to her cheeks whenever Sir Ralph Verrinder came near her. He would look at her, smiling, with a certain insolence which enraged his young cousin.

Dick Verrinder's face was as unlike as possible to his cousin's. Muriel could see him as he stood scowling that day, not a bit good-looking, but wholesome and pleasant, despite the scowl, with freckles on a sunburnt

skin, a nondescript nose, dusty hair, an angular boyish figure, an obstinate mouth and chin, and blue eyes usually full of goodwill to all the world, but at that moment full of angry lightnings. There was no love lost between Sir Ralph Verrinder of Whirlicote Hall and his young cousin Dick, who lived with his widowed mother in a little cottage in the village, and was as happy and well liked as he was poor. Presently he was going for a soldier and many people would feel the poorer.

There had been an informal dance and supper after the tennis. The Hardy's were as hospitable as they were rich. The young couples strolled in the gardens under the full harvest moon. Dick Verrinder had taken Muriel, very much against her will, to the haha that was between the kitchen garden and the park. He had drawn her cloak about her shoulders with a rough, boyish tenderness. He had been so indiscreet as to speak to her about his cousin. He denounced him with honest heat. Who ever heard anything good of Ralph? His attentions were an insult to any innocent girl. He had been too selfish to marry hitherto; if he thought of marriage now it was in order to pay his debts.

"He is tied up uncommonly tight," said Dick with grim satisfaction. "I think the grandfather knew Master Ralph through and through."

Muriel remembered her own choking anger, her tears, often the woman's outlet for anger. She heard the boy's voice again.

"My darling, I'd rather shoot myself than give you an instant's pain. But he isn't fit for you to look at—an innocent white dove like you–-"

Was it possible that it was she, Muriel, who had found such bitter words to say to her young lover? She remembered dancing time after time with Sir Ralph Verrinder, while Dick's furious face looked out from dim corners and around door-posts. That night she had accepted Sir Ralph. She remembered her mother's troubled look, her father's frown. She had never seen Dick Verrinder again. He had joined at once the battalion of his regiment which was going on foreign service and had left England for five years.

Before five months were over ruin and death had overwhelmed the Hardys. Robert Hardy had stripped himself bare to satisfy his creditors, and had died of an unsuspected aneurism. His widow had stripped herself still further with a fine fanaticism. The tongue of scandal was silent. Some

people even talked of Robert Hardy as quixotic; but his widow died praising God that although she and her children had come to poverty, no one had cause to curse her husband's memory.

As for Sir Ralph Verrinder he had bowed himself out when the collapse had come, and had gone abroad to the gaming-tables, where all he could squander of Verrinder money had been dissipated.

All that was over ten years ago, gone like a dream. There was nothing left of it, only invalid Elsie making her little stories and poems in the garret at the top of the house over the watchmakers' shop, and Muriel, of no accomplishments, wearing herself out teaching the children of the little shopkeepers.

It was almost like a continuation of the vision, seen as between sleeping and waking when a voice spoke at her ear.

"I beg your pardon," said the voice, and there was a quiver of emotion in it. "I wonder if you will remember me, Miss Hardy. Dick Verrinder of the old Norfolk days. It was so lucky that I was visiting my old aunts in the square this evening of all evenings."

Muriel opened her eyes. Her boyish lover was greatly changed. He was more than bronzed, even a little yellowed by Asiatic suns. The blue eyes had acquired a frosty look which was not there in the old days. But the clean spare figure, admirably tailored, the lean face, the close-cropped head were oddly distinguished. In the old days Muriel had known such men. Of late years she had only seen them in the street. The only man she knew now with any degree of intimacy was Mr. Stipple, their landlord, who was so good to her and Elsie, a dear old man, one of the quaint Londoners that Dickens knew. For the rest she occasionally exchanged a greeting with the fathers of her pupils. She had not spoken to a gentleman for years.

"Did I startle you?" Dick Verrinder asked, his eyes devouring her face. "I am so sorry, but I have been looking for you everywhere. I had given up all hope of finding you. You do not look well." There was a note of anguish in his voice as he said it. "Now, where are you living? I am not going to lose sight of you again. May I sit down? There are so many things to hear and to tell."

He had the shabbily gloved hand in his. Muriel gazed at him as though he

were a visitant from another world. She felt as if she must shrink into herself away from him; she must be looking so shabby, so dusty, so old. He had a gardenia in the lapel of his coat. There was a fresh and clean air about him as tangible as the scent of violets. How deplorable she must seem to him!

“I was on my way home,” she said. “My sister Elsie and I live near here. I felt rather dazed by the heat and so I sat down. It was the merest chance.”

“A blessed chance,” he said.

She stared at him, and got an impression of an obstinate chin, more obstinate than she remembered it. He was still holding her hand, unconscious of the few fatigued passers-by. He was looking at her as though she and he were alone in the world.

“I have been looking for you for years,” he said. “It was a long time before I heard the things that had happened. My dear mother died the year after I went out. There was some trouble and we were sent to a wild part. I thought you were Lady Verrinder. Frankly, I never wanted to come

back. When the regiment was ordered home I exchanged into one just begun its term of service. Then I heard about the things that had happened; but I was bound to stay where I was. All inquiries made from that distance failed. I came home last spring. I thought the clue was utterly lost at times, but I've kept at it; I should have kept at it till I died."

"Why?" she asked in amazement.

"Why?" he repeated. "I told you I should never change. You are a free woman, Muriel?"

"Yes," she said, "I am free except that I am bound to Elsie. Don't you see how I am changed? For nearly ten years I have been teaching the children of the little bourgeoisie down there." She indicated the valley of mist below the hill. "There was nothing left for us. We gave everything, even Mother's jewels, to the creditors, Now and again Elsie sells a poem or a story. It is ten years since I have had a holiday. Our landlord is a good Samaritan, and—we live."

"Take me home with you," he said. "You are done with mere living

henceforth."

"Ah," she said, "you are like that boy of old. You used always to be so sure of what you wanted. But—Mr. Verrinder–-"

"Captain Verrinder," he amended. "Presently you will call me Dick. Now that I have found you I will allow you any time you want. We shall be married at the church over there. I know the vicar. He is a dear old boy."

She gasped.

"Ah," she said. "You are so surprised at finding me that you have not realised. I am thirty-three, and I have had a hard life. I feel a hundred and three sometimes, and I look forty-three at least. Don't you see how faded, how shabby, I have grown? Besides, you know, I never loved you."

"But you will love me," he said calmly. "As for any change in you, you are the woman I loved and shall always love. I have come to take care of you and your sister."

The clock in the church tower rang the three-quarters.

"Oh," she cried, jumping up, "Elsie will be terrified. I am always home by a quarter past. Good-bye, Captain Verrinder."

"I am coming too," he said, turning and walking by her side.

She felt too utterly bewildered to gainsay him. At the foot of the hill a great artery of West London ran at right angles to the way they were taking.

"My pears," she cried, suddenly remembering them at the sight of a fruit-shop. "I was bringing home two pears to Elsie. She feels the heat so. I have left them behind on the seat. Oh, how stupid of me! Some one has probably taken them by this time."

"Very probably," he said. "It is lucky we can replace them. Come in here."

Muriel followed him into the shop, being conscious all the while that

people stared at the contrast between her shabbiness and his attire. She watched in the same daze the shopman put up peaches and grapes and pears, with a magnificent basket of roses. As they left the shop, Dick carrying his purchases, she felt the scent of the roses all about her. They seemed to light the stuffy dark stairs of the lodgings.

“I have met an old friend, Elsie,” she said, going in first. “You remember Mr. Verrinder? he is Captain Verrinder now.”

“I have been looking for your sister everywhere,” Dick Verrinder said, sitting down on the end of the little sofa on which Elsie sat, half-reclined, and looking very fragile in her muslin gown. “Presently she is going to give me the right to take care of you both. Yes, you are, Muriel. I shall give you as much time as you want. But I think you have kept me long enough waiting.”

It was an odd business; but Dick Verrinder never seemed to see it in that light. From that time onwards the two sisters, who had been so lonely except for the kind old watchmaker, found themselves watched over by a constant, tender protection. Still Muriel went to and from her tuitions; still she protested that Dick had some strange veil on his

eyes which kept him from seeing her as she really was.

The weather continued very hot, through August, right into September. But there were alleviations now. The most wonderful delicacies arrived day after day addressed to the two girls. Every evening Dick Verrinder made his appearance, and would sit with them in their roof garden, among the smutted ferns and rockery plants; and Mr. Stipple would sometimes join them, and discourse with equal ecstasy about the stars, and the long lines of light which represented the radiating streets.

And they would have supper together afterwards, a supper very unlike the sparse meal which had been on the table the first evening Dick Verrinder came, for, despite their protestations, the hampers from Fortnum and Mason’s continued to arrive, and the things had to be eaten.

There were expeditions too on Saturdays and Sundays when Muriel was free, when they took the train into the country as far as they liked, and lit down somewhere and had a meal at an inn, and sat in the inn-garden till the stars came out.

The long hot summer had told on Elsie, despite the alleviations of these

latter days. She was thinner, more transparent than any mortal thing has a right to be. Often she suffered from exhaustion and was incapable even of being carried to the roof-garden.

“Marry me at once,” Dick Verrinder said one evening, when he had found Muriel on the seat where he had recovered her, “and we will take Elsie to the South for the winter. Marry me for Elsie’s sake if not for mine; you would marry me for mine in a little while. But Elsie has to be thought of.”

“You are so obstinate,” she said with a little sob that was half a laugh. “Don’t you know that I would have married you for your own sake five weeks ago, only I thought that you had a delusion and that it must pass.”

“Let us go home and tell Elsie,” he said. “Tomorrow I will get the special licence. And you must come shopping with me. You won’t be too proud to accept things from your husband.”

“You spend too much money,” she said, looking at him wet-eyed. “It is not as though you were a rich man.”

“You shall hold the purse-strings presently.”

The next day they went to Bond Street and Regent Street. By this time Muriel had lost her tired and dusty look. The radiance, lost untimely, had been coming back to her cheek and her eye, the grace to her carriage. She had bought some thin black stuff for a dress and made it up herself over an old silk lining. Her wide hat of black chip suited her violet eyes and the pale gold hair which had become so much brighter, more springy of late. She was a very pretty woman still. She could not help recognising it as she saw herself in the glasses of the shops, prettier perhaps than she had ever been.

Dick made the most extravagant purchases. The long cloak of real lace to her feet made Muriel turn a little pale when she heard its price. There was a hat to match it with beautiful pink roses under the brim.

“I want you to be smart,” Dick said, putting a finger on her lip, when they were alone for a minute. “I want to take you to see the aunts after we have lunched. Do you know that they know all about you. Aunt Jemima has been buying your trousseau. Elsie helped me about the sizes. They

are dear old bodies and are ready to love you."

"I suppose they are rich," Muriel thought to herself, explaining Dick's extravagance by the thought.

When the footman opened the double doors of the stately old square house to them, and they went upstairs to the drawing-room with its three long Georgian windows overlooking the green square, who was there but Elsie? looking quite at home between two old ladies, fat and benevolent-looking, who came and gathered in turn the lace-clad Muriel to their comfortable breasts.

"We thought he was never going to marry, dear," said Aunt Jemima, the elder of the ladies. "We used to call him the woman-hater. And to think that he was only the most faithful of men after all!"

It seemed that the old ladies had made friends with Elsie during Muriel's daily hours of absence: and they proposed to take charge of Elsie while their nephew and his bride were on their honeymoon.

"And to be sure, my dear," said Aunt Jemima, who was a much more

masterful person than her sister, Aunt Kate, “we don’t propose that you shall go back to your lodgings. It will be much more becoming that you should be married from here. Besides which we are going to be so dreadfully busy for the next few days that we can’t by any manner of means spare you.”

So Muriel had to go round and explain to the parents of all her pupils that she was obliged to give up her tuitions. She would do it in that way since she was troubled because of leaving them so suddenly before they could provide a substitute. However nearly all the parents were very amiable about it, and a little overawed perhaps by the fine carriage belonging to the Misses Verrinder, and the stately coachman and fat horses that took her from door to door.

For the next few days she seemed to be always in the hands of dressmakers and milliners. By this time she had resigned herself to accepting all the things that were done for her and walked about like a person in an exquisite dream. Sometimes she thought the fine clothes and the carriage and all the luxury must fall to pieces like the splendours of a fairy-tale; and for herself she would not have greatly minded so long as Dick, her Fairy Prince, was left to her, for by this time she

loved Dick as greatly as ever the heart of bridegroom could desire.

On the eve of their wedding she and Dick were alone. By this time all the fine frocks, etc., were locked away in travelling trunks, excepting only her wedding-dress, and the beautiful garments in which she was to travel.

“Do you know,” he said to her, “you have never yet asked me where we should live when we settle down?”

“You had so many plans before settling down,” she said. “And, after all, you have hurried me so that there has been hardly time to think. Shall we live here? I do not think that I mind greatly where it is so long as I am with you.”

He kissed her with a flush of delight.

“Could you make your home at Whirlicote Hall?” he said.

Hitherto the name had not been spoken between them, nor the name of Ralph Verrinder, and now she turned a little pale.

“How should we come there?” she said. “It is your cousin’s house. I have forgiven him long ago, have learnt to be grateful to him that he did not marry me.”

“That is all right. I too have forgiven him. He died last March, Muriel. I am the owner of Whirlicote in Norfolk, and Portsoken Manor in Lincolnshire and Scales Hall in Surrey. You will be Lady Verrinder. I did not mean to tell you till to-morrow, but the aunts said I must do it.”

“I suppose the beggar-girl did not mind taking a crown from King Cophetua,” she said, lifting his hand to her cheek. “After all it is not these things that matter, since it is your love that is my crown.”

*

BILLY AND THE BONNETS.

EVERY one liked Billy as every one liked his aunt, whom the golden youth generally were agreed to call Mother Benton. The lady enjoyed the

enormous revenues of Benton’s Brewery; and since she had never given the late Mr. Benton an heir or heiress, there was no one for the money to come to but her nephew Billy. She was the soul of good-nature, and her good heart made a lady of her when without it she might have passed for a cook. But there could be no real vulgarity about a person who however fat and red-faced and roly-poly and fond of bright colours was yet overflowing with the milk of human kindness, and so kind that she had learnt a simple delicacy in the manner of performing her kindness.

Billy adored his aunt. He was a fat, white-faced youth, with small eyes and shapeless features who gave one the impression of always being half-asleep.

His brother officers would assure you that Billy was really quite wide awake, not such a fool as he looked, and other things of the same kind, and generally wound up by adding that he was no end of a good fellow, which was true. Billy was quite as good a fellow as his aunt.

He belonged to a very smart regiment which has usually at least a portion of its quarters in town, and is popularly supposed to exist for ornamental purposes, although in times of war it has occasionally

disproved that idea. He had never given his aunt a moment’s reason for anxiety about him. At his preparatory school, at Eton, at Sandhurst, he had been invariably honest and well-liked, although his best friend couldn’t say he had been exactly brilliant. But then what did Billy want with brilliancy, seeing that he had been born with a gold spoon in his mouth?

Mrs. Benton’s one desire unsatisfied was to see Billy married and well married. The desire to have Billy’s son in her arms was a corollary to the first. She wanted to see the succession to the Brewery assured; that once done she was fond of saying that she would be ready to depart.

She and Billy quite understood each other.

“She must have birth, Billy,” Mrs. Benton had often said to him. “It’s just the one thing we lack. If she has birth I don’t care if she hasn’t a second garment to her back.”

Billy would assure the aunt that he quite agreed with her. Still he was slow to give her her heart’s desire. Numbers of the young women of the aristocracy, unexceptionable in every way, were ready to share Billy’s

great fortune. But somehow Billy's little affairs always hung fire; and year after year Mrs. Benton's going in peace was postponed.

One day Billy was taking a short cut from Piccadilly to Portman Square, where Mrs. Benton's great town-house was.

He was passing through a quiet street nearly given over to milliners, modistes, and other persons whose province in life it is to make ladies beautiful. Something drew him to stand before a bonnet-shop. He had never done such a thing in his life before, at least when he was alone, but Fate was working out her designs with him.

Suddenly between an osprey and a big bow of panne he saw a face that, as he described it to himself, knocked him silly. It wasn't that it was so beautiful. Billy had run the gauntlet of many kinds of beauty. It was a girl's face, pale, with very blue eyes. It was framed in pale fair hair; silky like a child's. The eyelids long and half-closed gave the eyes a languishing look. The mouth was thin and humorous, the lips faintly scarlet.

Billy stood an instant looking into the eyes, feeling, as he said

afterwards, as though he had been shot through the heart. Then he lifted his hat, and passed on. But after that he took to haunting the quiet street and Madame Elodie's windows.

He didn't know in the least what to do. Billy had never been a Lothario. His feelings towards the face in the milliner's shop were not at all Lothario-like. He wanted to know the owner of the face as he knew the young ladies in Park Lane or Grosvenor Square. But how to set about it?

At last the thing was done for him. One evening of summer twilight, when Billy ought to have been dressing for a particularly smart dinner but on the contrary was haunting the grey street where the blinds had just been pulled down in front of the hats and costumes, the little door by the side of Madame Elodie's shop opened, and there came out the face of his dreams. It was under a soft white hat with blue convolvulus in it; it surmounted a long blue coat which Billy would not have found amiss in his own world.

The girl was not alone. She was keeping very close to a large, red-faced girl, with a much more flamboyant taste in costume, who looked a person of character and decision. As they passed close to Billy, who had drawn

himself back in the shadow of the shop-fronts, the red-faced girl suddenly pulled up sharp in front of him. He noticed the other girl tug at her sleeve in a terrified way. But the red-faced girl was not to be hindered.

“I say,” she said to Billy. “You’re straight aren’t you?”

She pronounced it “strite,” but I shan’t reproduce the dreary pronunciation.

“I hope so,” said Billy, lifting his hat.

“Because if you aren’t,” she said, “you may just hook it. Violet is not one of the wrong sort.”

Billy was dreadfully disturbed, quite as much as if this coarse remark had been made before the most innocent girl of his own class. He saw the cheeks of the girl who had been called “Violet,” flush with a painful red, and then fade to more than their usual whiteness. He began to pour out an incoherent disclaimer of anything but the utmost respect for Miss Violet. If she desired it he would go away and never come back again.

“Stow that,” said the red-faced young woman. “I knew you were straight the minute I set eyes on you. If I didn’t, catch me encouraging you, young man. Well, you may come along. This is my young man, Mr. William Sanders.” A fourth person had now joined the group, who remarked to Billy, following the introduction, that he was his servant, sir.

“And now where are you two gents going to stand treat to?” said the red-faced girl, whose name Billy presently discovered to be Clara. “We’ve got to be in at half-past ten. A beastly shame I call it. Violet here is all for grass and trees. But I tells her she’ll have to put it off till Saturday. I vote for Earl’s Court and a snack of something there.”

Presently Billy found himself to his amazement on top of a bus going west through the lighted streets. He remembered dimly that he was due at dinner in Berkeley Square, but he was not in a mood to have his perfect contentment disturbed by such a trifle as a broken engagement.

The long line of lamps in the delicate summer haze, stretching away by the trees of the Green Park, marked the way to Paradise for Billy. Stars

came out overhead. The people on the bus talked in whispers. They were mostly couples with their arms about each other. Billy and Miss Violet sat in front, separated from their companions; they might almost have been alone.

At first they were silent; presently they became a little more intimate, and the girl referred shyly to having seen Billy's face between the bonnets.

"I never meant to have told Clara," she murmured, "but she found out somehow. And one day she had a long look at you from the other window. And she said you could be trusted. But I never supposed she was going to speak to you."

"I'm very glad she did," said Billy.

"And, oh, please, you mustn't think her vulgar, because she's so kind. She looks after me, and is quite jealous if I talk to the other girls."

"I should be just the same myself," said Billy. "But I shouldn't think of thinking Miss Clara vulgar. I think it's awfully good of her to look

after you, you know, and … to … to keep people off—undesirable people, you know.”

“Oh she doesn’t let me know a soul, except William Sanders; and he’s really so wrapt up in Clara that he’s a part of her. He’s a most respectable young man, a greengrocer’s manager. When Clara’s married she’s going to live at Tooting.”

There was a suffocated sound in Miss Violet’s voice as though she was enjoying a huge joke all to herself, which made Billy smile indulgently at her in the darkness. He was to become well acquainted with that sound in her voice in the time to come. She had not her humorous mouth for nothing.

Presently they were at Earl’s Court, and after they had had “a snack,” which Billy insisted on standing; it was really the best dinner Earl’s Court could produce, and they all did full justice to it; they sat in as secluded a place in the gardens as they could find. But that was not very secluded, and Billy repressed an inclination to suggest two hansoms for going home, since the bus gave better opportunities for conversation and he was quite hungry for the murmur of the soft voice at his ears,

with the stifled merriment never far away from it.

The drive home was even better than the one out, since the friendship had grown so much. Under cover of the darkness Billy kept touching the blue cloak with reverential tenderness and felt the contact with it thrill through him with a shock of delight.

Miss Violet was very frank about herself. She had lived with her parents and brothers and sisters in an Oxfordshire village; but they were so poor that she had to do something to earn a little money. Her name was Hope, Violet Hope. Her great ambition was some day to have a bonnet-shop of her own.

Then Billy told her his name and made her guess at his occupation. She made two or three guesses, with the stifled merriment in her voice. A shop-walker. No; she had guessed that because he was so tall and straight. A hairdresser; Billy pulled a face in the darkness, and felt her tremble at his side.

“No, a Guardsman,” he blurted out, anxious to prevent any more hurts to his vanity.

“I knew you were a soldier,” she said, as though suddenly repentant. “Papa … is a soldier. I only guessed those things for a joke. But a Guardsman, how nice! On furlough, I suppose, since you’re not in uniform?”

“Yes; on furlough,” said Billy mendaciously.

“Oh!”

She seemed about to burst out with something and then stopped.

“Go on, please,” he said, bending his head to her.

“I was only thinking how nice it would be to walk out with a Guardsman in uniform. The other girls would be so jealous.”

“That reminds me,” said Billy; it had never been really out of his head all the time; “would you and Miss Clara, and, of course, Mr. William Sanders, come into the country with me on Saturday afternoon? I know an inn in a delightfully secluded part of Surrey where we could have tea.

Will you come?”

“I should love to. But can you–-?”

“I can get leave.”

“And—won’t it be very expensive?”

“I think I can stand it.”

“I suppose Guardsmen are very well paid?”

He could feel her eyes big on him in the darkness.

“We are pretty well off as a rule,” he said lightly.

He thought the week endless till Saturday should come. But it came at last, and turned out an exquisite afternoon. Two o’clock found Billy at Victoria. He had arranged with the guard, before the rest of the party arrived, for a first-class carriage to themselves. Violet was in white with a bunch of pansies at her belt, and lavender ribbons in her big

hat. Billy thought her lovelier than ever. “What toffs to be sure!” cried Clara, resplendent in a hat trimmed with cherries.

Billy didn’t mind Clara’s looks or her language, or Mr. William Sanders’ cheap cigar and broad stripes. He was so completely swamped in love by this time that he had neither eyes nor ears for any one but Violet. It was Billy’s first love affair, and he had taken it badly. Now and again he had a little qualm on the subject of “the old girl,” as he called Mrs. Benton; but that was soon forgotten in the delirium of looking at and listening to Violet.

They strolled through grassy lanes to the inn, where they had a good country tea, with cold ham and eggs and crisp green lettuce and honey. After it was over they had still a couple of hours to spare before they need make for the train.

They left Clara and Mr. Sanders flinging hay at each other in a hay-field and strolled on into a wood. They found a delightful place to sit down, in a green shade, where the only sound was the summer hum of insects and the singing of birds, and the falling of a little stream far below. There was a tree-trunk for Violet. Billy in his immaculate grey

frock-coat and light trousers flung himself on the moss at her feet. While she was settling herself with a soft frou-frou, he surreptitiously kissed the hem of her skirt.

He had been falling in love all those weeks when he had hung about Madame Elodie’s shop-windows. Now he was fathoms deep in it. He was going to marry Violet if she would have him and as soon as might be. It would be hard on “the old girl,” but she was so kind and loving, he thought wistfully, she would forgive him when she knew how his heart was in it. Besides, she couldn’t stand out against Violet for long. Billy was no wiser than thousands of unwise lovers before him. He was grateful to those unknown people in the Oxfordshire village who had brought her up with the speech and manners of a lady. But if it had been otherwise, if it had been possible to imagine Violet otherwise, he would still have loved her, have let every other consideration go for her sake. A look at her face, demure in the shadow of her hat, made even the thought of “the old girl” vanish. He leant back till his face was against her skirt.

“Violet,” he said, “I love you, darling. And–-” his voice was full of delighted amazement—“you love me!”

He drew her face down to him and kissed it rapturously, and she did not prevent him, rather yielded herself to him. He smelt her crushed pansies by his cheek.

“You will have to marry me,” he said.

“It is very soon,” she whispered, “and you know nothing about me. And–-I know nothing about you, Billy dear.”

He laughed out.

“I am perfectly respectable,” he said, “and quite able to maintain a wife. But–-I have the dearest old aunt. She had other views for me. You will have to placate her, darling.”

“And you,” she said, “you will have to please my uncle. You’ve no idea of how imperious he is. Poor Papa and Mamma! I can twist them about my little finger. But Uncle Gran! You’ve no idea what a terrible person he is.”

“I hope he’ll let me down easy, be satisfied with me, I mean,” said

Billy, playing in an infatuated way with a loose tress of Violet's hair.

"He's quite capable of sending you about your business."

"In that case we should just have to disregard him, sweetheart, shouldn't we? We can't let anybody stand in our way."

"It would never do to displease Uncle Gran. And then Aunt Min. I look to Aunt Min to finance my bonnet shop, and to get me customers."

"You don't suppose I am going to let you keep a bonnet shop!"

"Oh, Billy, you'll have to. You don't know how much money is to be made out of it."

"I have plenty of money."

"For yourself. You can't imagine what luxurious tastes I have. That was what made me think of the bonnet shop. I want heaps of money. My sisters are content to sit at home genteelly. They are horrified at me. You've no idea what a money-loving little wretch I am."

“So long as you didn’t think of marrying for money.”

“I did, even that, before I knew you, Billy. Now I should never marry any one else, no matter how rich he was. I shall run the bonnet shop for both of us. You don’t know how much money it will bring us in.”

“You darling!”

“I’ll ask Madame for leave next Sunday and take you down to Oxfordshire to see the family. Papa and Mamma are dears. You won’t need to be the least bit afraid of them.”

“You think not?”

Billy looked quite anxious.

“They’ve always let me do everything I wanted to do.”

“Just like Aunt Susan with me.”

A little cloud fell over his face.

“But Uncle Gran is a terror. You won’t mind if he’s rude, Billy. He thinks so extravagantly about his family. And of course, dear, though you’re a gentleman, still a private in the Guards! What made you enlist, Billy? Was it to fight?”

“As a matter of fact I didn’t enlist,” Billy stammered over his confession. “I—I—went in in the ordinary way. I’m—in fact—I’m Captain Benton.”

“Then Uncle Gran’s your Colonel, so now you know how dreadful he can be.”

“Lord Grandison.”

“Yes; Lord Grandison. He’d have fits if he knew where I was. But we are really very poor. I didn’t see that having Lord Grandison for an uncle made up for the money we were always wanting. So I persuaded Mamma first—if you have Mamma you can always have Papa—to let me learn bonnet-making. What’s the good of having a beauty-aunt if she doesn’t

give you a lift some way or other. Lady Grandison has only to wear my bonnets to make me the fashion. Billy, don't tell me you're so disgustingly rich that I shall have to give up my dreams of a bonnet-shop?"

"You shall make them for pleasure, dear. I don't think I could really consent to any addition to my income."

It is no use recording the other foolish things these young people said, as in fact the conversation after a time became rather incoherent. Suffice it to say that Lord Grandison, though he wouldn't acknowledge it, was really as well pleased with his niece's choice as Mrs. Benton with her nephew's. There was no lack of acknowledgment about Mrs. Benton, however. She is still singing her Nuno Dimittis, although Billy has been a Benedict these five years back, and Billy's son reigns more autocratically over his great-aunt's heart than ever his father did.

"Cute beggar, Billy!" say his brother officers, "to unearth that charming niece of old Gran's, whom he had buried away somewhere in the depths of the country. And who could have supposed what he was up to when he used to disappear and turn up looking moonier than ever?"

Clara, Mrs. Sanders, runs a very smart bonnet-shop. It has been rumoured that the Hon. Mrs. Benton has a share in it; but that is not really so. Only now and again she spares half an hour to give Clara her ideas for new hats and bonnets. And judging by her smart clientele, Madame Clara profits by a taste more exquisite than her own.

*

THE OLD HERO.

IT was about five o'clock of a winter afternoon and old Major Lacy was sitting with his feet in a pail of hot water and mustard before the dreary lodging-house fire.

Outside it was dark, except for the gas-lamps that flared in the wind along the deserted sea-front. The Lacys took their change to the sea in winter when no one else wanted the lodgings and they were cheap. In summer they stayed in town for the same reason.

The lodgings were draughty in winter, and the Major had taken cold.

Selina, his eldest daughter, to whom her father was moon and sun, had grown alarmed about him and had insisted on his going to bed early after the preliminary foot-bath. A little kettle was singing on the fire. The Major was to have a hot drink to assist his cure; a bottle of rum, sugar, a lemon and a glass stood on a shabby little tray on the table.

Selina was kneeling in front of her father, a bath-towel across her extended hands, ready to wrap the feet in when they should emerge from the pail. She had a reverential air as though the feet were something sacred. Since she was a girl, a woman rather, who had the need to adore something, it was as well she had such a father as old Hugh Lacy to lavish her heart's worship on.

Despite the foot-bath, despite the shabby, stained dressing-gown, despite the unlovely lodging-house surroundings, to the person of discrimination Hugh Lacy would have given assurance of the hero he was. His white hair fell in leonine fashion about his red, sunburnt old face; his eyes, yet blue and kindly, and innocent in their normal expression, could at moments have the low lustre and flash of steel; his voice yet could ring commandingly when occasion required it.

Into the mean room, lit by the dim lamp which Selina had toiled in vain to make more efficient, there came suddenly a magnificent young gentleman. The stupid little lodging-house servant ushered him in with a horrible travesty of his name. Then, as though discovering her blunder, she retired precipitately.

For a moment there was absolute silence in the room. Then the young gentleman, who was clad in the garments of Savile Row, advanced, blushing deeply and holding out his hand.

“My father, Sir Valentine Dumaresq,” he said, “asked me to call, sir, and present his kind remembrances to you. I am stationed at the Seaford Barracks with my regiment, the —th Hussars, and only discovered yesterday where to find you. My father had some trouble to discover your address.”

The old soldier’s face had lit up during the speech. He had forgotten the slight awkwardness he had felt at the strange young man’s intrusion on his private moments. He took Captain Dumaresq’s hand and shook it heartily.

"I am very glad to welcome a son of Sir Valentine's," he said. "A kind, handsome, generous fellow and a fine soldier. To think he should have remembered me over all these years. Sit down, sit down, Captain Dumaresq. Selina, my girl,—my eldest daughter; Selina, Captain Dumaresq;—take away all this rubbish. You are too young a man and too old to know how the women can coddle one. You forget one end of your life and have not yet arrived at the other. Dear me! And how is Sir Valentine? And how did he know I was at Seaford? I thought he had lost sight of me long ago; it is not easy to lose sight of him. What will you take, Captain Dumaresq? I was about to have some hot rum for my cold. You won't join me? A cup of tea then? Ah, we never drank tea when I was a young fellow."

Leonard Dumaresq looked down at Selina's bent head, as she dried her father's feet with the bath-towel, curiously. It was a world he had never entered before, this dreary ugly world in which old soldiers took foot-baths by the sitting-room fire and were waited on by plain-looking daughters. She was very plain; dark, lumpish features; too much hair for the size of her head. Her hands in the lamplight showed thin and discoloured; her ill-fitting gown of rough grey tweed made her dull complexion more undecided. Her eyes were hidden from him. And she was

not young,—thirty or perhaps older.

He looked away from her to the old leonine face.

“My father has often said to me,” he said, with a shyness that became him, “‘Leonard, my lad, if you are ever within reasonable distance of my old comrade, Hugh Lacy, it must be your proud privilege to see and know him. He is the finest soldier I have ever known.’”

“Bless me, did Sir Valentine say that?” the old hero exclaimed delightedly, “I’m sure the Queen lost a very fine soldier when your father gave up soldiering. He was bound to shine wherever he was. Look at him now, a Minister of the Queen, when others of us are laid on the shelf, fit for nothing but to fret our hearts out.”

A good many things concerning the old man were passing through Leonard Dumaresq’s mind. It was true that Hugh Lacy was a man who had made history. By sheer magnificent dash and courage and resource he had risen from a humble position to be Major in a crack regiment. He had had a drab little wife, supposed by his brother-officers to have been a sewing-maid or the dressmaker of the village where he had been born. As

a matter of fact she was neither, but the daughter of a poor parson. But no one was interested enough to find that out except one of the subalterns who looked up to “old Lacy” with far more discerning eyes than the rest. Mrs. Lacy had always lived in some shabby genteel street of the town where the regiment happened to be stationed, and never emerged save when she could not help it. If she had been the sewing-maid or the village dressmaker, she could not have been shyer of the magnificent butterflies who were the feminine friends and belongings of the Major’s brother-officers.

When Sir Valentine most unwillingly had given up his sword for the country-gentleman’s plough-share he had acquired a stock of unsatisfied longings and ambitions, which perhaps in time he had transmitted to his son. Anyhow Leonard Dumaresq was so devoted to his soldiering, so much in love with the hard work of it, that he excited an amusement that was almost contempt in the minds of the gilded youth of the regiment.

He was so much in love with it that presently he forgot the dinginess of his surroundings, the shabbiness of the old Major, the oily fumes of the rum punch, in listening to and looking at the finest soldier his father had ever known.

Selina had brought him his tea; she had taken the little tray and disappeared, and when she brought it again it had been spread with a certain daintiness which was at war with its surroundings.

Captain Dumaresq hardly noticed. He was absorbed in listening to the old man. But unconsciously he drank several cups of tea and accounted for a whole plateful of thin brown bread and butter, which was a tribute to Selina's housekeeping.

Presently Selina's younger sisters, Maud and Betty, came in. They had been forewarned at the threshold by the little servant of the grand visitor who had fallen upon the humble domicile like a creature from another sphere. So they had put on their best to do honour to the occasion. They were rosy-checked, blue-eyed girls. Captain Dumaresq had an uncomfortable feeling of having seen them about on the esplanade and in the streets of the towns, laughing and chattering rather more than was desirable with various heedless young subalterns from the garrison town across the bay from Seaford. If he had thought of them at all then it was to suppose that they were shop-girls or dressmakers' assistants. He felt a vague annoyance now to find that they were Hugh Lacy's

daughters.

They put Selina more in the shade than ever. Their gaily beribboned blouses with a deal of transparency at the neck, bought for three and elevenpence three-farthings in Bayswater, their cheap pearls and amber, their bangles and Mizpah rings, showed festive by comparison with Selina's colourless garments. They had fair hair fluffed out over obvious wire frames. They joined in the conversation freely, and were plainly exhilarated by Leonard Dumaresq's presence. Hitherto their acquaintance had at its finest been restricted to young officers of the line.

Their coming spoilt the afternoon for the visitor. He had been forgetting the dinginess of the surroundings in listening to the hero. Now the magic had fallen from his eyes and once more he was conscious of the sickly fumes of the rum, the smell of the cheap oil-lamp, the wet ring which the pail had left on the dusty hearth-rug, the peeling American cloth table-cover, the stain of grease on the old hero's dressing-gown.

He stood up to go. He was an amiable person, and had not been aware till

this moment of any unusual fastidiousness. Now the girls irritated him, good-natured, simple creatures in whom it was evident the old hero found nothing amiss. Nor would he have if they had been as he had supposed them, dressmakers or shop-girls; only—they were as discordant with Hugh Lacy as was the lodging-house parlour. Poverty had no repulsion for Dumaresq; but it ought to be clean, simple, austere poverty. The menage in which he had found his father's hero, the hero of his own boyhood, jarred on him like some horrible discord.

As he walked away along the wet esplanade, and took a boat to row him across to the other side where his barracks lay, he had no definite intention of returning. Indeed, he had a very definite intention not to return. He did not want to see those beribboned girls, to hear their Cockney accents again.

But oddly enough, in the days that followed, the memory of the girls and the things that had annoyed him faded away, and the face of the old soldier emerged from the obscurity of the dim lodging-house parlour, with that light of valour in it which drew him as the musician is drawn by immortal music, the poet by great poetry.

Not a week had gone by till once again he found himself walking down the wet esplanade to the dingy lodging-house. Indeed he was conscious of a great expectation as he walked up the steps and rang the tinkling bell. The blind was down over the parlour-window, but he could see on it the shadow of the old soldier's head. It was the head of a lion. There was something incongruous in seeing it there so quiet in the lamplight.

When he was ushered in he found he had interrupted a reading. Selina was sitting on the other side of the lamp. She had an old calf-covered, broken-backed volume in her hand; an account of the campaigns of the Duke of Marlborough he discovered it to be. Later he knew a good deal of the contents of the book.

He had interrupted them at a stirring bit Selina kept her finger between the pages while she shook hands with him.

"Finish, my girl," said Major Lacy. "Captain Dumaresq will excuse us."

Selina read on to the end of the page. Unlike her sisters her accent was pure. She read the stirring, quaintly-worded narrative with simple effect. She was not a great soldier's daughter, and at one in everything

with him, to read Marlborough’s Campaigns with quiet pulses.

A little colour came in her cheeks as she read.

A good girl, Captain Dumaresq thought to himself. What a blessing the old father had her to minister to him! And she was not likely to leave him. How plain she was! It was not fair that women should be so plain. He was a quixotic person, and it gave him a little stab to see a woman so plain and so resigned to her plainness. He had known women as plain, plainer; but then the kind fates had atoned to them by making them satisfied with their looks. A woman who could read like that ought to be better-looking.

When she had finished her reading she drew a basket to her side containing grey worsted stockings, and finding one with a great hole began to darn it while the men talked. If she heard what they talked of she made no sign. After a time she went quietly from the room, and presently reappeared followed by the tea-tray. She poured out the tea and placed Captain Dumaresq’s cup at his elbow. Then she brought her father’s and arranged it on a little table. Her movements were quiet and quick. Captain Dumaresq was glad she was so void of offence. Sitting

there with her unlustrous dark head in the lamplight, darning innumerable stockings, she was as if she had not been.

He had paid his first visit in the second week of November. By Christmas it was a settled thing that he spent a couple of afternoons a week with the old soldier. He usually found him and Selina by themselves. The livelier daughters had apparently made many friends and were much in request. After the first they were not greatly interested in Captain Dumaresq. He was a faultless and dazzling person to be sure; but a bit of a stick, no fun in him, for them at least. For the same reason which made them prefer the gimcrack shops of the Burlington Arcade to the dazzle of Streeter's or Hancock's, namely, that they were interested in the things within their reach, they preferred the pink-cheeked Infantry subalterns to the Captain of Hussars.

He had been vaguely conscious of some gradual mitigation of the lodging-house ugliness. At first it was a new lamp. Again his eye missed with relief the horrible little white and scarlet spotted lines of the American cloth table-cover—its place had been taken by a square of dull green serge. There was a clean strip of matting now instead of the greasy hearth-rug. One afternoon his nostrils were sensible of a

grateful odour. There was a bunch of lilies of the valley in a cheap vase on the table.

He looked across at Selina, wondering how she had come by the flowers. Lilies of the valley were not cheap just then. He was a person of a simple unspeculative mind, and it was not at all like him to think of the cost of the flowers and to couple it with the obvious poverty of the Lacys. He wondered if some one had given them to her.

He was sure no one had given them to Maud or Betty. Lilies of the valley were incongruous with those blooming damsels. He felt himself vaguely displeased with the idea that Selina had been the recipient of the flowers, and ascribed it to jealousy on the old man’s account. Of course she must never leave him now. It would be cruel, wicked, when she had become so necessary to him. Fortunately she seemed entirely satisfied with her father, not like those minxes, her sisters. It was fortunate that she was so plain.

He never had a doubt of her plainness till he met her one evening, hurrying along in the darkness to a chemist’s shop to get a prescription made up for her father’s cough. He stopped and spoke to her under a

street-lamp.

“He is not worse?” he asked, with a shock of alarm. He had been coming to love the old hero better each time they met, as the simple and heroic soul revealed itself more freely.

“No, he is no worse.”

She lifted her eyes to him and the light of the flaring street-lamp was in her face. He recognised, with wonder at his own dullness that the eyes were beautiful, beautiful enough of themselves to redeem even a plainer face than hers. They were grey—no, they were black or dark brown; the iris lightened and darkened, a soul spoke through the eyes, a beautiful soul. Ah! now, he was sure they were grey, but with such dark lashes, and the pupils so deep and so lustrous.

“He is no worse,” she said quietly. He started at the sound of her voice. It seemed to him that he had been looking through her eyes into her heart and soul for a long, long time.

“But, Captain Dumaresq,” she went on, “he is not any better. Don’t you

see what is the matter with him? They have laid him away on the shelf because he has no friend in high places to remember him. He wants work, to work for his country. He is sixty-five, but he is twenty years younger in everything but years. He has no friends in high places, therefore he is laid aside while the incompetents get the work to do."

"No friends in high places!" Dumaresq echoed. "But—my father! What has my father been about? I think we shall have need of him soon. I do not believe that our next war is going to be such an easy matter. Thirty years or so of peace or comparative peace have let the incompetents have it all their own way."

She kept her eyes steadily on his face and he heard her breath come quickly.

"Could you bear it," he asked, "if he were sent on active service once again?"

"Oh yes, I could bear it," she said almost joyfully. "You see I know how he has fretted."

The winter passed and the spring came and the Lacys were back again in Bayswater. But things were different with the old soldier. He was not going to be forgotten for ever. He had had a message from Sir Valentine Dumaresq. The friends and comrades of many years ago had met. The old soldier had braced himself up and got out his dress-suit—it was well the moth wasn't in it—and had dined with his old friend. He had met various great people, and they had made handsome speeches to him. He had been thinking of himself as forgotten, worn out, thrown away as worthless these five years back; yet his exploits seemed to have reached the ears and even kept in the memories of these people. The world held an undreamt-of hope after all.

Whenever Captain Dumaresq was at liberty to run up to town, and that seemed to be pretty often, he was sure to find his way to the Bayswater terrace, with the scrubby little square at the back, where Major Lacy had pitched his camp for his declining years. Often now, since the old hero had been recognised by the world, he found no one in but Selina. She was still working at the grey worsted stockings.

Great things had happened to every one but Selina during that last winter at Seaford. Both her sisters had come back engaged to subalterns

of the line. Of course they could not hope to marry for years and years; but meanwhile they were exuberantly happy with their little new diamond rings, and their daily love-letters, and their endless chatter of their lovers and themselves. Less in request with her father Selina seemed more pushed into a grey corner of life than ever.

One afternoon of autumn Captain Dumaresq had called and found only Selina. They sat together in the big window overlooking the tiny scrap of garden and the square beyond. The forest trees which had been overtaken by the town long ago were beginning to lose their leaves. A damp mist ascended from the garden. Under the trees, youths and maidens, usually of a Jewish cast of features, strayed arm in arm, or coquetted in melancholy arbours.

Captain Dumaresq had taken the most comfortable chair in the room and was lying at full length in it. The room was a gimcrack one, but it contained one or two chairs in which a very tall man could stretch himself. He was looking at Selina with a certain lazy content. She was still darning stockings. Though nothing good had happened to her yet she looked better. Her cheeks had filled out, and had a faint colour. She was plumper, or perhaps one only imagined such things because a little

air of felicity lay about her lips. Her dress of yellowish Indian muslin became her. She had bought the material for about five shillings and had made it herself with an austerity that pleased Captain Dumaresq's eyes.

Plain! Yes, she was plain still. She never would be anything but plain. But all of a sudden he realised that her plainness meant the beauty of all the world to him.

"I think war will be declared soon," he said, "and your father will get a command."

She started and looked at him, the quietly happy air fading from off her lips.

"You will be very lonely," he went on.

"Very," she said. "But I can bear it. I shan't be the only woman. Poor Maudie and Bet! They live in anguish lest Bertie and Cecil should be sent out."

"What would you do if you had a lover as well as a father at the war?"

He had drawn himself up in the chair and was looking steadily at her.

“I have never had a lover,” she said in a bewildered way. “How can I imagine what I would do?”

“You have never had a lover. Have people no eyes in their heads?”

A wounded flush came into her cheeks. She took up the stocking she had dropped and bent her eyes over it for a second. Then she looked at him, brave and patient.

“I have never thought of lovers,” she said. “Lovers are not for—for—plain women like me. I had my father.”

“Had they no eyes in their heads?” he repeated with a voice and a manner she had never seen in him, never heard. “Perhaps you are plain. Indeed I think I thought you plain at first. Now I think you exquisite, adorable. My darling, love me, for I cannot do without you. You are my home, my everything a woman can be to a man. Lift your lovely eyes to me and tell me that you love me.”

He carried her off her feet. She protested, while he silenced her with his kisses, that she was plain, no longer young, undesirable, that he would know it all when his madness passed.

“That madness will last for ever,” he said. “Why you were never plain. You are beautiful, were always beautiful, will always be beautiful to me. Our hearts met first over your father, met never to part. I have never loved a woman before. How long will you keep me before you tell me that you love me?”

He held her face away from him, the better to see it. Why, she was beautiful. It was only that the scales had fallen from his eyes. She had been always beautiful. What a soul in those eyes!

“I don’t deserve you,” he said humbly, “but I love you. I have loved you all the time.”

“And I you,” she said with her ecstatic air of bewilderment.

*

THE KNOCKING AT THE DOOR,

OLD Maeve sat in her room in a gable of the house and stitched incessantly. It was a room that took all the storms, a south-west gable, and since Ardlewy Castle was on the Atlantic seaboard there were a good many days of the year when the boughs clashed and moaned outside the window as though in mortal pain, and the rain beat against the glass. But Maeve with her little turf-fire and the black tea-pot perpetually in the ashes was happy enough.

“I do be thinkin’,” Maeve would say when Madam O’Donnell would come in and sit with her in a lonesome silence, “of how different it used to be when we had the nurseries. Big as they are they were hardly big enough, what with Master Hugh, and Master Aymer, and Master Dermot, and Master Brien, and Master Garret, and Master Donal, and Miss Cecilia, the Lord rest them all! Isn’t it a quare way that there must be only old in the castle, and the young gone out of it? It does seem unnathural like to me.”

Madam was very fond of her old nurse, yet these visits to her were

invariably a re-opening of old wounds. To be sure it was sad enough for all of them that the children were gone, the boys killed in battle or the hunting-field, or dying of chills, the only daughter drowned in a sudden squall when she sailed her little boat to the island, she that was as much at home on the water as the sea-mew or the gull.

Maeve had fostered the eldest son, Hugh, and had been nurse to all the rest. So she would never go out of Ardlewy while the Prince and Madam stayed in it, and she must have her little comforts so far as they could give them to her and a quiet life, darning innumerable little holes in acres of fine worn damask, sometimes mending Madam's laces or repairing the ravages time or the moth had made in silks and tapestries of curtains or furniture. The room in the gable was a little kingdom to her where she lived retired from contact with the other servants, with whom she quarrelled if she had the chance. She had her own food and her few simple utensils for cooking. She never left the gable-room except to go to Mass of Sundays or holidays.

She seemed as much a fixture in the house as the tattered flags or the suits of armour that had out-lasted so many beautiful spirited creatures of flesh and blood.

So long as the Prince lived they were all safe in Ardlewy, and if the money was not much there was enough for their wants, seeing they were all so old. To be sure the heir-at-law grumbled a deal about the disrepair into which the house was falling, and the Prince was more fretted for the sake of the house than he was for the heir for whom he had no love.

“I wish I could take the house with me,” he would say to Madam, “and not have it go to Walter Burke. I never thought to see Ardlewy pass to a Burke. Weren’t they always against us? Wasn’t there a Queen’s Burke when Owen More Art O’Donnell hid in the mountains of Munster, and he starving, and the Queen’s Burke away in London singing madrigals to the Queen?”

He would talk as though the Princes of Ardlewy of these latter days were not loyal men; but indeed he lived in that mist of shadows that the days of Queen Elizabeth were in a sense nearer to him than his own, and the old vexations had as much power to hurt him as the new, unless it was the vexation of knowing that Walter Burke was uneasy for his shoes, and grumbled because Ardlewy suffered. And it was a very great vexation to

him that Ardlewy should suffer. There was hardly anywhere he could walk that he did not suffer this vexation, what with the long ranges of empty stabling that had been almost stripped of slates the night of the big wind, what with the gardens gone to weeds, and the gravel-paths hardly distinguishable from the beds, what with the roof that leaked, and the floors that crumbled and the more perishable stuffs that all wanted renewing.

Then there was the incessant encroaching damp in the acres of rooms where it was hopeless to think of lighting fires, since the servants were so old and there was no coal nearer than Galway and none to chop the trees for firewood, although the place was a wilderness with fallen trees ever since that same night of the big wind. And to be sure Walter Burke was rich and could give the place all it needed; and since the children were gone the Prince had taken the house to his heart as though it were human, and fretted over its needs as one might over a child's.

"If it were not for you, Grace," he would say to Madam, "I'd as lief it were all done and over and that Walter Burke might have the place while it yet held together."

But this was only in time of much depression; and Madam hearing him would shed a tear or two.

Compared with all the rest Madam was a child. She was no more than fifty-five, while her husband was seventy-five, and the youngest of the old servants was not far short of seventy. What with the old house and the old servants, and dogs, and pensioners who swarmed to the kitchen every day, although the O'Donnells had little enough for themselves, it was easy to be young at fifty-five. And Madam's great dread was that presently she would be left alone. Then Walter Burke would come in and take over the place and would pension her off genteelly for the rest of her days, in a little villa at Salthill it might be, she who had borne O'Donnell, Prince of Ardlewy, six sons and a daughter. Walter Burke had married a soap-chandler's daughter and she would be mistress of Ardlewy. Often, often, Madam put up her gentle, voiceless prayer that she might be taken before that day came.

Often enough old Maeve would forget that the good days had gone and the sad days come, and those were hard times with Madam when she would climb up to the turret-room and would find the old woman in one of her trances, when she would talk of the children as though they were yet

alive and children, and these were the old good rich days before death
and poverty had come to a handful of old folks at Ardlewy Castle.
“Master Hugh has the knees worn through his knickers again,” Maeve would
say, smoothing out a little old garment. “If you will send to Galway for
the flannel, Madam, I will make him a new pair.”

Then Madam would look at her gently and shake her head, answering at the
same time that she would send to Galway for the flannel.

She envied old Maeve her dreams. She envied also, while she grieved over
the forgetfulness of old age that was beginning to steal on the Prince.
He had begun to forget his troubles, except when a letter from Walter
Burke or the lawyers would come to recall them, or he would come upon
some ruined thing so insistent that even his wavering thoughts could not
overlook it. He ought not to have failed so soon, seeing that the
O’Donnells had always been long lived, and that he had been much in the
open air. But Madam could not but acknowledge that the forgetfulness was
a mercy.

When they walked up and down together now on the terrace-path he talked
usually of old things that had occurred long ago. About them his memory

was unfailing and he seemed to linger only on gentle and pleasant things of the past.

His animosities, which had been fierce enough, began to fade. He no longer denounced the agitators who had impoverished him, and the Government which he had been used to call their accomplices. Even the name of Walter Burke had less and less power to disturb him.

“A time will come,” Madam said to herself, “when only I shall remember.”

Hugh’s dog, Rory, an old, very big Irish terrier, crippled with rheumatism, turned one melancholy watchful eye upon her as though he understood the thought.

It was a morning of April. All the winter it had been a winter of storms, and if they had no big wind in the sense of those that made history, the piping and shrieking of the wind about the castle and down the long corridors and in the disused rooms had become so familiar a sound that it was as if one always lived in a hurly-burly. The green was on the boughs now, and the sun was warm, but the wind, between the North-West and the South-West, showed no sign of abating. In shelter it

was warm enough; and the old dog lay on the mat which Madam had spread for him in front of the hall-door and basked in the sun.

"I believe you remember," she said, stooping to fondle the dog. "But he will never come back. Don't you know that he died in Australia long ago? Even his bones are not laid among us."

Hugh had gone away after the ruin had fallen upon them, with some vague, generous youthful dream of building up a fortune for Ardlewy and had never returned. Five years after he had gone they had heard of his death from a chum of his who had watched his last hours in an Adelaide hospital. The news had come a week after Cecilia had been carried in in the sail of a fisherman's boat, drowned and dead. Madam could yet hear the dripping from the sail on the black and white marble pavement of the castle hall into which they had carried her. She wondered how they had all lived to be old, seeing that such things had happened to them.

The old dog whimpered as she caressed him and trembled violently.

"I believe you remember," she said. "And to be sure Maeve remembers. But she will not remember for long, and when the cloud deepens on her brain

it will be a mercy to me.”

Old Maeve had been curiously excited of late.

Once or twice she had muttered half-apologetically that the big wind had got into her head, and that the roaring of it confused her: and, as a matter of fact, that same thing had happened to many persons, some of whom experienced deafness, others headache, and many a confusion of the senses, so that it was no wonder an old half-mad woman, living amid ghosts and the past and thinking, thinking incessantly, should have been affected by it.

A little while ago when Madam had visited her in her turret-room, where the winds whistled as through the rigging of a ship, she had found the old woman more distraught than usual.

“Will the wind never die?” she had asked, and her hands trembled at the darning.

“Does it disturb you, Maeve?” Madam asked kindly. She had gathered a few primroses out-of-doors and was arranging them in a vase before the

statue of the Angel Guardian who had been wont to look down on a full nursery long ago.

“It isn’t that, Madam,” Maeve answered impatiently. “It isn’t the noise of it I’d be caring for at this time of day. Sure I’d think the world was dead if ‘twas to die away, I’m that used to it. It’s only that Master Hugh will be coming by the hooker from Galway to-night. ‘Tis the crazy ould hooker she is, and Michael Sweeney not the man he was to manage her. I’d be glad Master Hugh was in safe.”

“Oh!”

With a voiceless cry Madam had dropped the primroses and run out of the room. There were times when Maeve’s hallucinations were too much for her heart to bear. She stood for a few minutes to recover herself, wringing her hands together in the silence of the long sunny corridor. Then she went back into the room.

“You forget, Maeve,” she said gently, “that Michael Sweeney is dead, and Terence his son has a fine new hooker.”

She had not the heart to add that Hugh was dead too, but went away quietly.

All that day the clouds in great masses of smoked pearl drifted to them over the mountains of the North, sometimes hurried along furiously by a screaming and lashing wind, at other times moving majestically with the sun, turning them to ice-floes and icebergs. At intervals they broke in heavy, sleety rain during which the mountains and the sea and the stretches of bog were all washed out in the grey water. Sometimes there were flakes of snow in the rain. Then the storm would pass over and the whole world be shining and sparkling beyond Aladdin's jewels, and the wind would shake the rose bushes scattering diamonds and the little flowers would lift their wet faces to the sun.

She did not know that Maeve had unlocked Hugh's room, locked so long, and had set the windows open, and lit a fire in the rusty grate, and swept and dusted, and set the sheets and blankets to air so that the room should be ready against her nursling's return.

"Sure the ould head of her's cracked," said one of the servants to the other. "And isn't it the quare long journey he'd be takin' if he was to

come home?”

“It ‘ud break the Madam’s heart if she was to know of it,” said the other. “‘Tis a mercy she’s that tied to the Prince that she’s not likely to climb up here.”

The hooker brought provisions and other things from Galway to the castle. With a fair wind it was in before nightfall, but with the winds they had been having of late it was no use counting upon it. As likely as not it might be blown out of its way and not get in for a day yet. But there was always a sense of expectancy when the hooker was coming, both at the castle and in the tiny fishing village. It was the one link between Ardlewy and the world.

It brought Madam the newspapers, and the novels from the circulating library with which she read the Prince to sleep and the silks for her embroidery. She embroidered during the hours of the day in which she kept up a soft desultory conversation with the Prince, listening for the thousandth time to the old stories, leading his thoughts away gently when they got too near grievous things. Even Madam had her little sense of anticipation about the hooker.

The night came wet and wild, no moon and no star visible for the heavy clouds and the rain. The Prince went to bed early. Usually it was easy to read him to sleep, but this night he was restless.

“Put down the book, Grace,” he said at last, laying a hand over hers. “Let us talk about real things. So many things have happened to us since we were married. I remember the glint of your hair and the rose of your cheek under your veil of lace as though it were but yesterday.”

The wind seemed to have excited him as well as Maeve. He kept waking up, dropping asleep for a little while and then waking again. Madame replenished the fire, lit fresh candles, talked when he would talk, watched him while he slept. But the sleeps were of such short duration that she never thought of going to bed herself; they were so light that the gentlest movement awoke him.

“What is that?” he asked, about two o’clock in the morning.

“Only the wind in the chimney.”

“Wasn’t there some one at the door?”

“Only the wind.”

The wind rattled the door-handle as she spoke and the door lifted in its frame. None of the servants would sleep in the corridor which was reputed haunted, but huddled together for comfort somewhere in the lower regions. Madam had no fear of ghosts. Her own beloved ghosts had never returned to her. She had often thought that even if they would come as ghosts she would die of the joy of seeing them, of the satisfaction of having her long hunger slaked at last.

“When I am gone,” said the Prince, “you will be left alone, Grace, quite alone. There was not as lovely a girl as you in the country, nor one with such a seat in the saddle. I did badly for you, my poor girl.”

She stooped and kissed his hand passionately.

At the moment there came the far-away sound of the great door-knocker and she started.

“Who can it be,” she asked, “at this time of the night? If the hooker is in they would not waken us till morning. Ah, there it is again!”

“I was asleep,” said the Prince placidly, “and I dreamt that Hugh was coming home from school by the hooker, as he used to come. Stay, I will come with you. Why do not the stupid servants open the door?”

“They would expect to find a ghost,” Madam said, smiling palely. “The louder the knocking the more they will huddle under the clothes.”

She stood, holding the candle, while the Prince dressed. As they went down the stairs together the knocking at the door was louder, more insistent.

“It is like a hundred drums,” the Prince murmured to himself, letting down the bars of the door.

As it fell open the wind blew out the candle, and they could see nothing except some hooded uncertain shapes outside the door. But it was no ghost that spoke.

“We travelled by the hooker,” said a man’s muffled voice. “We were all but wrecked. We ask your hospitality.”

“Ardlewy has always welcomed the stranger,” said the Prince loftily. “Ah, here are lights. Come in, come in; there will be fire and food presently.”

There was exhilaration in his voice, something that had been long lost out of it. He took a candle from one of the half-dressed, curious servants, and led the way to the drawing-room. He did not notice how Madam glanced fearfully at the stranger whose face was in shadow. Was her head going like all the rest of them that she imagined voices ceased out of the world for ever?

She scarcely glanced at the young woman with the child held to her breast who followed the man. She crept up the great staircase behind them, softly clasping and unclasping her hands. In the drawing-room the Prince was lighting the candles in the huge chandelier. One of the servants came in with things to make a fire. Another followed with wine.

“We are half-drowned,” said the man again; and there was the sound of

water dripping on the polished floor.

Then some one flew in from the staircase with a cry; old Maeve with her hair dishevelled, but her eyes with the madness gone from them.

“Go to your mother, to her first,” she said, pushing the stranger into Madam’s arms. “I told her you were coming. I felt in the breast that nursed you that you were still warm. Feel him, Madam. ‘Tisn’t a ghost he is. ‘Tis Master Hugh come home.”

It was Master Hugh who had come back to life from death, who had come home with gold in plenty to lavish it on Ardlewy, who had brought back a wife and a son to restore the old joy to the place. The youth had come back to Ardlewy; life stirred again in the lonesome house, among the old hearts. The Prince came out of his memories and his dreams to the reality of his son and his son’s son. Once again there was a happy stir and movement in Ardlewy, as the old house renewed its youth. Madam would never be lonely now; and as for Maeve, busy in the nurseries, she had taken a new lease of life.

THE END

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