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ISMAY'S CHILDREN

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'HOGAN, M.P.'

'FLITTERS, TATTERS, AND THE COUNSELLOR'

'THE HON. MISS FERRARD'

ETC. ETC.

'An honest tale speeds best being plainly told'

IN TWO VOLUMES

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ISMAY'S CHILDREN

CHAPTER I

'Our purses shall be proud, our garments poor,
For 'tis the mind that makes the body rich;
And, as the sun breaks through the darkest clouds,
So honour peereth in the meanest habit.
What! is the jay more precious than the lark
Because his feathers are more beautiful?
Or is the adder better than the eel
Because his painted skin contents the eye?'

It was a fine spring morning—mild and soft, almost warm, although the middle of March had not yet been reached. Blackbirds and thrushes made the clear air ring; the crows, busy in the tall branches of the elms, exchanged cheerful notes with their neighbours. The full liquid murmur of the river completed the chord most musically, and with it all ran the mellow under-current of a tiny south wind—scarce above a breath—that just lifted and stirred the branches of the osier field. This osier field ran side by side with the high-road, fenced from it by a dike on this side, and on the other bordered by a ten-foot wall in somewhat ruinous condition, over which the tops of fruit-trees were visible, where the ivy and the tufts of parietary plants, grasses—now all dead and bleached—snapdragon, and old and straggling wall-flower, allowed them to be seen. A path, if a sort of irregular causeway of loose stones, sods, and tufts, with here and there the relics of a former hand-rail, deserved that name, ran through the field. The whole field

was a swamp pure and simple, yet the path gave evidence of frequent use. At this moment it was being traversed by a little old woman, who scrambled, jumped, and shuffled her way along at a rate and with a success that argued good practice among the sinuous dangers of the road. She wore a pair of enormous old boots, that had formerly been a man's, and carried an umbrella clutched in her left hand. This last was evidently worn more with a view to ornament than use, for no living human being could have told, without serious examination, at which end it opened. An ancient Paisley shawl reached to where the boots began and the nondescript skirt ended, and the whole edifice was crowned by a very large-sized drawn velvet bonnet, of a fashion at least a quarter of a century old. This odd figure was directing her steps from the high-road—the junction of which with the osier field was announced by a gap in the dike which flanked it—towards the ivy-clad garden wall. She soon reached a point under the wall facing a door that had once been green, to reach which she had to mount some three or four steps, marked by decayed planks and a dilapidated hand-rail, which had long ago been placed there.

Taking a tighter grasp still of the umbrella, the old woman was in the act of hoisting up her heavy foot-gear to the level of the steep steps, when a voice hailed her from the top of the wall.

'Kitty! Kitty Macan! What a time you have been. Did you meet a red-haired woman, and delay to come back and go out again?'

The old woman, between anger and the start the sudden address had caused her, tumbled backward and only saved herself a fall by grasping the rail. The address evidently exploded a ready mine.

'Oh, den! Good work you have dis morning, driving and frightening me. Oh Lord! I am crost, I am—and curst, I am; such a house! dere to say I was at the town las' evening—and notin' else would serve herself an' she knowing well—who else would know it?—dat we was out of tay, but wait till morning to give me work.'

'Come along, Kitty,' urged the invisible Gertrude; 'you will have me late for school.'

'Sweep ye, Godfrey, and Gertrude, and school, an' all den.'

This invective, gasped and sputtered out as Kitty Macan tumbled through the garden door, was in acknowledgment of a handful of mortar and lichens, which at that moment had dropped, not of its own accord, on to her bonnet.

The object of her wrath and projector of the missiles aforesaid dropped lightly off his perch on the wall, and, unheeding of the furious looks of the old woman, strode along beside her. He was a slim, reedy lad of about seventeen, or less, with that foreign look so often seen in the south of Ireland, thick, black hair, and a pale olive skin, curiously long-shaped eyes of an undecided colour, between brown and gray, looking almost greenish now as he half-closed their thick fringes against the sunlight. He was untidily and shabbily dressed,—one elbow was nearly through his old shooting-jacket, and there was a longish piece of wrist and shirt-cuff to be seen at the end of each sleeve.

Kitty Macan grumbled all the way up to the house,—the gooseberry bushes and winter cabbages being to all appearance not less receptive and sympathetic than her young master. They came to a dog-house just before they reached the back door. Godfrey slipped the chain with a touch of his long fingers; a greyhound bounded out and into his arms. Kitty Macan passed on into the kitchen, taking her grievance with her, while master and hound rolled together on the grass.

'Kitty! Kitty! Kitty, you old slieveen!' was her salutation there from a handsome girl of about twelve, who, with a lesson-book in her hand, was pacing about the floor. 'It is a quarter to ten. I wanted to drink the milk. Hurry —ah! do hurry!'

Kitty Macan's answer was to fling open a basket, extract a tin-foil covered parcel therefrom, and lay it with much unnecessary force upon the table. Then she placed her umbrella reverentially in its sanctuary behind the kitchen

door, and finally sat down and proceeded with a demonstratively deliberate manner to untie, remove, and stroke her velvet bonnet.

Gertrude—that was the schoolgirl's name—laughed, caught up the packet of tea, and ran off. Kitty Macan drew a deep sigh, hung the velvet bonnet on its nail on the kitchen dresser, and having put on a white apron, took a kettle, which was boiling wildly, off the turf fire, and followed her along a flagged passage to a room at the front of the house.

There a party of people were assembled, evidently waiting for breakfast. The schoolgirl was seated at table eating bread and butter; another girl, much taller, was seated in the window with an open book in her lap; and the third and only remaining member of the party sat in an arm-chair which had been moved half round from the fireside to the table. She was a very remarkable-looking old dame. A pair of round eyes, bright and hard as those of a bird of prey, lighted up a wrinkled countenance; bushy dark eyebrows contrasted with the thick hair which fell in short snow-white braids from under her black lace cap, along each cheek. A peremptory and metallic-sounding voice was raised high in exhortation as the old servant entered.

'Gertrude! call Godfrey—are you not ashamed to sit down in that manner, like a beast of the field, I protest it is, not to wait for others?'

'It is ten minutes to ten,' observed Gertrude, helping herself to bread.

Her grand-aunt made no further comment. She was busy now making tea in a great old painted china teapot, Kitty Macan aiding. This accomplished, Kitty placed the teapot, which the mischances of time and fate had reduced to wear a tin lid, in the grate amongst the turf ashes, and departed. Miss D'Arcy—that was the old lady's name—pushed back her chair with a sudden movement, so deftly calculated that it brought her right hand within easy reach of a cupboard in the room wall situated beside the fireplace. A bunch of keys was hanging in the keyhole of the door.

Having opened it she pushed the package of tea on to a shelf, shut the door with a smart bang and rattle of the keys, then swung round her arm-chair again and resumed her place at the table.

'Have you called Godfrey?' she asked of Gertrude, looking at that young lady with a fixed directness to which a palsied motion of her head and chin rather added emphasis. Gertrude, taking a large piece of bread and butter in her hands, so as to lose no time, left the room. She returned in a moment, followed by the greyhound and then Godfrey. The dog made straight for the fire, and lay down before it, keeping his sharp muzzle pointed upon the table and its occupants. Godfrey slowly lifted one of his long legs over the back of the chair ready placed for him, and sat down to breakfast, shaking the rather unsteadily balanced table as he did so, in a manner that called forth an impatient protest from Gertrude.

Miss D'Arcy poured out the tea; it was too great an effort for her to lift the teapot, so she stooped it so as to let its contents run out, the cloth generally receiving some small share. Gertrude helped herself to the cup nearest her, Godfrey leisurely cut up his slice of dark-looking country bread. His grand-aunt looked from him to a cup which was intended for him in a puzzled kind of way.

'Marion!' she said commandingly. The student in the window-seat laid down her book and rose obediently. If Godfrey and Gertrude Mauleverer gave the promise of beauty, Marion possessed it, and in no stinted share. She was tall and slim as became her years, which had not yet numbered eighteen, but her deep-chested well-proportioned frame gave indication of a riper magnificence to come. Great long-lashed eyes like her brother's, of a strange undecided tint between gray and brown, marked sweeping brows and a clear olive skin of a uniform paleness. Her hair, a rich blue-black, was brushed and coiled in a knot at the back. She took up one of the cups standing before Miss D'Arcy and laid it beside Godfrey's plate. He rewarded her for this friendly office with a gentle tap on her

hand with his knife-blade. Then she seated herself and began her own breakfast.

No one spoke. Gertrude ate with her eyes fixed upon the clock. Godfrey supported his head with one hand, and appeared to have forgotten every one's existence. His grand-aunt seemed to be absorbed in her breakfast, but she was watching every stir. From the wall, a portrait in pastel looked down on the group. No one could see all the faces in juxtaposition and doubt the relationship for an instant. It was the likeness of the young people's father, a handsome officer in regimentals. Marion and Godfrey's eyes were in shape and colour exactly like those of the picture, only for the moment seeming softer. Marion had the short upper lip, and Godfrey with it the richer tints of skin and black close-set hair. Gertrude's energetic countenance and sudden turns of head betrayed all the fiery recklessness of her soldier sire. They were an interesting trio of creatures, and their surroundings were certainly not out of keeping. One skilled in what a French writer calls the physiognomy of *things* might have found scope for much picturesque inference from the contents of the apartment in which Miss D'Arcy and her three reputed grand-relations were sitting. Everything was old and mostly decayed, a dull-red flock paper covered the walls, a carpet of indescribable texture and colour was on the floor. In the recess beside the fire, in a line with Miss D'Arcy's cupboard, was an old mahogany escritoire with book-shelves. A carved wooden bird seemed to have perched on the summit of this piece of furniture; its head was turned to one side, and seemed to correspond with a fat little gilt eagle on its eminence over the carved mirror of the chimney-piece, which reflected everything in the room broader than it was long. Quaint little miniatures,—a pair of worked-silk screens and a clock in Sèvres china, which seemed to have suffered more than one fall in its circumstances, so chipped and maltreated did it look,—furnished the chimney-piece. The pastel portrait was flanked by double rows of old mezzotint engravings of the last century, the glass in the frames of which was cracked and greatly fly-blown. Opposite to

these, a large old oil-painting, considerately hung right in the dark between the two windows, showed a perfectly black square surface set in a heavily-moulded yellow rim. At the far end of the room a spindle-legged semicircular table stood against the wall; on this table, which was covered by a white cloth, stood an image of Our Lady of Dolours, flanked by two china candlesticks and two Jenny and Jessamy vases full of fresh primroses. Three rosaries—one of carved olive-wood and with a fine ivory crucifix attached, one of tiny red beads, like ripe currants, and one of huge common black beads—lay before the statue; and in a little glass lamp of antique shape burned with the faintest flicker a tiny thread-like flame.

The room had a queer smell as of apples and hay blended. The earthiness that comes up from the boards in a house built upon the ground-floor,—though plenty of sweet fresh air had ingress from the loose-fitting casements,—seemed to weight the atmosphere.

The breakfast was soon over. Gertrude had gone—her long hair flying in the wind, as she leaped her way through the osier bed. Godfrey was stroking the hound and evidently meditating a move. Marion was busy gathering up the crumbs on a plate. Kitty Macan entered, tray in hand, and began to clear away the breakfast things.

'I heard dere is queer work up at Lambert's Castle—den—Miss D'Arcy, ma'am.'

Miss D'Arcy turned her eyes upon Kitty with a questioning look.

'I tol' you dat dere was an account of a match' (a south-country euphuism for an offer of marriage—the same being conveyed by a professional matchmaker) 'sent up dere from Capel's before Shraff Tuesday for Mary Ahearne. Oh, go 'long, Fly! you baste!'

Kitty Macan waited at this juncture until she had made a voyage out of the room with a trayful of the breakfast gear. When she returned she took up again the broken thread of her story.

'Harry Capel's fader and moder were giving him up the place—dey would go to their little farm out on the

Limerick Road. He have no one else to be in her way, and a fine boy, clever proper man. I could not begin to tell you what stock he has. Well—an' now—no! Mary Ahearne she have took something in her head—word came down with their girl Judy; if it is not true I renounce the sin of it, I do.'

Godfrey burst out laughing at the pious tone with which this last was said, and picking up a cap which lay somewhere near, ran out of the room hastily, followed tumultuously by the greyhound. He was joined after a minute or two by Marion. She held her plate of crumbs in her hand. In an instant a couple of pigeons were on her shoulder, cooing and flapping as she divided the crumbs between them.

'They have four eggs in the nest now; she will begin to sit shortly. I must look to the rats, else they'll nip our prospect of young ones in the bud.' Godfrey sauntered up and tried to stroke one of the birds as he spoke.

'I wonder,' began Marion—she stopped—'tell me—Godfrey! When did you see Harry Capel?'

'Why?' Godfrey darted a suspicious look at her.

'Nothing—nothing,' she replied. 'I was thinking could Kitty's news be true. I have not seen Mary since Sunday week.'

'Pooh! I imagine so. Why not?' Godfrey curled his handsome mouth into a sneer. 'Come down and see the thrush's nest where she has it in the old elder bush.'

'I wonder if Father Paul knows it,' said Marion as she laid the plate on the ground. The pigeons speedily followed it thither, but Fly with one application of his tongue made an end of its contents, and then dashed after his master. They proceeded leisurely along an alley bordered with fruit-trees that had once been espaliers, but had long ago burst their bondage and shot up and across at their own eccentric will. Grass and weeds fringed the walk, but among these also were polyanthus and primroses and brown wall-flowers just bursting into bloom. The knots of buds on the apple-trees were swelling and white. Here and there pear blossoms were just opening, and gave

their first sweet odours to the air. They had soon reached the elder bush—one of a thicket of recent growth, and self-planted, no doubt.

'Now,' said Godfrey, advancing his head into the branches, 'I expected as much after last night's shower. Now, Marion, bet you sixpence you don't find the nest.'

He drew back. Marion took his place, and peered anxiously among the boughs of the elder, bare as yet, but with every here and there at the joints little bouquets of a vivid green.

A moment elapsed—in silence. 'Don't breathe in it!' said Godfrey. 'Why, you goose! don't you see that? Run your eye straight along this bough towards the root. Now!'

'Oh—yes—five eggs! poor bird! She'll never escape the cat—so low down as that?'

'She will. I'll take care of that. I have a blackbird's too—in the stone-pine before the house. She has only one egg. I expect these out in a fortnight. I'll put them in the old cage and hang it just here close to the nest, and see if the old ones won't feed them.'

Marion did not answer him. She broke off a cluster of buds as she passed a pear tree and fastened them in her dress. Then she pulled up a cabbage by its overgrown head, and turned off into a yard to feed a couple of rabbits which were there. A goat made herself heard from one of the outbuildings, which were large and rambling. One of these, built outside close to the weir, had been once on a time a mill. There was a race carried across a projecting elbow of the river bank. A Quaker had long ago inhabited the place. He it was who had laid out and stocked the garden and had worked the mill, but as the corn-lands of Barrettstown and the neighbouring country passed into grazing and dairy-fields, and the repeal of the Corn Laws allowed the Americans to send flour into Barrettstown, the mill got less and less to do; the Quaker miller, without waiting to be starved out, sold his plant and removed himself to a commission business in Liverpool. The garden remained to the tender mercies of Nature. The mill fell

into ruin with a celerity not to be matched out of Ireland, and the dwelling-house became the abiding place of Marion, Godfrey, and Gertrude Mauleverer, with their maternal grand-aunt, Juliet D'Arcy, and her devoted follower Kitty Macan, as well as certain adherents pertaining to this last.

CHAPTER II

'There is nothing either good or bad
But thinking makes it so.'

MARION, Godfrey, and Gertrude Mauleverer were the children of Captain Godfrey Mauleverer, a wild Irish officer, the typical Hibernian *militaire* of adventuring disposition and extravagant habit; who had, with characteristic inconsiderateness retired from the world one or more days after the death of a rich and childless uncle had raised him from his state of military vagabondage to riches and rank.

It might be alleged, however, in excuse for this crowning act of the poor Captain's crazy folly, that he had no reason whatever in the ordinary course of nature to expect any inheritance from his uncle. Mauleverer of Barrettstown was a married man with a thriving family of five children, three of the five being boys when Captain Godfrey, some fifteen or more years anterior to his death, had last heard of his kinsman.

Not one of these five children survived their father, and Captain Godfrey Mauleverer's death being duly reported from a south of England port and confirmed, the next heir, a young man named Tighe O'Malley, the son of the only sister of Mauleverer of Barrettstown, stepped into his uncle's place, and an estate nominally worth seven thousand a year.

Godfrey had been a wanderer since the age of sixteen, when he entered a marching regiment as lieutenant, having purchased the grade with the small inheritance left him by his parents, both of whom died young. Nothing was known

of him by his relations. They had never heard of his marriage, nor had they even indirect knowledge of the fact that some twelve or more years before his death he had, when quartered in a little country town in the north of Ireland, induced a beautiful young girl, then a governess in a county family which had entertained the officers of his regiment, to leave the country with him. Ismay D'Arcy, then barely seventeen years old, belonged to a good old family, which 'the troubles,' the famine years, and then the Encumbered Estates Act, had all combined to reduce to penury. She was a distant relative of the family in whose employment she was, and Godfrey Maul-everer, then the beau-ideal of the seventeen-year-old girl, found it not too difficult to persuade her that it would be a change for the better in her circumstances to follow the drum. Her relatives, she said, were unkind, by which she probably meant unsympathetic. Neglectful they certainly proved themselves to be, for they took no trouble whatever to ascertain if the handsome lieutenant had repaired the wrong he had done the girl. They washed their hands of her and forgot all about her.

Years later, some intelligence reached the head of the house—how, no one was told—that Ismay was dying in Jersey, and that her aunt, Juliet D'Arcy, had been sent for in all haste from her own *habitat* in the mountains of Clare. He put a cheque for twenty pounds in a letter which he sent there and then to Juliet D'Arcy, and bade her ask for more if she found it needed when she reached 'the poor girl.' He was never reminded of this promise. Godfrey was not a man to suffer it, even had there been a necessity, which there was not, for Miss D'Arcy's niece was dying when she arrived, and but a few days afterwards she and the disconsolate husband laid her in her last resting-place in the parish graveyard.

There had been a marriage—'a Scotch marriage, very irregular'—the distraught Godfrey confessed between his paroxysms of grief, Juliet D'Arcy urging him, half-angry, but deeply pitying. He was always intending to be married in church to his darling Ismay. He would have done this

before the birth of Marion, the eldest, but he had been ordered to Malta, and had to leave her behind. Then it was put off and put off, and sometimes it was Ismay's own fault, for at times she would shrink from the avowal, at others urge it passionately. Then, when at last the boy was born, she thought it would be such a slur upon him, and so it was never done.

'But it was a marriage all the same,' protested Godfrey, with tearful sincerity. 'She need not be one bit afraid; they were all right so far as that went, and one day he would run down to Scotland and get her the proofs from the witnesses. He would, indeed, just to please her, some day soon.'

Juliet D'Arcy was as Irish as himself, and every bit as procrastinating and happy-go-lucky. She knew this ought to be done, but they were living out of Ireland, where alone people knew or cared anything for their affairs. The little white headstone in the graveyard bore the inscription, 'Ismay Mauleverer.' The children had no prospects of any sort. Godfrey could leave them nothing. He had nothing but his captain's pay; his regiment was now in Jersey, and there they remained. So day followed day, and weeks slipped into months peacefully and quietly. She was devoted to the children, and before long she became equally attached to their fascinating handsome father, and thus ended by giving herself but little trouble about what had once been the cross and vexation of her very existence. There was no one to remind her of it now, and she let it slip out of sight contentedly enough. Nothing stands still in this life, however, and Juliet D'Arcy was roughly awakened to a sense of her duty and responsibility, once for all and very suddenly.

She had crossed to Havre to make some purchases, one fine July morning, and at mid-day, as she was on the threshold of a draper's shop, she became aware of three familiar faces, and three well-known voices saluted her ears with an accent that roused her consciousness strangely, all speaking at once.

'Miss D'Arcy. I declare! It is herself. Juliet, my heavens! and can it be yourself.'

'Well, well, 'tis most extraordinary, and really agreeable too!'

Juliet recognised three old Clare neighbours and friends who had halted for a rest at Havre on their way for a long continental ramble. She left her shopping at once, only too glad of the encounter, and accompanied her friends—two sisters and their brother—to their hotel, where she spent the major portion of the day talking over old times, and exchanging news, or rather receiving it, for she—impelled by some unaccountable fatal impulse of concealment, for yielding to which she afterwards bitterly reproached herself,—gave them no information as to her whereabouts and occupation. They knew vaguely that she was with her runaway niece, of whose death they had never heard, and that there was a soreness connected with the subject which made it rather hard to approach under the circumstances of a casual meeting such as this. So they respected her reticence, and found plenty of interesting matter of conversation until dinner was over, when Juliet found she must hasten to the Jersey boat. The gentleman of the party, on account of whose ill-health they were travelling, escorted her to the pier. He had been one of Miss D'Arcy's admirers in the old days, for Juliet had been a belle in her time, and this Hyacinth Skerrett had been an old flame. Miss D'Arcy held him such: perhaps he did not remember so much. She took his arm silently, for the encounter with her old friends had waked some not altogether happy memories. She felt depressed, and overcome by a melancholy sense of isolation and homesickness. Her companion was silent also, but it was from another cause.

They soon reached the pier. The little steamer was just starting, and they were the last to arrive.

'Miss D'Arcy,' he said, clearing his throat with an effort, 'I—I—it was a great pleasure meeting you again in this way—it was indeed. And I've been thinking all day of something I did not like to mention—but I don't doubt you'll say I am right. Come on quick, they are going to pull away the gangway. Poor Ismay, her father and I

were boys together! Have you heard of Mauleverer of Barrettstown—Godfrey's uncle he is, you know?'

'Yes! yes!' gasped Juliet.

'Oh, Lord! she's off,' he cried, and sprang past her detaining hand and on to the pier, barely in time before the men hauled up the ladder. He turned and leaned over the edge.

'What? what is it?' cried Miss D'Arcy.

'Write to Father Paul Conroy,' shouted Mr. Skerrett. 'He is parish priest of Barrettstown. Don't you remember Conroy of Ballinavogue? You do. It's his brother then.'

'He is the parish priest of Barrettstown, you say, Paul Conroy,' screamed Miss D'Arcy in her strongest Clare brogue.

'Yes,' shouted back her friend, making, as he did so, a sign with his hand as if to say 'enough is said.' This was perhaps not unnecessary, for Miss D'Arcy was excited enough to have kept up a conversation all the way to Jersey.

Mr. Skerrett took off his hat and waved it; and Juliet, though her limbs were trembling with excitement and her mingled anxiety and terror were so great that she was murmuring incoherent questions still, replied gracefully with her pocket-handkerchief. She gazed back at Hyacinth Skerrett's lean figure as he slowly walked back along the pier, now and again turning his head to watch the steamer as she diminished in the distance.

'Father Paul Conroy,' repeated Juliet aloud. The importance of Mr. Skerrett's words seemed to grow and swell every minute as the tossing wake of the steamer stretched longer and longer behind, leaving the possessor of the secret far remote, and carrying her with her growing burden of bewilderment and anxiety, in solitary perplexity out to sea.

'Barrettstown—the parish priest'—and she pressed her hand tight to her forehead as though she thought thereby to stamp the remembrance indelibly on her brain, of the precious news she had heard, or rather the promise of

news. Hyacinth Skerrett—poor dear fellow! how aged he was, thought Juliet—had given her a friendly hint, it was plain.

What could have happened? Mauleverer was Godfrey's uncle, little Godfrey's grand-uncle. How glad she was that she had never mentioned poor Ismay; and yet, might it not have been as well, or better, to have said, just accidentally, '*Poor Mrs. Mauleverer is dead. Did you not see it in the papers?*' when in truth no such announcement had ever appeared. Yes, Juliet thought now that she ought to have forced herself to make that speech, or one something like it. It certainly would have been against the grain to utter it, but she told herself that she ought to have faced the matter and set Ismay's memory right, she herself being dead and gone, and out of reach of all comment. But old habit had prevailed and carried the day. For good or evil she had been silent.

'Mauleverer of Barrettstown and Father Paul Conroy'—the names rang like chimes in her ears, and set themselves to the clanking of the engine and the throb of the paddles. She had seated herself on a camp-stool, and leaning her elbows on her knees, held both her temples with the palms of her hands.

Godfrey might be counted on to know nothing whatever of the portent of Hyacinth Skerrett's enigmatical deliverance. He was not the one to read the riddle. Even if she found him at home, for he was to start that evening on a fortnight's yachting trip with a Sir Harry Somebody or other; probably, if wind and weather suited, would have left ere she arrived. And his promised journey to Scotland! Juliet rose now from her camp-stool so suddenly that she upset it, and began to walk up and down the deck in a fever of impatience. She blamed herself for her supineness and recklessness. The whole future of Ismay's children was now depending on a matter which she had allowed to be thrust into the background as of no importance. What if Godfrey had gone by this, taking the secret with him. What clue had she to discover when and where the irregular marriage had

taken place. Suppose the yacht lost and all lost with him!

She got home at last, how she could not have told. It seemed like an awakening from a hideous nightmare when, on hearing her hand touch the latch of the little garden gate, Captain Mauleverer's tall shape rose in the summer twilight from a little rose-covered garden seat, where he had been waiting for her.

'At last!' he cried, hastening down the alley, and throwing away his cigar as he came.

'Oh! Godfrey!' she cried, 'come in. I am not able to stand, I am so tired. Come in with me, dear.' The Captain drew her arm into his, and led her into the little sitting-room. The lamp was lighted. He marked her paleness, and poured out a glass of wine for her. She put his hand aside.

'I am so frightened,' she began breathlessly, 'and I don't know for what. Who do you think I met in Havre. Hyacinth Skerrett and the two girls his sisters going to Homburg for his gout or theirs, I forget which, but it was he told me. I stopped with them all day, talking over old times with Mary and Charlotte. They're my cousins just twice removed; you remember Matty Skerrett married twice, and the second time it was a cousin of the same name as herself; the first was a D'Arcy, not the D'Arcys of the Hill, these are D'Arcys of Levalley. Matty had no children.'

Godfrey nodded and began to light a fresh cigar.

'Oh dear!' sighed Miss Juliet. She had exhausted herself in the family ramifications. 'That is not what I've to tell you though. Hyacinth Skerrett came to see me on board, and, indeed, he might not have left his news to the last minute that way. Your Uncle Godfrey Mauleverer of Barrettstown—I am to write to Father Paul Conroy the parish priest of the place, and a brother of Conroy of Ballinavogue, and indeed there is at least the rinsings of a tub of relationship between that Conroy and the D'Arcys.'

'Juliet, my dear,' observed Godfrey, who was wondering

what there was in all this to distress her, 'I don't know any of these west country people, and I have told you that often enough, I think.' He smoked for a second or two, then observing the wild eyes with which she was staring at him, he resumed:

'Come, let us have your news.'

'But I have told it to you,' she burst out. 'Oh, Godfrey! you don't seem as if you cared one pin, sitting there smoking as if it was nothing at all, and for all we know your uncle may be dead and all his children with him.'

'What?' said Godfrey, 'have they cholera in Barrettstown? or are you telling me one of your dreams again?'

He removed his cigar from his mouth and fixed his great dark eyes on her with a startled look that contradicted his speech. Juliet began to sob with pure exhaustion and exasperation.

'It was just this way, then. We were the last to get on board, and he had barely a minute; his words were these just as I'm telling you now: "Poor Ismay's father and I were boys together"—or friends—he said one or other. "Mauleverer's uncle at Barrettstown is—" and then he had to run to get on shore as the boat was going, so he shouted to me off the wharf: "Write to Father Paul Conroy the parish priest," and told me he was by way a connection of my own, and that he would give me the news—and there must be something, Godfrey.'

Godfrey was silent for a moment. 'My uncle is not above sixty, I don't fancy,' he said, resuming his cigar, 'and he has three sons; one of them must be of age by this; there were two of them at Eton when last I heard of them. Let me see, when was that? fifty-one, or was it fifty-three, eh?' He ruminated a moment. 'Come, Ju, drink your glass of wine, old woman, and go to bed. You are tired and nervous, and you are excited about those children, and have taken some *fantigue* into your head. Come, it is a day-dream this of yours. Here, drink it, I insist on it.'

Poor Miss D'Arcy drank the glass of wine which God-

frey held to her lips. 'But I tell you, Godfrey,' she insisted. 'There is *something*. There must be. Anyhow,' she said, 'you'll write to Father Paul Conroy, eh? won't you, dear?'

'Tush! yes! I'll see! Have some supper. I bade Amélie have supper for you. I am off. Sir Harry Crashaw's yacht is to start with the next tide — that is to say three in the morning. I should be on board now, only that I waited to see you. I don't know when we'll get back.'

Miss D'Arcy looked at him and burst into a fit of weeping.

'Oh, Godfrey, Godfrey. Will you ever have sense? Will you ever think of doing your duty by these poor lambs? What did you promise me long ago, beside their poor dead mother?'

She tried to rise from her chair but was unable. Godfrey laid his cigar in an ash-tray and walked across the room to her.

'Look here, Juliet,' he said, in a low but most intense tone, 'you are not very complimentary to me, by Jove! Do you imagine, you old goose, that if there was the least thing wrong—the legitimacy of my children ever questionable—that I should not have set it right long ago, eh?—do you? You have taken some nonsensical notion into your head, old lady! There now, good-bye! you are only delaying me.'

The window was open, and the wind, which had risen and was blowing from the east, carried in the sound of the incoming tide breaking on the pebbly strand, not thirty yards from where they were. A sharp whistle was heard. It was the signal from the cutter sent from the yacht.

'Juliet,' said Godfrey, 'they are looking for me. Now, there's a good soul!'

He soothed and stroked her. She ceased to sob, and an expression of almost resigned despair came into her face.

'I must go—I cannot stay.'

'Don't,'—she had risen from her chair and caught his sleeve as he was leaving the room.

'One word! Godfrey, dear,' she pleaded, 'one word. Tell me the name at least of the place you and Ismay were married in.'

'I must go; they are looking for me,' he cried impatiently; 'don't you hear the wind rising? We shall not be able to get out if I don't go. Aird's West, the Royal Stag. Aird's West, then, since you must, Ju! It was irregular—no clergyman, you know, and that! I'm gone! good-bye!'

The door shut almost simultaneously, and Juliet was left alone. The sound of the sea seemed to grow louder and louder, and the little casement, which had been open all day, shut with a sudden clap which startled her. Then it flew open again just as suddenly, and she heard the order, 'Give way,' in Godfrey's voice, as the wind carried it to her. The yachtsmen were in waiting on the beach just at the foot of the garden, and the breeze carried the voices to her. Then she could hear the measured beat of the oars, for an instant only, and all was silent again save for the rising storm and tide.

Amélie the *bonne* came in now with some food, but failed to induce her mistress to touch it, and finally retired, thinking there had been a scene—nothing uncommon in the household. Madame, being quick and expansive, was given to extremes of word and act, while Monsieur, if indulgent and amiable, was decidedly provoking.

Tired as Miss D'Arcy was, she could not retire to rest until she had taken action in some way upon the information given her by her friend of the afternoon; so she seated herself at her desk, and began a letter to Father Paul Conroy of Barrettstown. Exhausted and stupefied as she was by the excitement she had undergone, she retained grasp sufficient of her intellect to arrange the points of her letter with characteristic diplomacy, and to present them in the proper order to the mind of the person whose interest she desired to gain.

The D'Arcys were ancient stock. The name of a County Clare D'Arcy, as Miss Juliet was in the habit of saying, carried weight with every one who knew anything, and a cousin,

a female D'Arcy, had once married a Chadwick. 'Yes,' mused the letter-writer, 'Marion D'Arcy's daughter by that Chadwick man was the mother of Father Paul Conroy. I'll put that first, yes, he will take an interest after that in doing me an obligation just like one of our own,' thought the astute princess of the Clan D'Arcy. Accordingly she began on the first sheet of thin letter paper she could find, but no sooner had she fixed her eyes on the paper and endeavoured to concentrate her thoughts on wording her ideas, than a burning headache intervened and forced her to resign the task. She recollected also that there was no post now before noon of the following day; so, gladly and reluctantly all at once, she closed her desk and retired to her room—not to bed yet. Tired and in pain as she was, and inviting as her white couch was, Juliet knelt in prayer for a good half-hour before her little oratory.

The next day, refreshed and more at ease, Miss D'Arcy's industry was rewarded by a very satisfactory result, in the shape of the following letter written in the fine antique Italian hand which yet survives in Ireland, and which a good hour before the mail closed she had finished, and was reading and re-reading with great pleasure to herself:—

'REVEREND AND DEAR SIR—The matter of this letter must be my apology, feeling as I do that no personal excuse that I could bring forward would suffice for venturing to intrude upon you. May I be permitted by way of preamble to recall to you that there exists in a considerable degree a relationship between ourselves? Your maternal grandmother was a full cousin once removed of myself, who have the honour of addressing you. I allude to Miss Marion D'Arcy, who married one James Chadwick, the grandmother of yourself and your esteemed brother, Mr. Phelim Conroy of Ballinavogue, close to my late father's place, Sheepstown. I mention this circumstance in the full conviction that it will have the effect I wish, namely, to interest you as a relative in the business which I have at heart in writing to you, and which is nothing less than a family concern of the highest importance.

'I will now proceed to lay it before you. My late niece—God have mercy on her—Ismay D'Arcy, being at that time seventeen years of age, married and ran away with the nephew' (Juliet reversed purposely the order of things) 'and namesake of Mr. Godfrey Mauleverer in your parish. Captain Mauleverer has been on bad terms with his uncle. Indeed there has never been at any time any communication between them. I know that old Godfrey Mauleverer is married and has five children, three of them being sons, but if it had been otherwise, or if these sons were to die before him, my niece's husband is the next-of-kin, the estates being entailed. It is in his interest and that of his three children that I venture to act upon a suggestion made to me recently by a friend, that I should write to you and ask for information concerning his unknown family at Barrettstown.

'Only that I fear to trespass too long upon your time and patience, I would enter into the circumstances under which the suggestion was made, and the reason why it has made me so anxious to obtain this intelligence. I have been abroad now for nearly nine years; almost all my immediate friends have departed this world; there is no one to whom I could apply in this matter with such confidence and surety as to yourself, who, living upon the spot, can tell me without difficulty or trouble the exact present circumstances of our relative's family. By doing so at your earliest convenience you will confer a great favour upon and earn the lasting gratitude and prayers of—Yours most obediently ✠ in J. C.,

JULIET D'ARCY.'

'Blessed Virgin Mother,' murmured Miss D'Arcy, as she folded up the foregoing, 'protect and guide me!'

When she had sealed the letter with the D'Arcy crest—a griffin's head and one claw—she carried it herself to the post, judiciously reserving it till one minute before the expiration of the stated time of collection, in order to baffle the curiosity of the post people, of whom she entertained suspicions, grounded on her experience of the

officials of her native district, as, for that matter, she did of all the world outside the Clan D'Arcy.

Her letter gone, Miss D'Arcy gave herself up to a state of pious and resigned, as she thought, but in reality extremely fidgety, anxiety. Godfrey sent word by a fisherman that he would not be back for a good week, which, experience told her, might mean a fortnight. She did not know how long it would take for her letter to go to Barrettstown, Co. Cork; the people at the post-office could have told her at once, but she would die rather than question them. A week passed thus, and she began to despair. The fact was that Father Conroy had gone to Dublin the very morning of the day on which her letter arrived, passing that precious missive on his way. He was a witness in a will case, and as he intended to return from town next day at latest, he desired his housekeeper not to forward anything to him. He was delayed in Dublin for nearly a week after his arrival there. When he at last got home and read Miss D'Arcy's letter he found news indeed to send her, and of so serious a nature that he thought it best to telegraph it. But he might as well have written. The day before his despatch arrived Miss D'Arcy had been summoned in all haste to Portsmouth. The yacht had put in there in search of medical aid for Captain Mauleverer, who was ill of a malignant fever. Ten days later she returned to the cottage bringing with her all that remained of Godfrey sealed up in a leaden coffin. He had always said that, no matter where he died, he wished to be buried beside Ismay. Juliet received her telegram at the hands of the weeping Amélie, and the letter which had followed it by the next post. The telegram announced the death, more than a fortnight before, of Godfrey Mauleverer of Barrettstown. The letter gave details of his last illness which was consequent upon the shock received from the death of his son, the last child left of five who had been spared to adolescence. Father Paul Conroy added that he waited her instructions, and asked her to telegraph, and desire her man of business to enter the children's claim if there were a boy among them. But Juliet D'Arcy was

unable to do so: she was ill—body and mind had given way under the strain of the last few weeks. Godfrey's friends took charge of the burial arrangements; and it was not for nearly a month afterwards, and then in defiance of doctor and nurse, that she rose, white-haired and suddenly aged, from her bed of suffering.

Driven by an impulse she could not withstand, she collected with feverish energy and packed all that was portable of the family goods, and taking the three children with her, set off—home. 'Home' was the only answer she vouchsafed to the children's questions, and this was given with a tone and look which silenced, if it did not content, them.

CHAPTER III

'Between the acting of a dreadful thing
And the first motion, all the interim is
Like a phantasma or a hideous dream,
The genius and the mortal instruments
Are then in council, and the state of man
Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
The nature of an insurrection.'

FATHER PAUL CONROY—that person of whom Miss Juliet D'Arcy remarked that there existed the rinsings of a tub of relationship between him and her own august family, and to whom she confessed 'a considerable degree' of the same magic tie, was taking the air calmly in the front garden of his presbytery of Barrettstown. It was about three o'clock of a lovely September day. Dinner was over, and Father Paul, sauntering among his flower-beds, full of overgrown mignonette and a rare luxuriance of nasturtiums, drew now and again a long sigh of pleased acquiescence in the various beauties that lay about him, all of which he appreciated naturally, and with no view to future literary use. He did not even describe them in his own thoughts to himself. The wide view across the Barrettwater, over the bog to the blue heights of the mountains that shut in the Shannon; the autumn glories of the woods to his right and left, and behind the bran new church and presbytery; the balmy scented air through which the gossamers were floating; the scent of the full-blown clove-pinks which had tumbled over the box-edges and sprawled at his feet; the dreamy buzz of the bees, working as for dear life in the

mignonette, scuffling up and down the stems and saluting each other with an impatient *crescendo*, more zealous than civil—it was all grateful and pleasant, and Father Paul thought what excellent potatoes he had had for dinner, and hoped in his heart that all and every one of his parishioners had as good to dig that very day.

Miss D'Arcy's relative was a very tall, burly-figured old man; his massive head, thickly covered with dark gray hair, was slightly stooped, but although he was sixty-five or thereabouts, there were few other signs of age about him. He was as active and strong as most men of half his years, and his rugged homely countenance, which was never shaved oftener than three times a week, if not beautiful, was kindly and amiable in the extreme. He was going to the chapel shortly, to hear confessions, so wore his camlet cassock, buttoned up all crookedly and well trimmed with snuff. A newspaper, which he had been reading, was crumpled up under one arm. His reverence was looking in an absent kind of way about him when a step sounded on the road which ran in front of his house. He raised his head and saw a farmer from the mountain district passing homewards.

'Fine day, Doyle,' said his reverence, with a tremendous chest voice.

'Ay, so, your reverence,' replied the passer-by, taking off his hat.

'Are you getting in your oats, above there?'

'Fait', then, your reverence, we are at the turf yet. You see it got no drying with us till now.'

'Don't lose this weather, Doyle; it won't last. Have you a paper going home with you?'

'I have, sir; the Carlists are defeated again, I see.'

'Indeed, yes. I see that.'

The wayfarer took off his hat again and passed out of sight along the Dublin Road, which was nearly a foot deep in dust. Father Paul straightened the prop of a bunch of carnations, and turned to saunter into the Chapel House. A rapid step, and almost simultaneously the click of the latch, made him look round. It was a servant from the

Barrettstown Arms. Father Paul cast a keen glance at him, and stood perfectly still until the messenger had approached close to him. It was not that he had not observed the excitement and flurry of the Mercury. Long practice had made his reverence a trifle cynical as to such outward signs. He was in the act of taking snuff when the boy got up to him, and, pulling his front hair, began all in one breath—

'There is a lady after arrived by the down train, your reverence—must see you this minute.'

'A lady—and who? What sort of—of lady?'

'An owld wan, your reverence, and three children wid her, and has a lot of luggage.'

Father Paul's deep-set eyes kindled, and he started.

'Miss—Miss——!' broke from his lips.

'Miss D'Arcy, your reverence,' supplied the messenger, 'and bid me to say she wanted to see you immediately, sir.'

'You ignorant scoundrel, how dare you, sir, not give your message properly at first, you common runagate—you! You are unfit to feed a pig! Who presumed to send you to give me a message from a lady? Begone out of my sight.'

The final recommendation was quite unnecessary. Father Paul's voice was enough to frighten an army, and the messenger was running off much faster than he had come. The last vibration had little more than died away upon the air, when his reverence, having exchanged the rusty cassock for his best Sunday coat, and surmounted his massive grizzled head with a chimney-pot hat of immense height, was striding off towards the village with his longest steps.

The hotel, towards which the parish priest was hastening, was the largest building in Barrettstown, and occupied a good share of the main street of the town. It was a low, rambling, two-storied building with dilapidated jalousies to the windows, a porch with wooden benches and some seats under a row of well-grown chestnuts, which, with a low parapet that guarded the river bank, gave it an odd, almost foreign look. In the old posting days it had been a

prosperous and busy hostelry. The great mass of stables and outhouses now in ruins bore witness to a time of activity and custom of which nothing else remained. The place seemed now all asleep and half-abandoned. A one-horse car in dry weather, and a fearful old omnibus in wet, attended the up and down trains, which called at a station four miles distant from the town. To save labour, the wretched animal stood in the shafts all day long. It was not worth while to unharness him for the couple of hours between those excursions.

Now and again during the day the Barrettstown Arms showed signs of life. When visitors arrived, which was seldom, a small crowd usually collected to inspect their luggage and themselves when opportunity offered. After bank hours, the officials were usually to be found in the porch, one or two generally boarding in the hotel. When the Dublin newspapers arrived, late in the afternoon, there were always a select three or four politicians and the local letter-writer to welcome their advent. The bar and the coffee-room were seldom untenanted after three—the rest of the house was a wilderness, a great empty spider's web spread in vain.

The advent of an old lady and three children with a huge quantity of luggage, with the addition of authentic reports in circulation of a couple of cartloads lying at the railway station, could not fail to attract a throng of the curious. The leading beggars, 'Lord Cork,' and Andy and his wife Peggy, were grouped to advantage outside the porch, which was occupied by idlers of a higher social position, all talking over the novelty so busily that they never saw Father Paul Conroy's approach.

Some of the bolder spirits had even penetrated into the hall, and were busy twisting their necks to read the labels on the battered portmanteaus and dilapidated trunks that lay piled in a heap quite distinct from the bagmen's cases, when a gruff and resonant—

'Hoh! Mrs. Fagan!' routed the inquisitors like a bomb-shell, and sent them all shuffling apologetically backwards, where they met the external pack crowding inward, all agape to see what would happen next.

Mrs. Fagan appeared without an instant's delay and curtsied for answer.

'Miss D'Arcy here?'

'Yes, father, this way, sir.' She moved as if to lead the way upstairs.

'TAKE UP MY CARD!' ordered his reverence, in a manner that made itself heard and felt all down the street. Mrs. Fagan received the card reverentially, carried it off, and returned without loss of time to show Father Conroy up. He at once removed his hat, and carrying it in one hand, followed the landlady. Not a single voice among the crowd interrupted the creaking of the staircase under his reverence's ponderous tread.

'Madam, I am glad and proud to have this opportunity of making your acquaintance.'

Father Paul had prepared this speech as he followed Mrs. Fagan up the staircase, and he said it in the most mechanical manner the instant that he heard the door close behind him, and almost before he realised the presence of the personage before him.

Perhaps, had he not provided himself with a ready-made formula wherewith to open the proceedings, the worthy father would have found himself quite tongue-tied from astonishment, — the unusualness of the apparition before him being of itself quite startling and unexpected, while the manner of the queer little wild-eyed old woman, which was strained and artificial in the last degree, only added to his amazement.

Miss D'Arcy, with a somewhat eccentric idea of impressing her relative, had attired herself in a long-tailed black silk gown, quaint of design and make. Yellow antique lace made a framing for an anxious drawn face, the colour of which was even a more pronounced yellow, a high aquiline nose, arched black brows, and brilliant wide-opened eyes of the same colour, which snowy white hair, brushed back over a roll, only made all the more startling for the contrast. Two dull-red spots burned in each of Juliet D'Arcy's cheeks, and the hand with which she indicated a chair to her visitor was like that of a fever patient.

'I have to thank you for your telegram, sir.' She spoke with a queer premeditated foreign accent, as designed as her attire. 'It was most kind, most friendly, but I could not avail myself of it—a sad affliction had called me from home. Those children of whom I wrote to you—are now orphans.'

Father Paul, who was indeed impressed to the verge of stupefaction, never taking his eyes off her, uttered a sympathetic groan.

'Their father, my nephew, the husband of my poor niece, Ismay D'Arcy *that was*, Mrs. Mauleverer, died suddenly.'

'I understand, madam, by your letter of the—eh! ah, well! the date's of secondary importance—that by the death of Godfrey Mauleverer without direct heir, your nephew—the estates being entailed—succeeds.'

'Certainly, it is so.'

'And your nephew, Captain Mauleverer, the heir in question, has been removed by death, and suddenly, you tell me, since his uncle's death.'

Miss D'Arcy put a lace-edged handkerchief to her eyes in token of assent. She was not crying—she had not been able to shed a single tear since Godfrey's death. It seemed as if a raging fire were consuming her: her eyes felt as if they were filled with hot sand.

'Then,' said Father Paul, 'his son, if he has left a son, inherits——'

Miss D'Arcy rose suddenly and opened a door leading to an inner apartment.

'Come!' she said imperiously. Godfrey walked in first, followed by the two girls. He was a strikingly beautiful child. His thick black curls clustered round a white forehead, the aristocratic features and bearing which marked him, and the belted blouse, of quaint half-French fashion, and untanned leather boots, all contributed together to bewitch the old priest. Father Conroy could hardly remove his eyes from the living answer to his question. Speech he found none. He drew the little fellow, who was far more self-possessed than he, to him. No child was afraid of Father Paul.

The dirtiest baby of the river-side cabin population left its mud pie on his approach and fearlessly thrust its grubby paw in his hand, or laid hold of the long tails of his rusty coat. It was on record in Barrettstown that a woman who found occasion to beat her four-year-old boy was threatened by him with Father Paul's vengeance, and that the urchin actually did set off, roaring, to the Chapel House, to make good his threat.

Godfrey, having taken a good survey of his new friend's features, leaned against his knee and turned his back to him. His sisters now engaged Father Paul's attention. The twelve-years-old Marion made a reverence, as her *bonne*, now left behind in Jersey, had taught her. She was a tall swarthy-looking child with promise of great beauty in her yet unformed features and lustrous thoughtful eyes; the youngest, Gertrude, hung in her grand-aunt's skirts, and peeped shyly at him. She was speedily transferred to his knee.

'Yes,' said Miss D'Arcy, with a sigh that seemed to come from the depths of her heart, 'that is Godfrey's son. I have his picture. You will see, reverend father, how strong the resemblance is.'

Father Paul ceased stroking Gertrude's curls.

'I attended the old man in his last illness. You are aware perhaps, madam, that he left the Church thirty years ago. Yes, Mauleverer "turned" with his wife, who was an English Protestant. He made a death-bed repentance, a sincere if tardy one, poor fellow—God rest his soul. He spoke to me of his successor and sa——'

'Go! children,' interrupted Miss D'Arcy hastily. 'Marion, take Gertrude. I beg your pardon, father?'

'*Viens donc*,' said the little girl, taking her sister's hand.

'They speak French?' murmured Father Paul, completely awestruck.

'Oh yes, it is the same to them as English,' she replied. A wan smile lighted up her face for a second as she watched the admiring look with which he followed them out of the door. It faded away, and it was with an intensified nervousness that she said to him—

'You were saying——?'

'He did not know that his nephew was a married man?' Father Paul said directly.

For more than a week that question—for to her it was a question, though poor Father Paul intended but a simple assertion — had been sounding in Juliet D'Arcy's ears. Prepared and ready as she was, it seemed to her as if some cruel cold hand had seized her heart and was squeezing it remorselessly.

'There was for thirty years no communication between Godfrey and his uncle,' she replied, with an effort.

Father Paul was gazing straight before him into the cut-paper decorations of the grate. He was remarking to himself—rather tritely—that the ways of Providence were truly dark and mysterious, and specially thinking with reference to the same, of the downfall close at hand for young Tighe O'Malley, the assumed heir-at-law of Barrettstown, who had just begun to throne it in the great house. Father Paul sat silent for an instant, then turned his eyes to Miss D'Arcy, waiting for her to speak. She clasped her hands together, to still their nervous movement, and after an effort said:

'Father Conroy, it was not to tell you this alone that I sent for you here to-day. I—I am sorely in need of your help and advice!'

Juliet was speaking now with her own natural voice and with a vastly different manner; all her imposingness and foreign dignity and accent had gone together. West Clare was the common tongue of both, and the familiar accents stirred more than one fibre of sympathy in Father Paul Conroy.

'Eh, well now, dear child,' he said kindly, falling at once into his confessional manner, 'sure I am here to help you, and for God's sake, and old times' sake, willing, and please God able, to do that same, and now go on and tell me.'

The lonely overtaxed old woman felt as if a door had opened to her at last, giving at least a glimpse of a state beyond all trouble, and she began her story at the beginning.

'The creature was young, desolate, and may be foolish,

and those D'Arcy Totnams treated her badly. Oh, no doubt of that, however, they—they ran off, and there was a Scotch marriage. I have it all,' she added quickly, in response to his frown, 'and all about it from the poor fellow, the night he went off in that ill-fated way. I don't know what it was, something came over me; I had met old friends who gave me news of his people and bid me write to you, and I was feeling as if something was to happen, so before he went I attacked Godfrey—it was the last time I ever heard him speak. When I got to him at Portsmouth he was out of his mind. Oh! why did I neglect to make him go down to Scotland and get the proofs and see the people? Oh, Ismay, Ismay!' she cried, wringing her hands, 'will you ever forgive me?'

'It will stand,' said Father Paul hastily, 'in law it will stand. Of course the witnesses can be found. The first thing is, though, to inform Mr. O'Malley. Your best plan is to see him and state your case to him and to a lawyer also. I wonder now—excuse me, Miss D'Arcy—why did you not communicate with young O'Malley through your lawyer first?'

Juliet put her hands to her head and pressed it with a dazed look.

'I'll tell you then, father. I was left by myself, and then that Hyacinth Skerrett put you in my head. The one thought I had since ever the poor fellow died was to make straight for this place. Anyhow, is it not where we have a right to be? Surely it is not you, a blood-relation of our own, that will say to me it is not the place for Godfrey's children?'

'Humph! humph! right—right, may be!' He ruminated for one moment. Then, pulling out his watch, he said, 'I should have been in the chapel this half-hour, Miss D'Arcy. However, it seems to me in the interests of all parties the sooner this business is got over the better. I will send a note to Mr. O'Malley to-night, giving him a—a—well, a hint of affairs, and ask him just to come down to see you at once, at his convenience, that is. Well, eh?'—a prolonged inarticulate murmur, expressive of deep considera-

tion issued from Father Paul's lips. 'Not here,' he added after a pause, 'you had better not have your interview here, for many reasons. Madam, my house, if you will honour me, is at your service. Mr. O'Malley will see you there.'

He rose now, and as he finished speaking held out his hand to the forlorn old creature. She took it gratefully and simply as it was offered, forgetting her studied part altogether. A smile lighted up Father Paul's face, and a late sunbeam stole in at the window just in time to meet it, and to gild his two-days-old stubble of beard, investing his homely, kindly countenance with a sort of beatified look. Bewildered as poor Juliet was, she saw this, and became infected by it as by some happy omen. The hard, drawn face relaxed for an instant; she seemed to feel a sense of rest or tranquillity, almost ease—the first for a long time. But the old priest had no sooner left her than the cloud once more overshadowed her. The old sense of solitude and uprootedness was upon her again. The almost maniacal look of anxious tension returned to her eyes, she paced up and down the room until her limbs refused to carry her, then threw herself on her knees and prayed with a perfect agony of supplication.

Father Conroy sent a note to Mr. Tighe O'Malley that evening, requesting him to call at Chapel House the following day at ten in the morning. Mr. O'Malley was absent with a shooting-party, and did not return until late at night, and Father Conroy's note, which the young gentleman suspected to be concerning some manorial business, was left to the very last. However, it got its turn in the course of time, and a perusal of the very first couple of lines caused him to drop his cigar contemptuously with a lively execration upon the breakfast-table. Then he burst into a laugh, dropped the letter upon the table and began to walk up and down upon the hearth-rug.

Father Conroy's 'hint of affairs' had been of the very broadest description. He had, in fact, plainly and candidly informed Mr. Tighe O'Malley that a lady had arrived with three children—one of them a boy—whom she asserted to be the children and heirs of his late cousin Godfrey, who had

survived his uncle's death not more than a fortnight. 'I tell you frankly,' the rev. father added, 'that there is some informality in the marriage, and that in consequence, litigation may be looked for naturally. I think it in the interests of both parties that you should see this lady and hear her statement.'

'What a joke this all is, to be sure!' Mr. O'Malley said aloud, then he stuffed the letter into the pocket of his shooting-coat, and walked over to the window of the breakfast-room and surveyed the scene without, or seemed to, rather, for the frowning brows and compressed lips told rather of internal than of external contemplation. He was a very handsome young fellow, dark enough of complexion to suggest a relationship with the little Godfrey at the inn in the village below. He had the look of one who could, and did, enjoy life. It would be hard for him to turn out, to resign his seven thousand a year, and go back to the meagre two hundred which his father had been able to allow him. Mr. O'Malley's reverie did not last long. He rang the bell with a vigour that brought a servant almost immediately.

'The dog-cart, Brady! in one minute, do you hear? The sooner I get this over me, the better chance I am likely to have with the partridges to-day,' he murmured.

The news had shocked him. His healthy red cheeks had blanched, and as he lifted the litter of papers off the table, and dropped them into an escritoire with a folding lid, his hand shook so much that he noticed it himself. He left the room, and proceeding to the dining-room buffet, poured himself out about three parts of a glass of brandy. Then he pulled on his gloves, selected a whip from a rack in the hall, and took his stand upon the steps to wait for the dog-cart. The brandy had sent the blood circulating a little faster in his brain. Whether caused by the shock or the unwonted stimulant, a slight giddiness came over Tighe O'Malley. The scarlet and yellow of the flower-beds seemed to be blurred together, and the long even vista down the drive between the trunks of the great beeches swam a little before his eyes.

The cool nipping air of the September morning soon restored him to his physical balance at least, and as he cast an appreciative glance round him at the beautiful stretch of park, wood, and water, hill and dale and bog, reaching over to the violet-coloured mountains—of which a break in the wood gave a distant glimpse—all his own, he clutched the whip-handle tightly, and muttered, 'I'll fight, by——; no compromise! All or nothing! I'll see it out, if it costs me twenty years' income.'

The dog-cart came round the drive. He sprang into his seat and the frisky chestnut gave him enough to think about for a little while. Fast as he drove, it was a quarter-past ten when he drew rein at the Chapel House gate. Father Conroy met him at the foot of the steps, his rugged face wearing a troubled puzzled look. He bowed to Mr. O'Malley, who replied to this courtesy by an extremely distant inclination, it having just entered his Irish Evangelical head, that this sudden apparition of a hitherto unexpected heir might be a Popish plot against the Protestant succession in his own person. He set his teeth hard to keep in some ugly words, as he stepped hurriedly into Father Conroy's dining-room. He looked round as he entered the door, with the air of one keen for the fray, but there was no one to be seen. Father Paul closed the door.

'The reason, sir,' he said, 'that I asked you to meet the lady here, instead of at the hotel below, was that, however things turn out, there may be no scandal spread.'

O'Malley bowed again. The tone and look of the old priest almost disarmed his suspicions. He determined, however, to lose no time, so by way of a hint he plucked at his watch chain. His hands were trembling in such a degree that he could not have taken out his watch.

'I—I am rather pressed for time, Father Conroy—I wish to see the lady at once. What does she call herself, may I ask, please?'

'Miss D'Arcy, and she is the grand-aunt of these children. She is an elderly person, and her family and connections are well known to me. We come, in fact, from the same part of the country.'

Father Paul scratched his chin softly, thinking if he ought, in candour, to inform his opponent that he was a relative as well.

'D'Arcy is a well-enough known name,' said O'Malley with an effort; then to himself, 'I wonder how much she has promised him.' Again he shifted his attitude and looked impatient. Father Conroy sighed profoundly, and walked out of the room slowly, leaving the door open as he went. Every second seemed an hour to Tighe O'Malley. He looked at the picture over the chimney-piece without seeing it, took out his watch and never noticed the time it marked, and as he looked up from it found himself face to face with an old lady who presented to him a most surprising and uncommon appearance. His bow was purely automatic. 'What an awful old witch!' was his internal comment. Then he remembered some picture or print which she resembled, with her snowy hair rolled off her face, her wild staring black eyes and hooked nose. Her mouth was twitching in a curious manner, and she seemed to be trying to control an agitation which every fold of her dress proclaimed. Father Paul pushed forward an arm-chair, into which Miss D'Arcy sank in such a way as to make one movement of her acknowledgment of Mr. O'Malley's bow and the act of sitting down. He remained standing.

'Will you not be seated, sir?' asked Father Conroy, very gravely.

'Humph! thank you,' replied O'Malley, laying his hand on the back of a chair close to him. 'I understand, madam,' he was beginning in a hoarse voice when Father Conroy lifted his hand.

'Mr. O'Malley, I beg of you, sir—excuse me, Miss D'Arcy—I wish to say that if it is the wish of either party that I should retire, I am ready to obey you?'

Juliet D'Arcy turned towards him with an imploring look. 'Don't leave me, I beg of you, sir. As I told you, I am alone, utterly alone. I implore of you to stand by me.'

'Mr. O'Malley will do you every justice, madam, I will answer for it;' and he turned to O'Malley, 'I repeat to you, I know this lady.'

'You have sent for me, madam,' broke in Tighe, forcing himself to speak slowly,—he was kind-hearted and generous, and he felt a sudden sense of the inequality of the contest between himself and the quaint little old figure in the chair, —'to put in a claim as next-of-kin—I mean on behalf of an heir to the estate I am in possession of. You speak of a son of my cousin, Godfrey Mauleverer?'

'Yes,' replied Miss D'Arcy, 'that is so. The boy is in the next room—Godfrey. His father married, nearly thirteen years ago, my niece Ismay D'Arcy. Mrs. Mauleverer died nearly nine years back.' Juliet fixed her eyes on him, seeing him but vaguely. She was rocking herself to and fro over her clasped hands, repeating to herself, 'Nine years that I wasted, nine years that I allowed to go by. Ismay, Ismay, oh! Ismay!'

O'Malley stepped forward. All the blood in his body rushed into his face. The veins on his forehead swelled with wrath.

'Married thirteen years ago, died nine years ago, in Heaven's name do you think such a tale as this will hold water? Do you imagine it likely if Godfrey Mauleverer married any woman of respectable character that his kinsfolk would not have been informed of it? I put it to you, Father Conroy. Where was this marriage? Who was the girl? Why, my uncle buried his last child only four months ago. He knew well that this estate was entailed and was Godfrey Mauleverer's. I never dreamed of inheriting until I heard of his death at Portsmouth. The solicitors, of course, had written to inquire for him at once, and inform him of his succession. Then they telegraphed to me and told me he had been taken ill yachting with Sir Harry Crashaw. I was next, naturally, if my cousin was what we always supposed—an unmarried man.'

He was wiping his lips now, and leaning against the chimney-piece. Father Conroy sat opposite, grave and silent, but watching both combatants closely.

'He was a married man—married thirteen years ago,' said Miss D'Arcy, but no one heard her. Her dry lips only framed the words to herself.

'It's all nonsense,' went on O'Malley, 'all nonsense, a delusion or imposition.' Miss D'Arcy started up trembling violently.

'No! no!' she cried, with a harsh scream. 'God's truth, and I will prove it. Ismay was married, was poor Godfrey's wife, and I have his own words for it. The children are all right.'

'Prove it! I defy you to prove it! I call you to witness, Father Conroy, whether you are accessory to this or not, I'll fight it out to the last—no compromise. To say that here—my uncle not two months dead, every one in the full belief I was only enjoying my own right—these creatures start up out of the ground and pretend to oust me! I've heard of such impositions before; palm off some brat, indeed. An estate of seven thousand a year is not to be had so cheap as all that, madam!' He stopped speechless, for want of breath. Great drops of perspiration rolled down his face. Miss D'Arcy, who seemed to have grown more calm in inverse ratio to his excitement, was beginning to speak when Father Conroy's voice drowned hers.

'Surely, Mr. O'Malley, this is not necessary; my dear sir, I—I—Miss D'Arcy says there was a marriage. Surely she knows well enough: she cannot expect us to rest satisfied with her mere allegation of the fact. Proofs must be shown.'

'I can prove it,' gasped Miss D'Arcy. Her eyes were blazing with an unnatural lustre, and her hands shook.

'Prove it, then,' almost shouted O'Malley, 'prove it, I say! Where are the marriage lines, eh? Have you that to show me?'

Miss D'Arcy pressed her hands on her breast.

'No! no! Merciful God! No!'

'No!' echoed Tighe, 'no! What is the meaning of this, Father Conroy?'

'Gently, my good sir, all in good time: that may be as Miss D'Arcy says; do not agitate her. Calm yourself, Miss D'Arcy, I beg. Sit down.'

Father Conroy was frightened by the look that had come over Miss D'Arcy's face. It was as if some awful Medusa

vision had passed before her eyes, which were fixed and staring in a way terrible to see.

'When were they married? Where did the ceremony take place?' asked Father Conroy gently. 'The place and church are as good as a certificate.'

'Yes,' repeated O'Malley, 'the place! The church, the name of the place?'

'I HAVE FORGOTTEN IT. HE TOLD ME: I HAVE FORGOTTEN!' and, with an agonised shriek, she fell to the ground in a fit.

CHAPTER IV

'I have not stood long on the strand of life,
And these salt waters have had scarcely time
To creep so high up as to wet my feet;
I cannot judge these tides—I shall, perhaps,
A woman's always younger than a man
At equal years, because she is disallowed
Maturing by the out-door sun and air.'

MARION fed the rabbits with the leaves of the cabbage, and then, moved by the plaints of the goat, pushed the cabbage-stump through a hole in the door into her place of durance, and turned to go into the house, with some vague idea, bred of old school habits, of doing something.

Her schooldays were over. She had been easily first of the first class for some three years, and as for the last two her school-work had consisted of going over and over the same elementary lesson-books, turning back faithfully from the end to the beginning, until she knew their contents by rote, Father Paul had thought it well that she should consider herself 'done school.' Marion had been awarded so many first prizes that her reverend relative, amiable always, decided that she overshadowed everybody else, and that the other pupils should be given a fair chance. He insisted upon her taking lessons by herself, partly with a view to her further improvement, but, if truth be told, with an eye to distinction as well, for Father Paul was most excessively proud of one and all of the Mauleverer children. Marion now found time hang heavily on her hands. She went, like all the other girls of the town, to eight o'clock mass

every morning. After breakfast the old habit of going to school, with its attendant bustle and excitement, asserted itself, and left a sort of periodical fit of energy that had to be dissipated somehow or other, and which expended itself in fits of vicarious piano-practice, writing Italian exercises, or reading over the stanza or two of 'Jerusalem Delivered' for the old nun who gave her an Italian lesson twice a week.

What was it all for? What was the use? she asked herself. Now after ten minutes of Brinley Richards, she jumped up, and picking up a garden hat, ran downstairs, intending to go and see the nest in the stone-pine. As she passed the door of Miss D'Arcy's room, the sound of Kitty Macan's voice came out.

'Deed then I think that girl of Ahearne's must be mad, so I do! It is extraordinary, what notions de kind of girls dat's goin' nowadays has.'

There was nothing so new or interesting in this discourse as to tempt Marion to play the eavesdropper. So she ran lightly over the tell-tale boards of the hall, the door was half open, and passed out and stood on the steps.

There was a carriage-sweep before the door. The entrance to this faced the river and lay to her right hand. There were wide gates of rusty iron with great stone piers, surmounted by balls of granite all grown over by a pale golden-green lichen like that on the trunks of the chestnuts, which grew beside them. These gates were always shut, as evidenced by a fresh growth of weeds all about them, but a wooden door in the wall close by stood perpetually ajar. The paint of this had once been green, but was now blue, and an enormous growth of ivy overhung it, and so completely hid everything that the doorway looked like a passage cut through this. Godfrey had promised for long enough to trim it, or make Rody the boy of all work do it.

Father Conroy's tall hat—his hat of ceremony, which he wore only when visiting Miss D'Arcy, or the mother superior of the convent—was daily rubbed and frayed in its passage through. However, Godfrey had always so many alternative schemes and plans for the doing of it that

somehow it never was done—one of these plans being to borrow a shears from some one and do it himself, another to get a wood-ranger from Barrettstown demesne on the other side of the river to do it, another to order Kitty Macan's runner Rody to mend the ladder, and borrow a shears and do it carefully. And so it came about that the ivy flourished, at its own will, and the Portugal laurels and cherry-laurels that clustered round the one tall stone-pine trailed their over-luxuriant branches on the ground unheeded and uncared, save by the birds that held their trysting-place among them.

Marion liked the great ivy tods, and never urged Godfrey to their destruction. They hid the house so thoroughly, although indeed it hardly required any adventitious aids in that respect. The river-road was hardly ever used. It had formerly, as well as being the thoroughfare to the mill, led up to a place called the Heron's Farm, but this no longer existed. Tighe O'Malley had taken it up from the occupiers and thrown it into the new plantations near the heronry. Hardly any one passed that way now; and the road, which had been, in the old times when the mill was working, a well-frequented thoroughfare, had become a mere grass-grown cart-track. The Limerick Road, which ran along by the other side of the osier field, took all the people. Even the turf-cutters preferred it, although it was a little longer for them, in going to and fro from the bog.

She passed through the door under the ivy-thicket, and out on to the green pathway. A little way up was the weir, and beside it the mill-race, cut through an elbow of the bank, and down which the water ran noisily still, though long years had passed since it had turned the mill-wheel.

A double row of flowering currant-bushes, all in blossom and filling the air with their aromatic smell, ran parallel to the race, and under the branches of the currants were thick clusters of primroses, double, lavender, white, and the commoner but more beautiful yellow. Marion looked at these, and said half aloud to herself, 'If I chain Nanny here, she will destroy all these flowers, and if I take her farther up or down there is no good grass, and she has

eaten the grass-plot bare in the garden. I wish we had never bought her. Suppose I drive her across into the demesne.'

Marion, who was thinking of the goat, turned her eyes away from her primrose-tufts across the river to the wood of Barrettstown and the tempting reaches of fresh green grass that the vistas among the bare tree stems allowed to be seen. Tufts of daffodils and jonquils dotted these irregularly. The sun shone on the tree stems, and the willows had a most beautiful reddish tinge. The blackbirds were singing and darting in and out of the laurels, and the crows, of whom there seemed to be hundreds, were coming and going in the tops of the pines and beeches. Marion stood a few minutes watching them. The weir ran across the river at this point. The top of it, a wooden bar, was about four inches or so in width. Godfrey had crossed over by it often enough, and the goat, unless securely chained, was in the habit of using it for trespassing purposes also. Marion looked once more at her pretty primroses and flowering currant-bushes. Then she returned to the house and reappeared with the goat, which ran out headlong dragging her after it. The creature was hungry, and charged desperately at the very shrubs and flowers its mistress desired to protect. Marion pulled it off by main force, and once more casting an envious look at the opposite side of the river, moved away, keeping up stream, and tugging the unwilling and mischievously-inclined animal after her. When she came abreast of the weir the goat made a plunge to get on the top of it.

'Since you want to, you may, Nan,' said Marion aloud; 'you are really too tiresome,' and she leaned forward to take off the chain from the creature's collar. This required both hands, and she let go the chain. The goat profited by her opportunity and dashed off. One leap brought her on top of the weir. The chain had tangled itself into a lump, and Marion, who had only half unfastened it from the collar, presently had the comfort of seeing it drop off into the river, and that on the downward side of the weir, where the current might be expected to wash it down into the mud.

She stood confounded at the sight of the mischief she had done. There was the goat far off in the wood already, tearing and biting alternately at the grass and the young shoots of the trees and shrubs. Deprived of the weight of the chain, who could tell whither she might not wander, perhaps to the gardens or the pleasure-grounds. What in the world was to be done now? Nanny, rid of the chain, was careering in the woods beyond; Godfrey, and no one else, could help her now.

Away she sped in quest of him. She searched the yard and garden for him in vain. At last from the end of the farthest alley she could espy his black head bent over his writing-table in one of the windows at the top of the house.

She flew to him. 'Oh, Godfrey!' she panted, 'that dreadful goat! she has let the chain fall into the river, and is off through the woods into the demesne.'

Godfrey was writing at a table set in the window, spread with papers and books. He stooped forward over it, and spread his arms on the top of the papers to keep her from looking at them.

'What!' he shouted, 'in Quirke's cabbage-field again! Well, *this* time he shall be paid for them!'

'No, Barrettstown woods! I was taking off the chain to—to——'

'To what?'

'Well, the fact is, she would have destroyed the currant-bushes and the primroses, and she has eaten every bit of grass on the ditch-bank and the garden-plot, and I just thought I would let her go over to the wood.'

'Oh ho! trespass! Well? and who cares about *that?* I thought you came to tell me she had got out into Quirke's cabbage-field. Well, and now, after managing matters so comfortably for her, are you disappointed that Nanny has accepted your invitation and gone to do mischief to our neighbours?'

'The chain, Godfrey! the chain! how are we to do without it? Oh, come down! you are able to stand on the weir, and if you take the garden rake you might easily fish it up again.'

'Easily, might I? Then let me see you do it. Now off you go, Marion, and leave me to my work. Do you hear? How am I to study if I am constantly interrupted in this manner?'

Marion never dreamt of remarking the way in which he spread his arms to hide the paper at which he had been busy when she entered the room.

'Eh? *mon Dieu!* Godfrey, do! do go and fish up the chain for me. What am I to do without it when she comes in to be milked in the evening?'

'I will, I will; there, there—go! Do you not see how busy I am? Not just now. There is plenty of time before tea.'

She withdrew unwillingly, and he bent his head again over the row of figures on the paper before him. Marion went to her own room, feeling a little uncomfortable about the results of her morning's performance. She too sat down to work in the window. There was a chair with a shawl folded cushion-wise upon it, and a couple of very ancient books lay upon the sill of the window, which was open. Marion took up her *Tasso* and conned half a stanza. The task consisted of four, and one she knew already. She was not to have a lesson until the next day, so there was no need to hurry in the preparation. Before long the *Tasso* had fallen on the floor, and Marion was leaning her chin in her hands and staring across the garden into the little space between the trees, through which she could see the blue smoke of Barrettstown, and some of its dusky roof-tops. She was thinking of Mary Ahearne, the farmer's daughter, from Castle Lambert, who had been a schoolfellow of hers for something more than four years; and the news which Kitty Macan, notwithstanding her hurry, had amassed and brought back from the town that morning. It was in one sense no news to Marion. She had known that her old schoolfellow was to be married. She knew what the match was, that the parents on both sides had arranged to start the young couple in wedlock, Mary Ahearne having been dowered by her father and mother with so many hundred pounds, and so many cows; and

Harry Capel's parents having agreed on their side to give up the farm and stock to himself and his wife; Mary Ahearne's dowry was to be at once handed over as fortunes to his sisters, so as to settle them in life, and get them out of the bride's way. Marion knew that Mary Ahearne was determined to be a nun, that she was naturally pious, and that she had hated farm life ever since she had become a boarder at the convent. Ever since the beginning of Lent she had expected to hear of the rupture of these negotiations.

'I wonder if Mary Ahearne will give way and consent! Will she refuse Harry Capel? She is too weak and quiet; they will compel her. Poor Mary! I am so sorry for her.'

Just at that moment a pair of sparrows, fighting vigorously for a crumb of bread, flew past her window. She leaned out and watched them until they made up their difference and flew into their nest in the ivy on the wall. But then something else more useful and important appeared. This was Kitty Macan once more dressed for the road and taking her way towards the short cut to the village from the end of the garden.

'Kitty, Kitty, Kitty!' hailed Marion, craning her neck out of the window.

'Well, den?' responded Kitty, turning her face, set in the frame of the velvet bonnet, upwards.

'Wait,' cried Marion. She sat down and wrote hastily on a half sheet of paper the following words—

'My dear Honora—Will you go with me this afternoon to Lambert's Castle to see Mary Ahearne? I shall leave this at two, and look out for you along the Limerick Road.'

Having signed her name, Marion ran downstairs, twisting up the sheet of paper as she went. 'Now, Kitty, give that into Miss Quin's own hands, you hear—not to any one else.'

'I will, den,' said Kitty, nodding her head; but as she turned to go she added, as if it were an afterthought: 'An' I wonder at you, Miss Mauleverer, so I do now, to be writing to that Quin girl dere, an' she not your equal at

all, miss. I hear your aunt say just now she's 'stonished she not hear you play your music upstairs.'

Marion heard not a word of this; she was playing with Fly, the greyhound, who, hearing his master's step on the stairs, left her and bounded to meet him. Godfrey went into the yard and called Rody to find the rake, so Marion went up to her own room, hoping devoutly that he meant to fish up the chain. After some further vicarious study of her *Tasso* she resumed her piano, but fitfully; then she found her way down to her aunt's room and did some lace work, and before two she was crossing the osier bed with long steps and jumps from one pool to another, until the gap in the dike was reached and the long stretch of the Limerick Road lay before her.

CHAPTER V

'The worthless peasants bargain for their wives,
As market men for oxen, sheep, or horse,
Marriage is a matter of more worth,
Than to be dealt in by attorneyship.'

WHILE Marion Mauleverer, light and graceful as a young fawn, was springing from tuft to stone and from stone to tuft, courting danger, and in the lightness of her heart setting herself to perform feats of leaping on her way across the osier field, the person to whom the twisted-up note had been conveyed was, in obedience to the behests therein expressed, preparing to carry them out.

Miss Honor Quin was one of the most remarkable persons in Barrettstown, and certainly one of the most important. She was about twenty years of age, short and rather thick-set of figure, with good features, plenty of blonde hair, and light eyes, which had always an expression of anger in them; whether this was that they were intelligent and bright, or that the eyebrows overhung them too closely, could not be said, but so it was—Honor Quin's eyes had always a spark in them. Stolidity was the leading characteristic of her countenance, which was as yet too youthful to betray those lines which nature, year by year, writes for whoever studies her caligraphy. She was buttoning her gloves, standing on the threshold of her father's shop. Having fastened the last button, she took a comprehensive look all round her, up and down the street, taking in the windows of the bank, the doctor's house, the attorney's. Then she shook out her skirt, and was about

to start when a voice behind called 'Honor!' suddenly. She turned round so suddenly as to bring her into collision with a pile of goods loosely heaped on either side of the door. A couple of dozen tea-kettles all fastened together by a string, which in its turn depended from a nail, clanked noisily on receiving the impact of a long roll of red flannel which had been so carelessly poised on top of a pile of its kind as to tumble over headlong at the merest contact of her shoulder. Bunches of hearth-brushes overhead swung in the breezes that came in as they liked. Strings of onions and sides of bacon, wooden milk-pails and zinc buckets, hid the entire ceiling of the shop, which was much larger and longer than the outside appearance of the building gave any warrant to expect.

It was a corner building. One side of the shop was devoted to the provision trade, and food was bought as well as sold, for barter in its most primitive form constituted a large part of the trade. It was an ill-lighted, ill-aired, and by no means too cleanly or tidily kept place. But if there was none of the meretricious elegance of other places of business, neither was there any of the pretence and sham so lavishly to be found in these emporiums; no gaudy advertisement cards hung in such a manner as to conceal empty spaces on the shelves; no dummy barrels were ranged in the licensed department. The shelves groaned and overflowed with *bona-fide* merchandise. Barrels of American and French flour stood in rows, together with great sticky hogsheads of sugar, in which the earliest fly of spring and the last lingering wasp of autumn found a harvest of refection. There was not a single chair to be seen, but the stout painted counters were in some places worn down at the edges in a manner which showed that customers had the habit of using them instead. There was a well-marked depression at the egg and butter counter, behind which Mrs. Quin habitually sat, and another, only worn considerably deeper, opposite old Peter Quin's post at the desk, where that worthy sat enthroned on high among his books, commanding a full view of the entire domain, his assistants declared, of the back and

front and both sides simultaneously. The one large square window which looked upon the main street contained a heterogeneous medley of paraffin lamps, broom and brush heads, bonnets and hats, rakes and gripe heads, bowls of cabbage and turnip seed, and all sorts of 'dry goods'—an elastic term which includes anything likely to be wanted in the north riding of Cork, from imitation Valenciennes lace down to Black Tartary seed oats.

Honor Quin was about to pick up the bale.

'Don't mind it!' cried the same voice, hastily and peremptorily. 'Tom, pick up that roll for Miss Quin, do ye hear?' continued the speaker, advancing into the light before the door. She was a stoutly-built short woman, who might have been any age from fifty to seventy. Her hair was all put away out of sight in a thick black net of chenille; a red and gray shoulder shawl was pinned neatly over a black dress that had seen some service, and under the hem of this appeared a pair of large black list shoes. She had probably been good-looking after a fashion once upon a time, but the blue had all faded from her eyes, which were now a nondescript muddy gray, and the red of her cheeks had spread itself impartially all over the somewhat heavy face. The prevailing characteristic of this last would seem at the first glance to be good humour and simplicity. But below this lurked an intense power of concentration and a watchfulness which nothing, however trivial, escaped.

The person addressed as Tom, an unwholesome-looking, heavily-built young man, wearing a ragged and shiny frock-coat, stepped from behind a counter, where he was busy making up the variously-coloured candles into parcels of different sizes, replaced the roll, and shuffled back to his place.

'Honor,' said the woman again, 'where are you going?' Her tone was a curious blending of pompousness and something resembling awe. She was rubbing her spectacles as she spoke, and put them on, and held a close scrutiny of her daughter's face while waiting for her answer.

'I told you before, mother, to Lambert's Castle, to see Mary.'

'To see Mary?—well then, don't stay out too long now, Honor; these evenings are not long enough yet.'

Honor was looking at her, and read suspicion through the glasses of the spectacles.

'If it's dark before I come home, mother, Luke Ahearne will see me safe to the door, you know.' With this Miss Quin turned about, and steering her way safely through the encumbered doorway took her road down the street towards the bridge. She passed the hotel, the bank, the post-office, the rival dealer's shop, then 'The Parade,' where the doctor lived, and the lawyer and district surveyor, with one or two others of the same stamp, the insurance agent, and rival bank manager. The houses were precisely the same as the shops, and belonged to that order of architecture to which the Irish genius seems devoted, and which is to be found all over the country and precisely the same everywhere. Perfectly bare walls with disproportionately short gables, built of the cheapest and poorest materials, and plastered over with a sort of stucco selected because of its complete unfitness, the windows stuck in by couples, and usually crookedly, the buildings all seemed, though none of them were forty years built, to be falling into ruin already, and were in their way as mean and squalid and as destitute of every vestige of taste or decoration as the mud cabins on the opposite side of the river. Nature indeed, left to herself, seemed to favour these, and bestowed with a lavish hand a charitable covering to their misery — multi-coloured mosses, graceful-bearded grass, wall-flowers, and the never-failing and cherished house-leek, hid the crumbling thatch with an ever-changing, ever-brilliant coat of embroidery.

At the end of the main street was the bridge—The Bridge, so called, although there was another, higher up towards the demesne gate of Barrettstown Castle. This was the lounging place for most of the idlers and all of the beggars of the town. All the people who came in by

the Limerick Road, which ran westward, and the Dublin Road, which was a continuation of the same and ran eastwards, had either to cross over or to pass one end of the bridge. It commanded a clear and thorough view of the main street, as well as of an exquisite landscape both up and down the river. Upwards there was a straight silvery bit of the Barrettwater, unbroken as far as the upper bridge; there it turned and went winding through the trees and into the demesne. Downwards the view was much wider and more extended. The river ran through a marshy tract with great fields of bulrushes and flags, out of which a heron rose at times, or a sea-gull, and flapped away, visible for miles against the low horizon. From morning until night the low broad walls of the bridge were frequented by the poor of the town. All the men out of work had a chance of picking up an employer on this rendezvous. On Sundays the labourers stood there, spade in hand, waiting to be employed. The beggars—it need not be said that this term was never made use of by them — waited here for the meal-times of their patrons among the townsfolk, and made furtive excursions to their kitchens, returning with the alms, hot or cold, as it chanced, to share and eat it on the bridge. Of beggars there was a small army in Barrettstown; here, as elsewhere in Ireland, begging being the only recognised profession, the only really orthodox and respectable existence. Any other calling was tolerated, but not really acknowledged. Andy and Peggy Lehan were the two seniors, and took precedence of the rest. 'Lord Cork,' whose unusual name requires explanation, was a huge creature, over whose shaggy head some fifty winters had passed. He had once travelled to Cork city, some five and thirty or so miles away, and his interminable discourse of the wonders he had beheld there, together with a habit of swearing, earned for him the title by which he was now exclusively known. There was a great deal of envy and spite shown to Lord Cork by the noble brotherhood on account of his travels, for not one of them had ever been ten miles out of Barrettstown in his or her life,

and they resented his superiority, and meanly aspersed the truthfulness of his descriptions and of his adventures.

He was the son of a small farmer who had been driven off the land, and had settled in the lanes of Barrettstown to live, as thousands and hundreds of thousands in the other towns of Ireland lived in like circumstances, in abject misery and poverty. He was a patient being, afflicted with an insatiable appetite, and perhaps a little more religious even than the others. It was the fundamental article of his and their scheme of existence that rich people could only prosper in this world and be saved in the next by the exercise of charity, and the shortcomings of the townsfolk in this respect was a never-ceasing wonder to the brotherhood. Peggy Lehan had no more doubt than Lord Cork as to the sanctity of her mission. In fact, being convinced of the same, she insisted upon a more logical and thorough application of its principle. It being the bounden duty of every one to give alms, Peggy claimed her dole with a boldness inspired by a sense of imprescriptible right. She was 'wicked,' that is to say, short-tempered. On one occasion a strange gentleman, either a visitor or traveller, happened to be crossing the bridge and was accosted by her, the most persistent and unpleasant of all the tribe. He refused with a tone and manner which left her so convinced of his determined and inveterate heterodoxy that she at once ceased to importune, and with a glance charged with vindictive disappointment, exploded into prophecy.

'Ye have the face,' she said solemnly, 'of a damned soul!'

A roar of delighted laughter from the stranger greeted this deliverance, and the ragged sibyl to her amazement found herself the possessor of a whole shilling.

Andy, her husband, was a favourite with every one, and but for this Peggy, who was unpopular, would have fared badly. She was, as might be inferred, a serious-minded creature, sour of visage and address, whereas Andy was invariably cheerful and light-hearted, qualities which, it is an unsuspected fact, are even more valuable in the begging profession than any other reputable walk of life. Lord Cork had the largest number of supporters. His special

infirmity, *i.e.* his large appetite, won him the sympathy of the men. One of the stock jokes of the golden youth of Barrettstown was to provide an immense mess for the big beggar-man's consumption, and lay bets upon the amount he could achieve. Truth be said, such events were rare and far between. Perpetual hunger glared from poor Lord Cork's eyes, as it did indeed from those of all of his compeers.

Peggy Feelan represented another class of beggars. She was not clad in the ragged uniform of the 'regulars.' She was tidy and cleanly, always wore a fresh white apron, and carried knitting in her hand. She only begged vicariously in the intervals of nursing, for she was the Mrs. Gamp of Barrettstown, no wake was complete without her, and she had a perfect talent for prayer. She need not have been so poor in the intervals of employment but for a weakness which is supposed to be proper to her profession. She also was a favourite, especially with the farmers' wives, who employed her on Saturdays to keep places for them at Father Paul's or Father Collins's confessional—they, coming from a distance and having business to transact, were unable to afford time to wait in the ordinary way. She was the better off by a couple of pence for this exercise. Peggy knew everything in town, and was a mine of information upon all subjects. She could read, or was reputed to be able to read, a little, and on Sunday morning when the American letters were given out at the post-office, was in busy request among the country people, who called for their letters when they came to mass.

There were many others, including a couple of fools and several deformed and afflicted people, without counting a flock of half-naked but evidently well-fed children who settled like flies on every newcomer. These last begged for amusement, and in imitation of their elders. They were never hungry. England may be the paradise of animals, but nowhere in the world are children so well treated as in Ireland.

As Honor Quin passed them, the ragged gentry all shifted their attitudes. Peggy and Andy Lehan were sharing a pipe with Lord Cork and hid it as she approached.

The two first-named were not only pensioners of her mother's, but customers as well. They spent their 'earnings' in Quin's shop, and so one curtseyed and the other bowed, with a 'Save you kindly, Miss Quin,' to which she replied, 'And you too, Andy and Peggy,' very woodenly and perfunctorily, and without looking at them. Lord Cork offered no salutation—the rival shopkeeper was his patroness—and merely betrayed his sense of Miss Quin's neighbourhood by drawing back an enormous red foot that was sprawled over the path.

'Well, Andy Lehan,' he observed, as soon as she was out of earshot, 'dat girl isn't much to look at anyhow. She is neither little and handsome, nor big and ugly.'

'You can't have eferyting den, Patsy. She is very well indeed—clean-skinned young girl—to have five tousan' pounds.'

'How much money is dat?' questioned Lord Cork, who had never owned five shillings in his life. 'Five tousan', oh God! Such a fortune! how much would dat be, I wonder? Dat is more dan the bank has, I am sure.'

No one seemed inclined to reply, and Lord Cork speedily forgot his question in the excitement caused by the arrival of the mail from Dublin.

Miss Quin pursued her way along the Limerick Road, looking neither to the right nor left, save when she had to reply to the salutation of some peasant woman carrying in her customary afternoon pail of milk to the town, or with a huge creel of turf strapped on her shoulders. It was a desolate-looking road now that the town was left behind, and that the Limerick Road had turned so that Barrettstown demesne and its rich woods were at her back. Nothing was visible higher than the brambles along the ditches, or here and there a scrog in the boggy fields that skirted the highway. Naked and bare as the place was now, it had once been a far-spreading populous townland. Moss and nettle-grown piles of stone by the roadside showed where houses, at least in the sense of human habitations, had once been, and the ridges of the old potato-gardens were yet to be traced in the grass. The fields, however, were rapidly

going back into bog; coarse sedgy grass and tufts of rushes had invaded and were springing up between the furrows. The ground began to rise now, and when she turned to look back for Marion Mauleverer she could see the slated roofs of the bettermost houses of Barrettstown between the poplars of the river-bank, and around their stems the cabins of the poor dwellers by the river-side, clustered like so many brown toadstools. Miss Quin was not contented with this survey, so she mounted on a bank beside the path. She was approaching a side road from which a view of the approach to the town would be impossible, and she wanted to make sure if Marion Mauleverer, a most unpunctual person, were really behind her or not. The air was as clear and thin as if a shower had just gone by, and the tiny blue spirals of turf-smoke rose up into the air and hung there like gossamer. She could see every inch of the two miles of road was perfectly bare and deserted, and shining white like a great piece of ribbon unrolled.

'She has gone on before me,' said Miss Quin, with a look of discontent, as she turned up the by-road which led to Lambert's Castle. This was a mere cart-track running at right angles to the road and leading up and round a hill. It was difficult walking, consisting of loose stones of divers sizes lying in water, although deep drain-cuttings on both sides of the boreen were carrying down a noisy brawling couple of streams. Something less than half a mile of the cart-track brought Miss Quin suddenly into view of the farm-buildings. The track grew muddier and dirtier at every step. The cows moved up to the ditch-side from the pasture-field and stared at her. A dog leapt out of the half door in the yard gate and set to bark noisily. It was milking-time, and having heard the door open, without more ado every cow put herself in motion and marched up to the yard close behind Miss Quin, one or two uttering a deep low which was promptly answered by their calves penned inside the yard.

The large door was opened now wide enough to admit Miss Quin, and then shut at once in the faces of the expectant kine. Miss Quin found herself in the presence

of Marion Mauleverer and of Mary Ahearne, both of whom kissed her immediately first on one cheek, then on the other.

'You did not wait for me then, Miss Maulever.' Even Miss Quin could not always manage to pronounce Marion's patronymic correctly. It was not often that the name was extended beyond the properly penultimate syllable.

'No, I will tell you how that was, Honor. Kitty Macan's clock is always a couple of hours all wrong, you know, and if I went to ask Aunt Juliet, she would be sure to want to know everything and perhaps stop me altogether, so I just slipped out after dinner. I could not imagine what hour it was, and so I came on here straight.'

Mary Ahearne and Honor Quin had been schoolfellows of hers at the convent in Barrettstown. They were boarders, she a day-scholar. Marion, although considerably the youngest of the trio—she was little over sixteen, while they were about twenty—had left school at the same time. There was nothing wonderful in this. Miss Mauleverer *chassait de race.* Her class-fellows acknowledged her superiority in all things; she was as far beyond them as was the pronunciation of her unusual name. Privileges of all kinds were hers—she might, and did, read poetry by Father Paul's permission, while Mary Ahearne and Honor Quin could not dare to glance at Byron or 'Lalla Rookh.' They never were late for mass, Miss Mauleverer walked in when she chose. Honor Quin's mother, as soon as it reached her ears that Miss Mauleverer was having private lessons, urged Honor to follow her example, but that young lady had sense enough to be aware that she required no such adventitious accomplishments. She had a fortune, and learning was of no use to her, as she told her mother; it would be a useless expense. Honor Quin possessed the best of the six pianos in Barrettstown. She could sing four songs, play six set pieces, had learned French, heraldry, the use of the globes, and many other accomplishments which were already in a fair way to be forgotten, for she despised these as the appanage of dowerless girls. She had three thousand pounds, and a deal more to come after that, as

her mother told her often enough, and she intended to marry a professional man. There was no one in Barrettstown or its environs who was deemed by herself or her parents to possess the equivalent of the fortune which Peter Quin had told Father Paul he could give her, 'money down'—three thousand pounds. The fact was, Peter Quin could give her ten, not three, thousand pounds, 'and never miss it,' but he had no intention whatever of allowing the residents of Barrettstown and North Cork generally to suspect that he had made so much money as that by them. His customers had, however, a shrewd idea that Miss Quin was worth more than the advertised sum—hence Lord Cork's exaggeration. The whole country had been canvassed by the match-makers for a likely suitor for the heiress's hand. Before Lent began half a dozen young farmers, Harry Capel among them, had sent 'messages,' or rather their respective mothers had sent them before Shrove, in their behalf. The ambassadors had all been received and treated in the most cordial and hospitable manner, magnificently even, but their overtures had been respectfully declined. Miss Quin was too young yet, her mother could not think of letting her go from her this year yet. Such were the excuses offered. Little by little it came to be known, or rather felt, in the town, that no one was good enough for Miss Quin. Her brother, the young counsellor that was to be, was looking out for a high connection for her in Dublin, and hereafter and for ever she was unanimously proclaimed to be destitute of the faintest trace of good looks. Honor Quin cared little for this. She had a poor opinion of Barrettstown, and testified the same in a hundred ways. She had as much money as she chose to ask for, and in the matter of clothes, not merely *carte blanche*, but it was expected of her to spend money lavishly. She was very moderate in the use of these privileges, and for that matter displayed a judgment which was creditable, if somewhat unaccountable, selecting plain cloth dresses in preference to the costly velvets and satins which her mother urged on her. Mrs. Quin wondered at her self-denial, misunderstanding her motive. In her opinion any one who could and might

wear silk or satin at others' cost was a fool not to do so. In this, as in other things, however, she gave Honor her way. It was one of Mrs. Quin's favourite boasts that she never 'crossed' Honor since she was born.

'I have my new pigeons to show you,' said Mary, leading the way towards one of the outbuildings. She took hold of the rusty bolt, and, working it with both hands, got it back, not without difficulty. Then she had to lift back the door, which was broken off the hinges.

'Step in here, Miss Maulever. Honor, come till I show you the new pigeons.'

Mary Ahearne's face had brightened a little, and now that she was standing in the shadow of the outhouse, and was not wrinkling up her face to keep the sun out of her eyes, she looked almost pretty. She was pale and freckled, her forehead was disproportionately large, and her features, especially the mouth, irregular. Still she was fairly well-looking. Her face possessed something over and above the shrewdness which was the leading characteristic of Miss Quin's. The eyes were large and dreamy-looking, the expression was pensive and altogether interesting, which last was precisely the quality that Honor Quin's lacked.

'Now,' she said, leading them into a large untidy kind of storehouse full of all sorts of lumber, broken farm-tools, disused harness, etc. She looked about for the pigeons, and not seeing them, was just turning out of the door, calling, 'Judy, Judy!' when a voice hailed her so loudly as to drown her own.

'Miss Mary, Miss Mary! I say, bad cess to yourself, and will you plase not let out dose turkeys till I get the chickens fed. The old yellow hen will murder them on me. Will you not let them out, I say. Chick! chick!'

All three girls stepped from the outhouse into the yard again, immediately on hearing this appeal. The speaker was a broad-shouldered servant-girl of about twenty, with bare feet and thick red legs showing under a short black petticoat. Over this she wore a cotton jacket which left her arms bare. She was busy emptying a mess of poultry food out of a black caldron into the feeding-pan. She

stirred up the mess with a wooden ladle and scattered it round about. While thus engaged her eye fell on the two visitors, whose presence she had not before suspected.

'Save you kindly, Miss Maulever. Save you, Miss Quin,' she called aloud, with a grin that showed a fine set of teeth and somewhat atoned for a beetle-browed homely face. 'Chick, chick, chickey'—this was to the poultry. 'Saints be about us,' she continued, speaking aloud to herself, but in a lower tone, 'but that Maulever one is shooting up like a young tree! The eyes dat girl have! Lard! Miss Quin dere beside her looks to want all de money she have,'—she muttered this in the intervals of calling the fowl. Her invitation soon collected the whole feathered tribe of the place. A hen with a family of ducklings came in under the broken door of the yard. The ducklings, well-grown and greedy, rushed headlong, after the manner of ducks, with outstretched necks straight through everything, and falling as they went, across to where the steaming mess of potatoes mixed with pollard and butter-milk was being scattered in ladlefuls. Their disconsolate parent stalked after them. They had taken to the water two or three days before, so the world hardly contained any surprises for her. Chickens of all sizes and ages, from the autumn pullet that had laid her first egg to the wee callow thing hatched yesterday, majestic old cocks, their feathers glistening rainbow-hued in the sun, and plump youngsters destined for the pot for not having been born hens, all scuffled and scraped and shoved, one more greedy than another, the game hens taking the opportunity to deliver pecks and kicks *ad libitum* to their favourite enemies, whom the gratification of a fiercer passion for the nonce kept from retaliation.

'What a number there are!' said Marion. The three girls were standing looking on just where they had come out of the outhouse.

'The food is nice and cold, then, to-day for them; you can't go and say, Miss Mary, that I scalded them; and I am tormented trying to boil it, for the pot has got a hole in the bottom you can see daylight through, and the saints

know when I will be able to get that old Jeremy Dudden to come up and solder it. I done it up there with a soaped rag, but it nearly put out the fire on me, so it did.'

There was silence now for a minute, only broken by the multitudinous pecking of the hens, the greedy splatter of the ducks' bills, and the querulous plaints of the turkeys from their prison behind the old coach-house door. The sparrows were all collected in the ivy of the ruin from which Ahearne's farm took its name of Lambert's Castle, and were watching until their turn should come to eat the 'bread of the children,' while from the pigsty in a far corner loud sounds, and not of revelry, proceeded.

'Miss Mary avic, you should order me a new pot some day you goes down to the town,' continued the abigail. 'This one only holds barely enough potatoes for the pigs, an' sure you know they must get enough, the cratures, against we be selling them, or they'll do no good; you may believe me, indeed, but pigs and Christians are much alike in the way of food. Ye must give them all dey want or dey'll do no good. Curse ye! take that for yourself; nothin' will serve ye but get into the dish.'

'Don't kick that drake, Judy,' called Mary Ahearne, in a peremptory voice. 'Look at that, Honor,' she added, in a low voice. 'Is she not disgusting? Nothing will improve that girl.'

'Don't I know what is good for them?' roared Judy, in reply. 'He would ait the whole dish if I would let him.'

'Bring out the turkeys' dish now,' ordered her mistress; 'lay it to one side, over there; Miss Maulever, move just a little bit; I want to open this door.' Mary Ahearne pushed back the door and released a flock of turkeys. They marched out, complaining shrewishly. Instead of making directly for her dish of boiled potatoes and meal one hen-turkey attacked a small fowl viciously.

'Go away, you wicked beast,' cried Mary Ahearne, running to the rescue. 'Judy, stop her!'

'They's the wickedest and crulest beasts, Miss Mary. Lave go, you divle!' cried the almoner Judy, dealing the

aggressive turkey a kick that sent it flying into the air. 'I hate turkeys, they's that crule to one another.'

'You should set them an example,' observed her mistress, somewhat drily. 'Where are the pigeons? Mat shut them up in there.'

'Mat is a fool, miss, so he is! Don't he know very well the slates is off dat house at the back, and what had the pigeons to do but go through? Miss Maulever, Miss Quin, 'tis a pity you cannot see the pigeons Harry Capel sent our Miss Ahearne. Nuns they do call them. They're some like magpies, I'm thinkin'. Lard! 'tis a fine thing to be goin' to be married! The divle a wan at all can I get! No one will take pity on me at all.'

Judy's coarse voice ran on unceasingly, with a jibing sound under its surface of good humour. Her young mistress was angry, and as much if not more ashamed than angry. She turned to Miss Mauleverer apologetically and said, 'I *have* to stay here until my mother comes down stairs and see the fowls fed. She cannot be left to do anything. You won't mind, Miss Maulever, will you? or you, Honor? we will go into the old garden afterwards.' She was evidently perturbed, for she sighed heavily when she had finished speaking, and her head drooped.

'We do not mind. What does it matter, Mary?' returned Miss Mauleverer.

'Throw down some food to this side, Judy, do you hear?' ordered Mary Ahearne. 'Give the little turkey some; those old ones are eating it all.'

'Ay so, Miss Mary. That old yellow hen hate anybody to ait a bit only herself. You should bid me kill her some day that you have some one to dinner you don't like—old Capel, now; I would love to see him picking the bones of that old hen, I would.'

Judy turned the great iron pot upside down now and struck the rim smartly against the ground so as to shake out the last particle of food to her hungry clients, turning as she did so her greenish-coloured eyes with a vicious look in them at the visitors.

'Come and lift the pigs' pot, Judy!' called a voice from

within the house. 'Come at once!' Judy vanished promptly, and Mary Ahearne turned round like one who has obtained a long-waited-for permission to leave. The others set themselves in motion also, and they picked their way carefully across the farmyard to a door on the opposite side. The farmyard was flanked on two sides by buildings, stables, cow-houses, and other out-offices. The living-house had been built by old Ahearne, and was a plastered edifice fronting the farmyard, exactly similar to the houses in Barrettstown, only much newer. It was not above twenty-five years built, and was far more ruinous-looking than Lambert's Castle itself, one end of which looked into the yard. The plaster was rain-soaked and stained, and the frost had carried away some of it. The woodwork was all shrunk and wanted painting; nevertheless the place looked prosperous, and, after a fashion, comfortable.

'Come along quick, Honor,' urged Mary. 'Let's get out of the way of the pigs' pot. The smell of it always disgusts me so. Just go in, if you please, Miss Maulever; I must close this door after us, else the hens will get in and lay their eggs ahide—they do whenever they get the chance—and then I shall be blamed.'

Marion and Honor obeyed her, and she drew the door to behind her with a look of relief as though she were glad to shut out the sights and sounds of the farmyard.

They were now in a wilderness that had once been the pleasure-grounds of a gentleman's house, though, save for the trees which remained as landmarks, no one could have thought it had ever been under any kind of cultivation. The walks and alleys had disappeared long ago; the box and myrtle had grown up into trees, and in the shade of the old laurels and ornamental shrubs, rank grass and weeds were flourishing. The three girls made their way through this thicket, which in truth had a very mouldering fungus-like odour, towards an open in the centre. This had been cleared and planted with potatoes. The blackish mould, which had been only recently dug up, smelled fresh and pleasant. A plot of cabbages skirted a dilapidated lavender

hedge on which some articles of linen were bleaching. Other plots here and there had been nearly dug over for the spring planting. Blue periwinkle ran through the grass and clustered about the stems of the shrubs, and a few old rose bushes were discernible here and there. They walked on, following Mary Ahearne's guidance, keeping to the right and towards the old house. They had to make a detour to avoid the ruins of a conservatory, which had been placed in a fine south aspect against the yard wall. It had all fallen in long ago. A metal basin in the centre of a heap of rubbish showed where a fountain had once been. They were not long in picking their way through the pleasure-ground, and soon found themselves at the front of the ruined Lambert's Castle. There was very little indeed that resembled a castle—a front formed of a huge mass of masonry, with a flat parapet on top of the very same style of architecture as Quin's shop in Barrettstown, or the new farmhouse built in the old stable-yard at the back. It was just a wall with as many small square windows stuck in it as could be managed, all staring like so many eyes. From the gutter which ran along the moss-grown base, to the coping stone on the summit of the wall, not a vestige of ornament was to be descried. The entrance, a small mean doorway, was at one end, and looked as if it were a mere afterthought. The windows were all gone, not even the woodwork remained, and the great thickness and solidity of the limestone walls was shown at the openings they made.

'Come down to the seat in the hedge,' said Honor Quin. 'We shall not be able to stay long.' She led the way to a bench in a thicket. It commanded a beautiful view of the open country and of the old approach to Lambert's Castle—a two mile long drive between what had once been a double avenue of beeches and oaks. Only the stumps remained now, with here and there a young seedling springing up among them.

It was a beautiful afternoon, still sunlit, and though the day was declining, warm and balmy. Marion forgot her curiosity, and leaned back, gazing out over the valley

with a dreamy vague enjoyment of the scene. She had picked primroses and periwinkle blossoms as she came along and had begun to make them into a posy. Her fingers had ceased this employment, and she was too absorbed to notice Honor Quin's meaning looks at her, nor the kind of conscious melancholy expressed by Mary Ahearne's face and attitude.

Honor Quin, on the contrary, was absorbed in her desire to fathom the truth of the report that Mary had refused Harry Capel, and if the report were confirmed to discover the reason for such a step. She shrewdly suspected that Harry Capel was one of her own rejected swains. She had never been informed of the 'message,' but she had been told by one of the shop girls that Mrs. Capel had been singing her son's praises there on market-days for some time after Christmas. She had divined the message and its result, but she considered Harry Capel a very suitable match for her friend, and she was determined to get to the bottom of the mystery. The servant Judy's impudent innuendoes had not been unnoticed by her. She moved a little round in her seat so as to face Mary Ahearne, and said tentatively in a low voice into which she tried to infuse a tone of sympathy:

'You have been crying to-day, Mary.' Miss Mauleverer heard this, descended from cloudland at once, and turned round so suddenly that she dropped her bouquet.

'What is the matter?' she asked sympathetically.

Mary Ahearne turned her head aside for a few moments before she replied. 'Oh, nothing, nothing of any great matter. You might guess it.'

A pause of some minutes ensued, and then she resumed with a broken voice, 'Harry Capel's old mother was up here yesterday and had as much talk and work. She knew well it was no use, yet she would try to make me say yes, flattering and bothering me. The poor boy was distracted and was drinking, as if that was anything new—and when she found that would not do, then she fell to abuse. What was I looking for—who was I thinking to get? It was not every day I would meet with a Capel. That's not the half of it,

and when she was gone, much as she came, it was then the row began in earnest,—mother, and Luke, and all of them at me.'

Mary Ahearne was crying now. Marion was listening in a kind of half-credulous wonder, as a child hears a fairy tale. She could not understand it in the least, but did not like to interrupt or to ask questions. Honor Quin was moved to compassion by the distress evinced by her friend.

'I cannot see what is this hurry to get you married,' she observed. 'You are surely time enough.'

'Well, you see—you won't tell ever what I'm saying to you, will you, Honor, or you, Miss Maulever? The lease has little over a year and a half to run, and Luke must marry a fortune to pay the fine. Margaret and I must both be out of his road before he can get that. Margaret will be easy enough to settle, but while they have a bit of money for me they want me to get off. He will have all the better chance, you know.'

'Yes,' assented Honor Quin, with a nod. She was wondering to herself if Luke had had the impudence to think of marrying herself.

'And do you hate Harry Capel?' asked Marion, opening her eyes wide and leaning forward.

'I don't like him,' answered Mary Ahearne, quite simply.

Marion sighed and looked bewildered.

'If you heard his old father,' pursued Mary, 'the night the two of them came up after the message was sent before Shrove. I went off, of course, to my room, but I thought Judy would be listening, so I crept down quietly to the door of the room. There she was, I need not tell you; so out of pure curiosity I listened myself. My dear, you would think it was a sack of potatoes that was in question. They were all sitting round the table and disputing. Three hundred pounds was nothing—notin', as old Capel called it—you know how he speaks. He was not going to take any such match for such a boy—a fine clever boy like that, who was used to have everything and had his horse kept for him! to go to every funeral in the country. Then the fight began. He asked for the boar-pig and that half

shorthorn my father thinks so much of; Mr. Harry—the fine clever boy that he is—sitting by with a surly face on him, and looking as if he did not care one pin. Oh yes,' went on Mary, and her voice, which had up to this seemed merely melancholy, grew bitter, 'I'll tell you another thing. I did not hear this, of course, they were too 'cute to say it to us. My mother was told that old Capel said I was no beauty at all—I was too sallow.'

Honor Quin burst out laughing. Poor Mary Ahearne wiped away a tear and then laughed also, but a little hysterically. Marion looked from one to the other with amazement, not unmingled with disgust. Honor Quin's behaviour was nothing out of the common. She knew her of old to be rough and coarse-natured. She had always borne the name of being 'worldly' at school, whereas Mary Ahearne was her exact antithesis.

'That was why they wanted the shorthorn cow, Mary,' said Honor Quin as soon as she could speak. 'She was to make up for your complexion,' and she went off into another fit of jarring laughter.

'She will stop where she is, then!' said Mary. 'That would be a very dear price to pay for a yellow skin.'

She felt hurt by the roughness and hardness of her companion, and turned shrinking away with the same look of uncomplaining, almost hopeless melancholy. As she did so she met Miss Mauleverer's eyes bent on hers wonderingly.

When Marion saw the tears glistening on the eyelashes of the face so close to hers, and the crushed, pained look, she forgot her disgust and stooped a little nearer with an impulse of pity and tenderness.

'Do not mind!' she said, so low that Honor Quin could not hear her, and she laid her cheek, for a second only, against that of Mary Ahearne. She rose suddenly; then she felt too irritated to remain quiet, and went away to a clump all grown over with periwinkle. It was the pedestal on which the statue of some heathen divinity had been perched, long ago tumbled over and broken into fragments. While Marion was busy gathering the peri-

winkles a noise made itself heard which startled the others as well as herself. Some one was forcing open the garden door by which they had entered. Then it was flung to noisily.

'That is Luke,' said Mary. In a few minutes her brother appeared out of the thicket and approached their seat. As soon as he caught sight of them he took the pipe out of his mouth, extinguished it, and put it in his pocket. He had a newspaper under one arm, and he folded it up roughly and put it in his pocket also.

He was a very handsome young fellow of about twenty-five, tall and well-built and straight, but a look of dissipation and something of sullenness made his face unpleasant. He bowed, hat in hand, to Miss Mauleverer, who acknowledged his presence by a silent inclination of her head. Honor Quin shook hands with him very formally and with an air of great reserve, for she knew that Luke Ahearne's mother believed her handsome boy to be a match fit for any lady in Ireland, and she was resolved to keep him at a distance.

Luke's mother had indeed cast a fly over the big fish in the interests of her son. It was but a half-hearted venture, still she thought it no more than her duty to Luke to attempt the heiress of Barrettstown in his behalf. He was considered a good match, viewed in the light of the customs of the district. The two girls were provided for—Mary the eldest and plainest was to have four hundred pounds fortune; Margaret, the youngest of the family, a handsome well-grown girl of nineteen, who was still in school, was to have three. Consequently the farm of Lambert's Castle on coming into Luke's hands would be unencumbered with the conditions of paying off, or rather buying out, his sisters' interests therein. If old Ahearne had not saved the amount requisite to provide the two girls with dowries, the farm would have been charged with the burden of their maintenance for life, they having an equal interest in the property with their brother, and the customary mode of procedure to be followed would be that Luke should procure a wife possessed of a fortune, this fortune to be

handed over to, and divided between, the two sisters, each of whom would then marry another farmer and buy out his encumbrances in like manner. This the usual system would have been quite possible to Luke Ahearne but for the fact that the lease of Lambert's Castle was fast running out, and that Tighe O'Malley might be naturally expected to demand a heavy fine for a renewal. His wife's fortune would go to renew the lease. The old couple would hand him over the farm and stock, retaining also, in accordance with the custom, one room in the house, the use of the kitchen, a ridge of the potato-field, a ridge of the turnip-field, a ridge of the cabbage and mangold-fields, and the grass and milk of one cow. This system, if sanctioned by custom, was but rarely found to work smoothly or well, the arrangement being one which offered peculiar temptations to fallen human nature in the shape of people in law. But custom ranks paramount in such societies as that of Barrettstown, where even a new seed potato is, on principle, refused a trial.

Customs of all sorts were to these people as law. Luke's father was a most hard-working, honest, industrious man, who grudged no exertion, but even he, a descendant of a good old Irish family, would not on any account dig up the bushes for fear of offending the fairies, and bought yellow meal for the fowls and pigs, even when he could not sell his own barley and oats, because of the tradition that animals would not thrive on food grown on their own ground.

Old Ahearne, quiet and peaceable though he was, had been once summoned to Quarter Sessions for assaulting an old woman. He had come upon her one day at the running stream that crossed one of his fields. She was nearly blind, and was only groping to find the stepping-stones by which to cross, but the old farmer coming up and observing her, concluded that she was laying pishogues (charms) to break the legs of his cattle when they came to drink, and then and there fell upon her and gave her a beating.

Luke laughed heartily at his father's superstitions, but

he had nevertheless his own. He could not bear to meet a red-haired woman in the morning, or to see a single magpie, and he firmly believed that the wild sounds with which the south-west storms beat on the exposed heights of Lambert's Castle, were the cries of drowned sailors' souls, tempest-tossed and driven in expiation of unprepared death.

He was in haste to get married, for two reasons. He wanted to secure the fine, and thereby the lease, and he wanted to be his own master, and the master of Lambert's Castle. Therefore it was that he had urged his sister's acceptance of Harry Capel's offer. The sooner the girls were got out of the road the better. As for her unwillingness and hanging back, that was all nonsense. A fine young fellow with a comfortable farm, his brothers and sisters all settled in America! Old Capel and his wife were giving up, and going out of the place, out of her road entirely. What could Mary be thinking of? he asked himself. He was excessively angry with her, or rather he would have been had not another set of circumstances combined to put him rather in good-humour.

He had been visiting Waterford lately, and had there discovered what he was in search of, a rich shopkeeper's daughter, whose people he had reason to believe, from the account given by his ambassador, did not disapprove of his suit. This item of intelligence he kept to himself, knowing well that the greatest reticence and caution were necessary. He felt greatly elated at his good fortune, and unconsciously swaggered a little in his manner and gait. He had never seen the Waterford damsel, nor was he in any particular hurry to do so, for he was carrying on a flirtation with a pretty little girl whom he had met at a wake. He did not care very much for her, and he had never had the slightest intention of marrying her, but she was exceedingly attractive; and all the young fellows, even Harry Capel, who was to marry his sister, were running after her. So Luke of course was to the fore with the rest in his attentions to pretty Bessy Rooney, and rather took pride in distancing them, his handsome face and figure,

together with his expectations, and his fine riding-horse, giving him advantages in the field.

He hated Honor Quin, as did for that matter most of the young men of the district. He had no idea that his mother had been so foolish as to make even an approach to matrimonial overtures to the Quins. Luke had opportunities of knowing a great deal more than his mother did about that family and their pretensions, and he would have been furious if he had divined what had really happened.

He threw himself on the grass now, close by the bench occupied by the visitors and his sister, and, addressing the latter, asked her if she had taken his coursing dog Sheelah out for a run that day as he had desired her.

'No, not yet, Luke; it is time enough,' she answered timidly.

Luke rolled over on his elbow. 'When it wasn't done before, you can let it alone now. Is not that too bad, Miss Quin?' he asked, turning to that young lady. 'I bid Mary take out Sheelah for a run, and she forgets all about it, and I that have entered her for the Coursing Cup!'

Luke addressed Miss Quin in a tone of rollicking gallantry, meaning to impose on her credulity, and to lead her to suppose that he was offering her attentions of honourable import.

'Indeed,' observed Miss Quin, in rather a chilly tone.

'There's not her equal in the whole of Cork,' pursued the youth. 'Miss Maulever, did your brother tell you of the trial we had with Sheelah and two of O'Malley's best greyhounds down there in the demesne? Cooper the stableman said he never saw the like of Sheelah. I'd back her against any dog in the county for fifty pounds,' he boasted, raising his voice as if there might be some one lurking about to take him up.

Honor Quin's face presented such a mixture of disapproval and frozen reserve that the youth was fain to direct his conversation to Miss Mauleverer and his sister, which he did, every now and then looking to see how Miss Quin endured the transference of his attentions. He had

as high an estimate of his own market-value as she had of hers. Of course she was a prize, an enormous prize, and he almost acknowledged that she was above his reach. However, who could tell—Luke, whom his mother spoiled frightfully, knew himself to be good-looking—but that she was secretly not indifferent to him; what else brought her to Lambert's Castle? She had been there to see Mary several times since Christmas, although this was the first time that she had been so fortunate as to find him at home. So he played off all his rustic airs and graces upon Miss Mauleverer, and put Miss Quin's stern expression down to jealousy pure and simple. Honor was indeed angry, but for a very different reason. She was beginning to think that Mary had something to do with the unwelcome appearance of her brother, and was almost impugning her *bona-fides*, but a glance at the poor girl's troubled, anxious face dispelled the illusion at once.

She rose now and shook out her dress. 'It is getting late,' she said, taking out her watch.

'My mother has tea ready for you, Honor. Miss Maulever, you will come in for a moment, won't you?' Luke added his entreaties to his sister's, and led the way back to the yard. The cows had come in and were being milked. Judy was at one and the servant-man was busy with another. The rest waited their turns patiently. There was a delicious scent of new milk all about, and with it a mingled bouquet of spring grass and all manner of budding herbs and blossoms that each cow exhaled with her every breath.

Standing at the door of the farmhouse, knitting in hand, the mistress of the house was superintending operations. On catching sight of the young people she let her spectacles slide down her nose and advanced to meet them. She was a well-favoured comely person, who looked about fifty, but who in reality wanted several years of that number. Country life, and particularly farm life, ages women rapidly. Her face was as freckled as a turkey's egg, and presented an odd mixture of simplicity and shrewdness, with a look at times, especially when her eye fell upon her son, of anxiety that was almost plaintive.

'Miss Quin, dear, I am very proud to see you,' she observed heartily, holding out a hand that afforded a marked contrast to her daughter's—so roughened and hardened was it by work. 'Good day to you, Miss Maulever,'—she added a curtsey to this—'I hope your aunt and all the family are well. It is a lovely day—yes, thank God for it. Now you will come in and have your tea. Mary, did you take the young ladies for a good walk?'

'No, just into the garden.'

'Dear, you are so fond of that garden, you seem to think that every one must like it too. Mary would live in that old place if she could, Miss Quin.'

'Luke!' roared a strident angry voice from the gate. 'Luke! and be hanged to you I say. Why did you not come back with that chain bit I sent you for?'

It was old Ahearne coming up from the turnip-field. His flushed angry face cleared when he saw the girls, and he lifted his hat civilly as he advanced.

'Oh! now I never thought, sure, he had so good an excuse, and I forgive him this time entirely. Miss Quin, I am delighted to see you, I protest. This fine day and yourself together do anybody's heart good.'

He had a welcome for Miss Mauleverer too, but that was too markedly different in kind to escape the notice of the suspicious and watchful Honor.

'But what are you standing out here for? I do vow and protest you are most neglectful to keep them here in the yard. Luke, you clown! why do you not ask the ladies inside? My God! man, look at Miss Quin here; and you hanging your head in that fashion.'

This meant nothing but civility—bare civility—but the heiress was almost frightened, and was vowing in her inmost soul never to set foot again in Lambert's Castle while she lived. She cast a look at Miss Mauleverer, but she was engaged watching some very young chickens hiding themselves in their mother's feathers, and was apparently careless of all else. So in they went, Miss Quin unwillingly leading the party.

Whether it was in obedience to some tacit hint from his wife, whose suspicious shrewdness had divined the state of affairs and whose pride had taken alarm lest her darling Luke should have made himself cheap, or that he really had no mind to lose time, old Ahearne returned to his field; and Luke, after loitering aimlessly about the entry for a moment, took his departure also.

The entry led straight into the kitchen, a roomy apartment paved with cobble stones. A huge turf fire blazed on the hearthstone; over this hung an oven-pot with a smaller fire blazing on its lid. A yellow-painted dresser was well plenished with delf. Rush-bottomed painted chairs stood about. There were pictures on the walls, but so stained by peat-smoke that they could not be distinguished. A wooden bench with a high polished back stood close to the fireplace, over which a couple of guns were hanging. A big old long-bodied clock with a dusky face ticked wheezily and deliberately in a corner, and between the beats of the pendulum the shrill chirp of the crickets made itself heard from the hearth. The faintest possible odour, the merest echo of the pigs' pot was traceable in the hot air, along with the smell of the turf and of the numerous rows of flitches and hams dependent from the ceiling. Sundry indistinct motions as of plumage rustling, and now and again a discreet *sotto voce* cluck, betokened the presence of some members of the feathered flock. A turkey with a valuable sitting of eleven eggs was accommodated with a basket in the quietest and most remote corner of the place. A 'late sitter,' about whose 'clutch' being addled grave apprehensions were entertained, was placed below the dresser, and a pet goose of notorious ill-temper stretched out her long white neck and bit and hissed at them as the party walked past her into 'the room.' Marion Mauleverer swerved aside from the snapping beak.

'Don't mind her,' said Mary. 'She allows no one to come near her but my mother, and they are the greatest friends in the world.'

'That is so, indeed,' corroborated Mrs. Ahearne. 'Would you believe it?—one evening I was sitting there not long

ago by the fire, and she got off the nest and came over and sat down beside me on the floor, just like a Christian, she is so 'cute!'

They were in the sitting-room now. It was much smaller than the kitchen. The floor was covered with cocoa-matting, and it had all the appearance of the best and the least used room of the house. Mary's piano, with a dish of waxen fruit under a glass shade on top of it, occupied a conspicuous place. A haircloth-covered sofa shrouded in antimacassars stood against the wall at one side. Chairs to match it, also covered with antimacassars, every one of which fell off on their entry, were ranged round the others, and were looked down upon by coloured prints of the Holy Family, Pope Pius the Ninth, Daniel O'Connell, and some lesser national luminaries. There was not a single book to be seen, except Moore's *Melodies*, which lay in their bright green binding on top of the piano.

Tea was presently served. Judy carried in a Britannia metal teapot which stood rather lamely on the tea-tray, one of its feet having been melted off at the kitchen fire. The contents of the oven-pot proved to be a huge cake, of a fine golden-brown without, and within, as rich as eggs, sour cream, butter, and currants could make it. Honor Quin sat for a minute with her cup of tea untouched before her. Her perturbation of mind hardly allowed her to notice the cake which her hostess put on her plate.

'Miss Quin, dear, you take nothing,' said Mrs. Ahearne. 'May be you would prefer a glass of sherry wine. Dear me, to think I should have forgotten to ask you that before!'

Mrs. Ahearne's hands fell into her lap, and she looked grieved at the thought of her breach of manners.

'Not at all, Mrs. Ahearne,' replied the young lady addressed. 'I never drink sherry wine.' Honor Quin spoke with her company voice, and in her stiffest and most impressive manner. She had encased herself from head to foot in a buckler of formality. Her distrust of the Ahearne family's intentions towards her almost forbade her accepting any of the proffered hospitality; Luke's disappear-

ance reassured her, however, and she ventured to accept the refreshment offered.

After tea, Mary Ahearne wrapped a light shawl over her shoulders and accompanied her friends down the cart-track towards the gate.

'When shall we see you again?' asked Marion, when they were about to part. Honor Quin turned round and identified herself with the question.

'I—I don't know. I shall be at Mass on Sunday—and after that to the convent.' A deep sigh accompanied the words, and the others remained silent.

'I wish 'twas Sunday,' continued Mary dolorously. 'I'd be settled in my mind one way or other.'

'How?' asked Honor Quin.

'My mother is to see Father Paul on Saturday; she has set that day this long time. She thinks to settle the day for the marriage, and send word to the Capels to finish the business. But indeed she will be disappointed.'

'Mary Ahearne,' said Honor Quin, 'surely your mother knows you want to be a nun?'

'Oh yes! but she would rather I got married.'

'What difference can it make to her whether you go into the convent or marry?'

'You always got your own way in everything, Honor Quin,' replied the girl sadly, 'but there is no one in your family to be thought of but yourself, and that is quite different from me.'

'Yes,' assented Miss Quin, 'it is different.' The thought occurred to her that her mother when reminding her of the advantages which surrounded her, which she did half a dozen times a week, had surely some complications like this of the Ahearne family in her mind when she laid special stress upon the circumstance of her being an only daughter and having but one brother. Honor never realised her full meaning until now, and in her heart she entirely agreed with her.

Marion was in a brown study, that was half composed of disgust and repulsion. She pitied her old schoolfellow and sympathised with her, but she was at the same time revolted

by the matter-of-fact manner of Mary Ahearne's recital of her woes. She had not been shocked, that was clear, not even surprised. She seemed to feel the sordid mercenary aspect of the affair much less than the obstruction offered to her going into the convent; took all that, in short, as an everyday occurrence. Marion brooded over this revelation of the world and its ways, which had so suddenly and unpreparedly come upon her, with a feeling of sickened disgust. She had heard of marriages before in the district, and much talk of 'fortunes' and such details, but a first-hand account such as Mary Ahearne's had never before come to her knowledge. Nor could it very easily have done so. She had been kept close at school until the preceding Christmas, or some time before it, and she had no companions and no acquaintance in Barrettstown. It was only the second time that she had been at Lambert's Castle. She had never been inside Honor Quin's house, and the only place at which she met her was the parish chapel on Sundays at last mass, or the eight o'clock service on week-days. Exchanging visits was never even thought of. Miss D'Arcy's condition of health, if no other consideration existed, forbade the like, and there was no attraction whatever to Marion in social intercourse with such widely different individuals as these girls and her other school companions. She had sat on the same bench for five or more years with Mary Ahearne, Honor Quin, and some others of the shopkeeper and farmer class. Miss D'Arcy, in the intervals of clear-headedness which her ailment permitted, exhorted Marion to keep herself aloof from such low company, and at other times found it convenient to patronise them for her own ends. Father Paul treated everybody with the same kindly paternal manner, and would have reckoned it a sin to observe social distinctions in the letter, though in the spirit he was intensely aristocratic, and was proud beyond measure of his own relationship to the D'Arcys. Marion felt puzzled between her guides, who differed and agreed in such a confusing manner. However, no very striking attractions presented themselves to bring her into conflict with either. Honor Quin was worldly and

self-conceited, Mary Ahearne was pious to an irritating degree, and insipid. Nevertheless, five years' intercourse with both had compelled a kind of familiarity and interest, almost affection. Notwithstanding the radical differences of being, the Mauleverers' position, as regarded the village and its inhabitants, was peculiar and characteristic, and to understand it fully without keeping Tighe O'Malley and Barrettstown in mind would not be easy. Ever since Miss D'Arcy's memorable appearance in the town and her encounter with the young heir of the Mauleverer estate she had been more or less an invalid. She had had a severe stroke of paralysis, and the utmost quiet and retirement was necessary for her, as her existence ever since then had hung upon a thread. Tighe O'Malley had left Barrettstown shortly afterwards, and had not been seen again by any one save when he paid a flying visit once on the occasion of his marriage. He was no permanent or abiding figure, and the inhabitants scarcely thought of him at all. The Mauleverers, in consequence of his absence probably, received more homage and respect than they suspected to be due to that cause. He was married—had married some years after the date of Miss D'Arcy's mysterious appearance on the scene,—but no one in the town had had more than a fleeting glimpse of his wife.

Mary Ahearne had conducted her friends to the high-road, and turned back then up the boreen. Marion looked back and saw her head and shoulders wrapped in the black shawl, passing along over the hedge top.

'Does she not look like a nun now? Look!' she said, addressing Honor Quin. 'She always did. You know Mother Sylvestre always said she had a nun's face.'

'So be it! Old Capel may be thinks so too,' said Honor Quin, with a sneering laugh. 'Those Ahearnes have great impudence. Luke Ahearne has conceit enough for anything, and his old father too, encouraging him! If George had been there he would soon let them know where they were.'

She spoke in an angry, offended tone. Marion stared at her. Here was a fresh mystery.

'Those fellows,' pursued the irate Honor, 'think a girl

cannot pass their road but they have only to hold up their finger to her.'

'What!' ejaculated Marion involuntarily.

'Yes. They all think that—Jim Cadogan is worse; he said not long ago he had only to give out that he wanted to be married and he could get his pick of thirty or forty girls in the county, and all with money, and all wanting to be settled.'

'To be settled!' echoed Marion.

'Men are disgusting,' continued Miss Quin, who now talked quite fluently, and had evidently mounted her hobby. 'They are all alike as far as I can see. I am sorry for Mary Ahearne, I will say that, and I think she is foolish. You see, Harry Capel is as good as she has any right to expect. He is rough, but so are the Ahearnes rough—very rough people,—though I believe Mrs. Ahearne had a thousand pounds of a fortune and belonged to a very respectable family.'

'Mary Ahearne has four hundred pounds,' observed Marion absently.

'Yes. I wonder if she will get all that with her if she goes into the convent. Catch the nuns take her without it—what fools they are!'

'Eh!' repeated Marion, startled.

'I said what fools they would be to take a girl like her without money. She's not accomplished or able to teach. Do you imagine they take in people to support them, or for God's sake?'

'Oh! Honor Quin, you really say dreadful things.' Miss Mauleverer felt perfectly stunned, as though she had listened to blasphemy.

''Tis no scandal, not a bit,' retorted Honor Quin defiantly. 'I'm not saying a word but bare truth. Ask Father Conroy if you like, Miss Maulever. You won't even get into heaven without money nowadays, for that matter. An' after all,' she added, with a bitter gibe in her voice, 'what is any one without money?'

Marion threw her a curt good-evening, and crossed the dike into the osier field, for they were close to the town now.

CHAPTER VI

'These signs have marked me extraordinary,
And all the courses of my life do show
I am not in the roll of common men.'

It was nearly dark when Marion entered her aunt's sitting-room. The lamp was lighted, and Kitty Macan was in process of getting ready the tea-table. A lively discussion was going on. Miss D'Arcy's voice was raised in shrill reproof, and Kitty Macan emphasised her arguments with the plates, accompanying each contradiction with a thump on the table.

'It is you at last, Marion!' cried Miss D'Arcy, on seeing Marion enter; 'and now will you have the goodness to tell me where and how you have spent your afternoon, and above all what has kept you so late? It is disgraceful to think of a young lady being out alone until dark.'

'I was not alone, Aunt Ju; I have been at Lambert's Castle, and I walked home with Honor Quin.'

However, before this much had been said in explanation, Miss D'Arcy had reverted to the subject of her previous conversation with Kitty Macan.

'Here is a pretty message from the Barrettstown Castle ranger about the goat! The impudence—the impudence that you have, Kitty Macan, to come and tell me such a thing!'

'Deed then, now, ma'am, what could I do with the message but just to give it to yourself as I got it? Oh Lard, yes! just as I was given it I give it to you, ma'am.'

'The goat,' pursued Miss D'Arcy, 'will be shot the

next time she is seen in the demesne. She made her way straight to the terrace-gardens, and has destroyed the young trees.'

'Johnny Hurrell say she have done depredations entirely on the rose bushes, and he swore his soul he would have killed her dead dat minute, only he knew she was ours. Deed yes, Miss Marion, you'd better be tinking of dat. 'Twas you let her out, and where is her chain, too? Johnny he carried her here in a bit of a rope, said she had no chain on her. Where did you fasten her this morning? I told you, Miss D'Arcy, I had no hand or part in dat. 'Twas miss, dere, and I cannot find the chain nowhere.'

'It was I sent the goat, or let her go, across the weir, and the chain has fallen into the river.' Marion spoke quite unconcernedly.

'And why, may I ask, did you take upon yourself to do any such thing?' demanded Miss D'Arcy.

'Oh! she would have destroyed the flowers there at the race, and she has eaten down all the grass in the garden. Godfrey, you might have fished up the chain as I asked you to.'

'What are you talking about?' asked her brother, who had just then sauntered in.

'O'Malley's ranger, one of his servants, has had the insolence to send an impertinent message to me. Kitty Macan, repeat what you were told to repeat, as you say, to Mr. Godfrey. Godfrey, listen to what this creature had the audacity to say to my face; Kitty Macan, you forget yourself strangely.'

'Do I, begob!' answered Kitty, who was clearly quite unaffected by Miss M'Arcy's outraged dignity, and continued to clatter the plates and knives.

'Nanny went up to the terrace and did mischief,' explained Marion. 'She never is content with grass when she can get flowers—nasty thing! and Hurrell brought her home, saying she would surely be shot next time.'

'That's all,' observed Godfrey nonchalantly. 'Come and give me my tea. I'm busy this evening. I shall drive

the goat into the demesne to-morrow myself, and let Hurrell shoot her if he dares.'

'Well, den, I wouldn't, if I was you,' observed Kitty. Dat's just why they are so partic'lar, because Tighe O'Malley and his lady are coming home. Dey's comin' directly, all of a sudden, and some beautiful quality wit' dem.'

They all started with surprise, and for an instant no one spoke. Marion, after a glance at her aunt, left her seat, and under pretence of doing something at the side-table, crossed over to Kitty Macan and pulled her sleeve.

'What did Father Paul tell you—often—and the doctor too?'

'Oh Lard, yes! not to speak of dose O'Malleys. I was forgetting, yes,' returned Kitty below her breath, with a glance in Miss D'Arcy's direction.

'I want tea, I say,' repeated Godfrey. 'Aunt Jul, can't we have tea now? I want to do some work.'

Miss D'Arcy rang the bell, and then without rising from her chair turned herself about and unlocked the press beside her; then she took out her tea-caddy. As the door swung open it disclosed a motley store ranged upon the two shelves, papers of sugar, flour, starch, jostled bars of soap and strings of candles. A large bowl of eggs flanked a piece of bacon. A quantity of papers, books, and parcels were jumbled together in a heap with these. No one was ever allowed to go near this museum of treasures, over which its proprietress kept watch and ward all day, while at night the key reposed with her great old watch, her rosary and her *paroissien* on a table beside her bed. Her bedroom was immediately behind the sitting-room, a pleasant sunny apartment looking into the garden, and between these two rooms, with the exception of her Sunday excursion to mass, which was made in a bath-chair, Miss Juliet D'Arcy's life was now spent.

Gertrude came in at this juncture, and laid a music roll in the window-seat. She had been down to Chapel House to practise, as was her wont every afternoon. Her brown hair was all tossed and her cheeks flushed. She was a

well-grown bright child, full of animal health and energy, which just now found an outlet in her school tasks. As Godfrey was Juliet D'Arcy's spoilt darling she was Father Paul's, and at the convent school her strong will and force of character made itself felt also.

'Godfrey, darling,' observed Miss D'Arcy, when the evening meal, an exact replica of the breakfast, had begun, 'you eat nothing. Let Kitty get you an egg—do!'

'Please, do, Godfrey, you are working so hard; keep up your strength,' added Gertrude jibingly.

The irony provoked no comment from her brother, who allowed Kitty to be summoned without demur. Miss Juliet selected with great discrimination an egg from the bowl in her store, and confided it to Kitty Macan, who in due time presented it to her young master with the wrong end up in a wine-glass.

Gertrude, on seeing her brother begin to eat the egg, was taken with an uncontrollable fit of laughing.

'Leave the room!' commanded Miss D'Arcy, staring at her with her eyes open as if with astonishment. Gertrude obeyed, laughing still, and first drinking up the contents of her cup.

'Godfrey,' said Marion, after a long pause, 'you *might* have fished up that chain now; may be it will never be got.'

He raised his dark eyes for a moment and then answered deliberately, 'What matter?'

'She will ruin the garden, and go into Quirke's cabbage-fields. Oh, Godfrey, you *must*!'

'I will tell you what you may do, miss,' spoke Miss D'Arcy, 'and that is just to go and get a cord and a chain from your friend Miss Quin. She will be only too glad to oblige you; do you hear?'

'Yes,' answered Marion, in a voice that plainly meant No.

'You can just set off for the town and tell the Quins you want the loan of a chain or a strong bit of cord. If you *will* know people of that kind, at least let them be of use to you.'

To this speech neither of the young people paid the slightest attention.

'I confess,' went on Miss D'Arcy, 'I wonder at your condescension to that Quin girl, that you would allow people to see her in your company. I do not object in the same manner to Ahearne's daughter at Lambert's Castle. Farmers are another thing, but these tradespeople! I tell you, Marion, it is time that ceased.'

'Well, I was at school with her long enough. You made no objection to that.'

'That was another thing. When I was at school, long long ago in Paris, the daughters of the tradesmen of the *quartier* were in the same class as young duchesses. It did not follow that they were companions in after life.'

'Marion isn't a duchess,' observed Godfrey.

'Well, you will not tell me, sir, that she is not in a very different position to Quin's daughter.'

Miss D'Arcy had drawn herself up straight, and looked from one to the other with an angry, excited look. Neither replied to her. The boy's face grew darker and more lowering. His long-shaped velvety eyes, black now in the evening light, were fixed with an expression at once forbidding and defiant on Miss D'Arcy's. Marion's too seemed to question her, but in a different way. The old woman's face, as she met those two glances, changed in a marked and peculiar manner. In spite of her effort, the stern reproof she attempted to convey by her look vanished. Her eyes fell under Godfrey's, and her underlip trembled. Her hands moved and shook, and she pushed her chair back a little, and turned herself sideways from the table.

Godfrey rose slowly from his seat, and, putting his hands in his pockets, strolled out carelessly without even turning his head. Marion listened to him while he unlatched the hall door, and went down the steps into the drive. He had not taken his cap, which lay on the window-seat, so he could not intend to go far. She handed her aunt a smelling-bottle containing salts, which were badly in need of renewing. Then she moved the chair back to

its wonted corner of the hearth, dropped a couple of sods on the fire, and seated herself on an old worked *prie dieu* chair opposite her grand-aunt's place.

Little by little Miss D'Arcy's agitation passed off. Her troubled perturbed face regained its wonted aspect, and her hands ceased their strange nervous action. Marion, without seeming to do so, watched her quietly until Kitty Macan, having finished her own refection, came in. Then she slipped out and into the front yard to look for Godfrey. A passing glance assured her that he had gone out on the river-bank. It was nearly dark, but she soon found him standing at the near end of the race.

'Oh, there you are,' she began. 'What made you speak that way to Aunt Ju, Godfrey? You know she is not to be upset or excited.'

Godfrey began to whistle softly, and made no reply.

'Let us get up the chain,' said Marion. 'I will go and bring you the garden rake. Godfrey, you must do it now. How are we to manage the goat to-morrow?' She went round to the house yard as she spoke, and presently returned with a long-handled rake. Godfrey took it from her, and made for the weir.

'Don't fall in,' said Marion, as she, following him closely, watched him start on the rather difficult task of balancing himself on the narrow ledge.

'Now! say whereabout it was she dropped it.'

'A little farther—two more steps. Now! just there—she let the collar and the last bit of her chain fall at that spot.'

Godfrey let the rake which he had been using as a balancing pole drop into the water, and crouched down, sitting on his heels on the narrow ledge of the weir. He then began raking and groping in the mud of the river-bottom.

'It will never be got,' he said, after a series of gropings. 'I'll move a little nearer the bank. Are you sure she let it fall on this side?'

He rose again to his full height, and retraced his steps to about half the distance, then repeated his dredging operations, to equally little purpose.

'I shall come down in the morning and dive for it,' he said. 'There is no use trying now.'

'I hope it will be got somehow. You know I got that at Chapel House, and Miss Johnston may want it again.'

'I say,' Godfrey began, 'this is comical—O'Malley coming back at last—is it not? It is now six years almost since he set foot in the place, often as he said he was coming.'

'Why does he come now, I wonder?'

'I heard it was that his wife, Lady Blanche, wants him to get into Parliament, and of course his own county is selected for that honour. He is probably coming down to salt the constituency.'

Marion listened contentedly without understanding a word. Her brother, indeed, was only quoting from the hotel-porch gathering. It was the merest echo of nonsense, but, having a vague flavour of malignant intention, was accepted unquestioningly by porch and bridge alike.

'Lady Blanche and her cousin, and the husband of the cousin, and the brother of the cousin. I forget all their names,' continued Godfrey. He seemed excited, and spoke in a bitter forced voice.

'Well, I know them. A girl told me at school to-day.' This was from Gertrude, who had come out at the side gate, and approached them unobserved. 'Lady Blanche's cousin is only a sort of distant cousin, a Mrs. Courthope. They said at first she was her sister-in-law, but Aunt Ju says she would be Lady Something Courthope. She's Mrs. Courthope, and her husband is a member of Parliament. He is coming over for Easter to inquire into the Fenians or something like that, and then there's a young gentleman from college coming with them for the fishing. He's Tighe O'Malley's relation also,—Mr.—— I forget his name. He will be a man of title.'

'You know it all, I see,' said Godfrey snubbingly; 'a nice lot of salmon they'll get, won't they? I wonder how long they mean to stop?'

'I don't know. Marchmont said to Mrs. Fagan at the hotel he could not tell if Mr. O'Malley would go to London

for the season or no. He was quite surprised. The visitors will stay a fortnight.'

Marion listened to Gertrude's eager repetition of the news which she had heard at school. She also was moved by the news. She wondered vaguely what effect upon herself this much-talked-of home-coming of the master of Barrettstown would have. Some it must have; Tighe O'Malley was no favourite, and the country people and townsfolk either pretended to, or really did look on the Mauleverers as the rightful heirs, and treat them as such. This was in the absence of the unlawful owner and master, as they chose to esteem him. How his presence among them might work remained to be seen.

All three stood still and were silent, each of them occupied with different thoughts, though with eyes fixed on the same object—the road leading to the great entrance of the Castle. This, which was private, ran by the river on the opposite side, but the lodge gates were hidden in a great clump of trees. No one could come or go on that road without being seen from the mill-house gates. Marion was thinking that she must avoid the river road henceforward on that account, so that she might not see any of the newcomers. Gertrude reflected that on and after to-morrow she would go to school and come home by the river road, in order to see as much as possible of the travellers to and from Barrettstown Castle. She would have to pass the chapel, and the windows of the Chapel House, these being situated about half a mile nearer to the town, and round the next bend of the river. They were, in fact, built in the demesne grounds; O'Malley had given the site shortly after he had inherited the estate.

'They are awfully busy up at the castle,' continued Gertrude; 'servants down from Dublin, and fuss, and workmen, and furniture—all sorts of things; I wonder they never came before.'

'I wonder what brings them now,' muttered Godfrey; 'wonder if he will have a couple of guards like Marchmont.' Godfrey's thoughts were full of O'Malley too, but in a different way.

'Why? why do you say that?' asked Marion startled. 'Why should he want policemen?'

'Do you suppose they have forgotten the evictions up at Kilfinane four years ago? For that matter the people he transplanted on the reclaimed land, down towards the Friar's Bridge, are not too content. Marion, I'll make you a bet he has protection in a fortnight.'

'I—you will do nothing of the kind, Godfrey.'

'Marion,' said Gertrude suddenly, 'you were at Lambert's Castle to-day. Is it true that Mary Ahearne is going to enter the noviceship?'

'To enter the noviceship?—she must be a postulant first. I know nothing about it. I don't believe she will marry Harry Capel, though. Now, please not to tell anything at St. Monica's to-morrow, do you hear? or to Miss Johnston either.'

'Very well, Marion, since you wish it, but it is well you told me,' replied Gertrude.

'Why should she speak of it?' asked Godfrey scornfully, 'or you either? what has that stuff got to do with us? I wish you would both go indoors. It is time for prayers.'

Godfrey turned his back to them and blew a loud shrill whistle. Then he listened; Marion and Gertrude, astonished, listened also. For a moment there was not a sound. The hurried babble of the race, the occasional drowsy caw of a waking or dreaming rook in the woods across the river, alone broke the dark stillness. Godfrey was about to repeat his signal when a faint distant whistle came to their ears, borne along it almost seemed in unison with the river. There came a second whistle, as remote and faint, and yet different.

Godfrey uttered some ejaculation, which seemed to blend surprise and impatience in equal parts. He seized the two girls by the arms with a sudden and violent grip.

'What hour of night is this for us to be out here? In with you both—prayers are waiting—come!'

Marion offered no resistance. Gertrude struggled and protested, only to find her arm gripped more painfully.

They were pushed and pulled by their tyrant until the sitting-room was reached. Godfrey then let them go, and dropped lazily into the chair opposite his aunt.

'They were out on the bank, larking about in the damp air, Aunt Ju; I have fetched them in to prayers. Gertrude had nothing on her head. It is not proper.'

'Quite right, dear,' assented Aunt Ju, taking no notice of Gertude's tearful protest. 'Ring the bell for Kitty.'

It was half-past nine. Kitty Macan had sent home her aide-de-camp, a barefooted girl from the town, who did all the rough work and kept her company in the kitchen, and a shock-headed boy, bareheaded like the girl, and who waited on and kept her company. She was sitting over the embers of the turf fire, meditatively awaiting the wonted signal. As soon as the sound of the bell roused her, she got up and proceeded to go through a sort of rubric of her own. She swept the hearth clean, placed the shovel and tongs to the right-hand side of the fire, close to the pile of turf, filled a bowl with clean water and placed it on the dresser. This was for the 'good people' or fairies, and she would far rather, if it came to choosing, omit her prayers than this ceremony. Having finished it she took a huge old black rosary off a nail, and betook herself to the sitting-room for family worship.

Marion handed her aunt a leather-covered prayer-book and a rosary from the oratory against the wall. The table was pulled close to Miss D'Arcy's chair, and the lamp placed so that the light fell upon the book. Gertrude took her red coral beads and knelt down before the little lamp. Marion had her accustomed place beside her aunt, who was obliged to remain sitting. Kitty Macan let herself drop on a mat before the settee at one side of the room, kneeling so as to look towards the oratory, crossed herself and ducked her head to the floor; Godfrey waited until Miss D'Arcy had begun, then slipped noiselessly and unobserved out of the room.

The family devotions lasted twenty minutes. Miss D'Arcy read the prayers aloud from her book, although she knew them off by heart. After them came the rosary.

Decade by decade did she give it out pitilessly until the prescribed number had been accomplished. Kitty Macan prayed with unction and from the depths of her soul; the fervour of her responses quite dimmed those of the two girls. The end came at last. The rosaries replaced, Kitty Macan produced a candle-stick, and demanded, in a voice which her orisons had bereft of all but intelligibility, a candle. Miss D'Arcy crossed herself deliberately—she was always the last to finish her devotions—and refused flatly.

'Quin's shop would not keep you supplied with candle-light.' She addressed her nieces angrily. 'Go to bed in the dark.'

There was nothing for it but to obey. Gertrude, though she knew this, complained nevertheless. 'I have not done half my lessons yet. It is Godfrey who burns our candles as well as his own lamp.'

Marion replaced some books upon their shelves, kissed her aunt's forehead, and went upstairs. The narrow steep staircase led into a corridor, with bedrooms opening off it on both sides. A large window, destitute of curtain or blind, admitted a clear stream of moonlight at one end. Marion's room was a large square apartment looking out upon the garden; it commanded a view of one of the bends of the river as well, at some distance down. The window was open. She seated herself sideways in it, and remained there looking out pensively into the half obscurity; there was a moon, but it was cloudy for the moment. Before long her eye was caught by a dark shadow crossing the path at that part which her window commanded. She could just distinguish it. It vanished into shadow. After a moment some other figures flitted past. A sudden thought came into her mind; she jumped up and ran into Godfrey's room.

He was there. His lamp was burning on a table in the window. Godfrey, seated with a book open before him, was smoking. 'Shut the door, please,' he said, without looking round. 'The draught is enough to blow out the light—quick!'

She obeyed.

'I suppose you have come on the same errand as Gertrude,' he continued. 'You shall not take the lamp. I want it—though not to read by.' As he spoke he shut up the book with a snap.

'Are you not—don't you mean to read?' she asked.

'Who could be bothered?' returned he, standing up and stretching himself. 'It's all stuff of Father Paul. I'll be no bank clerk. Tighe O'Malley has the confounded impudence to propose to get me some such appointment. An excise officer, indeed! If it was some outdoor thing now, but fancy stuffing in a bank like Murphy and Kelly down there for seventy or a hundred a year! And even then, if I did——' he stopped and sighed profoundly.

'What will you do then, since you are not to go to school any more?'

'Do! I don't know. Don't ask me, Marion!' he retorted, almost savagely. 'What can I do? I don't like even to think. There, now,' Godfrey broke off, suddenly changing his tone. 'I'm off. Where is my cap? Oh, here!'

'Where are you going, Godfrey?' cried Marion, on seeing him turn down the lamp, and then swing himself over the window-sill. She ran to the window and caught hold of his jacket. He had dropped down on the roof of one of the outbuildings.

'What are you doing, Godfrey? I won't let you go!'

'Let me go! Marion, don't be a little fool. I am going down there to smoke a pipe in the river-path with some fellows. That's all. Don't make a noise. Look! do you see the light of Aunt Ju's window there on the grass, Marion? You will give her a fright if you make me lose my balance and fall into the garden. Hands off, I say! else I shall jump, and perhaps break my neck.'

She let him go unwillingly, and he walked lightly along the roof of the mill buildings to the wall next the road, stooped, laid one hand upon the coping-stone, and then let himself drop over and out of sight.

Marion gazed after him with a mingled sense of fear,

perplexity, and astonishment. 'I must tell Father Paul,' was her first articulate thought. 'Who can his companions be?'

Then she remembered the curious under-current of political ferment at that moment permeating the town, the rumours of midnight meetings, drillings on the hillsides, the increase in the number of the constabulary. It was impossible for even her, who lived a life apart, and who was forbidden to read the newspaper, to escape knowing and feeling something of the troubles that stirred the air. Could Godfrey—but no—that was impossible. Fenianism was confined to the common people, the farmers' servant-men —the poor people. There were plenty of farmers' sons engaged in it. Who was it that had said Luke Ahearne and Harry Capel, and ever so many more, were leading members? Even so, Godfrey could have no feeling in common with them. What could he have to do with them? He despised them all, as Aunt Ju did And yet! when she thought of the whistling, the dark figures on the river-bank, and now this nocturnal excursion of the wild, untractable if lovable Godfrey, she could not help feeling anxious and uneasy.

CHAPTER VII

'Now for the rebels which stand out in Ireland,
Expedient manage must be made my liege.'

As soon as Godfrey found himself on the grassy river-side path, he put his long legs in motion at a rate which soon brought him to the upper bridge. That crossed, he turned his steps towards the Dublin Road. He passed by Chapel House, all dark now save for a light in the curate's room, next the chapel, and had got as far as the bank that skirted the cemetery without hindrance or disturbance to his onward course. Here, however, he was challenged by a low whistle, or rather a sort of chirrup, proceeding from the back of the ditch. Godfrey coughed in reply, and a dark figure rose from the shelter of the bushes, and approached him.

'Evening!' observed the newcomer, sauntering leisurely over beside him.

'What is up to-night?' asked Godfrey.

'Nothing. The boys are all up at Fenlon's. The night's too bright for practice, and there's business on hand.'

'What is the business, Cadogan?' asked Godfrey eagerly.

'Hush! don't speak so loud. Swearing in a few chaps from Skreen at the upper end of the barony; and anyhow, the peelers are after being sent up to the Knockstuart bog again—Tony Smith has sent them there now twice—to find us. It's far better drilling-ground than the demesne, and now that O'Malley's coming home we daren't go in there.'

'I see. You think now that the police have got two

sells about Knockstuart, they won't come after us there again.'

'No—hush!—what's that?' cried Cadogan. 'I thought I heard a horse's foot. Godfrey, let us get off the road. Come over here by the ditch. The moonlight is as clear as day, and the patrol might be down on us.'

'Who cares?' said Godfrey, continuing to walk in the middle of the road.

Cadogan seized his arm and dragged him over to the ditch side, where in the shadow of the bushes and weeds their presence was more likely to escape detection.

'I'll report you,' said Cadogan, 'you young ass! Is that the way you obey orders? We may meet the patrol any minute. Don't you know you may be arrested and shut up for months just for being out after dark?'

This suggestion seemed to rather sober Godfrey, who was in a perfect quiver of excitement. He walked along behind his companion and kept a sharp look-out backwards. When they had proceeded thus along the same road for something over a mile and a half, keeping well in shadow of the wall of Barrettstown demesne all the time, they came to a sharp turn. Cadogan halted. 'Slip up there to the turn and see if there's any one in sight along the road. It's a very bare one, and if we are caught on that there's no way of hiding.'

Godfrey, to whom all this secrecy and manœuvring was a perfect delight, readily obeyed, and crept to the place indicated. One glance round the turning was enough. He came flying back waving his hand.

'Four or more peelers—the mounted patrol—coming along fast.'

'Over the ditch with us, and lie flat,' said Jim Cadogan, putting his precept in practice without loss of time. Godfrey tumbled through the furze bushes which grew on top of the dike, and rolled into what was luckily a dry hollow behind it. Jim Cadogan lay down on his face and crawled up to the edge of the bank to look over. He was well in shelter, and commanded a good view of the road. In a minute the sound of horses' feet, of four mounted consta-