

NEW WINE

By Agnes & Egerton Castle

New Wine
Minniglen
Wolf-Lure
Rose of the World
The Secret Orchard
If Youth But Knew
Wroth
The Star Dreamer
Panther's Cub
Diamond Cut Paste
The Pride of Jennico
My Merry Rockhurst
The Composer
Flower of the Orange
The Bath Comedy
Incomparable Bellairs
The Heart of Lady Anne
The Lure of Life
The Haunted Heart
Our Sentimental Garden
The Hope of the House
Wind's Will

By Egerton Castle

Young April
The Light of Scarthey
Consequences
Marshfield the Observer
The House of Romance
Schools and Masters of Fence
English Book-Plates
The Jerningham Letters
Le Roman du Prince Othon

NEW WINE

BY

AGNES AND EGERTON CASTLE

AUTHORS OF

"MINNIGLEN," "THE PRIDE OF JENNICO,"

"THE HAUNTED HEART," ETC.



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*Neither do men put new wine into old bottles;
else the bottles break and the wine runneth out,
and the bottles perish.—ST. MATTHEW.*

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BOOK I

*“—a growing son: a growing son and
comely to behold.”—GENESIS*

NEW WINE

I

KILMORE HOUSE, MAYFAIR

LORD KILMORE stretched out his hand for the nut-crackers and deliberately split his walnut before replying.

The port wine glass stood at his elbow, the decanter in front of him—both of heavy old-fashioned cut glass. Port was the only wine he cared for. Yet he did not look like a man nourished on port wine: his thin, chiseled face was of the color of old ivory. Though he never spoke of his health and was as active as most men, there was a stamp as of some unadmitted illness upon him; his gestures had an unconscious languor; the thick black hair was silvered—prematurely, since he was, as Debrett would tell you, scarcely over fifty. His eyes were blue: cold and brilliant eyes, that spoke of restless energies, tormented desires, never fulfilled.

The contrast between the driving force of the spirit, expressed by his glance and speech, and the weariness of all his movements, made a curious impression—an unpleasant one. But then he was not a pleasant man. It was doubtful if any one had love for him, even those two motherless sons to whom he was, paradox of his nature, at once the most indulgent and the most arbitrary of parents.

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To-night, in the pillared dining-room of Kilmore House, standing between park and street in proud seclusion, he was entertaining three contemporaries to dinner: the only kind of party he ever gave, the choice repast to a chosen few. He had been at Eton with Blantyre, at Oxford with Darcy; Lord Edward Verney was his brother-in-law. Why they came to dine with him it might have been difficult for them to explain; for the excellence of the fare provided by the chef could hardly have compensated for the gloom diffused by the host.

Darcy, charming, cheery old beau as he was, would come to the board breathing good fellowship, genially content with himself and the world, and quite ready to wax a little sentimental after the first glass of champagne over the memory of old days. But laughter and speech would be gradually frozen on his lips, and by the time the servants had withdrawn, he would have lapsed into gloomy silence, almost if not quite ready to believe that England was going to the dogs, and that they would yet live to see all they held dear trampled under foot by a legalized mob. As for Lord Edward, his amiable habit of goading his brother-in-law to acrid bursts of temper, did not add to the comfort of the other guests. It was fortunate that Sir James Blantyre should belong to the type of amiable cynic who invariably selects the line of least resistance in social intercourse.

When Lord Kilmore had cracked his walnut, he looked across at his brother-in-law, and said slowly:—

“If that’s your opinion, it’s not mine. Give them ten years’ martial law, and you’ll hear no more about Home Rule.”

Colonel Darcy roused himself with a little start from a

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creeping somnolency. "Gad," he was wont to say, "I am an abstemious man, but I've got to take a glass too much at Kilmore's to keep the dashed chill off. Of course," he cried, in his jovial voice, "you've got a lot of property over there, haven't you, Kil? It's hard lines on the Irish landowner, I must say. But we are pretty badly hit over here too, what?"

"Monstrous," agreed Blantyre, filling his glass.

Lord Kilmore's shaven lip curled with an intensification of the irony peculiar to it.

"My dear fellow! If my father hadn't got rid of every inch of the wretched soil we once owned in Clare, I'd have done it myself—at any cost. Wise man, my father."

"To be sure," Lord Edward laughed tauntingly. "He got rid of other things too. The last Papist of the race."

"The first rational man of the race," said Lord Kilmore, with an icy glint of the blue eyes.

"Sensible fellow. Sensible man," echoed Blantyre.

"If there are three things I hate in this world," went on the host—he was peeling the half of his walnut with slow, bloodless fingers—"they are: a Papist, an Irishman, and the meddling fool of an Englishman who sets out to dry-nurse disloyalty."

The fixity of his glance seemed to include his brother-in-law in this last category, and Lord Edward was quite ready to give tap for rap.

"Pity," he smiled, "you can't prevent my nephews being called O'Connor, then. It sounds rather Irish, and—er—just a little bit papistical."

Lord Kilmore bared his teeth at his relative, and Colonel Darcy hastily intervened:—

"And where are my young friends, this moment, Kil-

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more? I rather hoped I might have met one at least to-night."

Lord Kilmore's face did not light up. On the contrary, across its brooding pallor there seemed to come a perceptible shadow.

"They're half-way across America. Anywhere this moment between Chicago and San Francisco."

"Both?"

"Both."

"Capital thing to send young men to see the world early," said Sir James, raising inquiring eyes over the lighting of his cigarette.

Lord Edward's mocking voice intervened.

"Surely, Darcy, you saw an announcement in the papers a little while ago."

"Bless my soul!" the Colonel sat up, tugged at his waistcoat, and looked distressedly from one to the other. "Nothing—er—I trust, my dear Kil? Well, 'pon honor, you know, it's the fashionable thing nowadays—eh, what? Marry an actress! They all do. The prettiest little woman I've seen for a long time, and the most charming, too—'pon honor, perfect little creature—is the new Lady Thurso. Came straight off the boards, my dear fellow!"

"After all, there's precious little difference, nowadays," agreed the smoker between two puffs.

"But," Lord Edward explained, keeping a malicious eye upon his host, "haven't you heard? The delinquent has been shipped for a journey round the world, with Guy to do watch-dog. Clever lad, Guy, knows which side his bread is buttered. My dear William," here he addressed his brother-in-law, "do you intend that Harold should pick up a pretty American instead? And what will you

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do when Miss Ruby Mordaunt brings an action? It went rather far, didn't it?"

"Thank you, my dear Edward, I appreciate your anxiety. I do not, however, anticipate any further trouble from Miss Mordaunt."

"Quite right. Quite right." It didn't matter with whom Sir James happened to concur; and, to do him justice, he did not care.

"Ugh," thought the warm-blooded Guardsman, with a shiver. "If Kilmore had dug a grave for the girl and buried her in it, he couldn't look much more *macabre*. What the devil did I come here for?" He glanced at his watch, and gave a well-simulated ejaculation of surprise: "Half-past ten! Bless my soul, I'd no idea it was so late. I must be off. I've got to trot the Missis and the little girls round to the Granthams' dance. Awfully sorry, Kil, break up pleasant party. But duty, eh what, duty."

Sir James and Edward Verney interchanged a look; then the latter said:—

"And we're due at the club. Dreadful thing this bridge, isn't it, William?" He laughed. It's always well to be civil to your entertainer at parting, even to a brother-in-law whom you detest.

Sir James Blantyre looked rather regretfully at his half glass of incomparable port, then swallowed it at a gulp—not the fashion in which he liked to discuss good wine. Nevertheless it was perfectly true that he and Verney had made an appointment for bridge. It was useful to make an appointment before going out to dine with Kilmore, if you were a truthful person.

So the good-bys were said. Lord Kilmore displayed no anxiety to retain his guests. He gave each a hand,

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to touch or shake, as they chose, and stood in the archway of the dining-room door just the necessary second to see that his servants were duly in attendance. Then he went back to his wine.

A footman crept in, made up the fire; the cat-footed butler followed, drew an arm-chair to the proper angle by the hearth; set at its elbow a small table with a new decanter of port and a fresh glass, and withdrew.

Lord Kilmore sauntered round and let himself drop upon the well-cushioned morocco. He stretched his long legs towards the blaze, and, as he gave himself to musing, the sour lines about his handsome mouth took deeper indentations. The evening—like all those other evenings that went before—had been dreary and profitless to him. It had indeed been worse than its predecessors, in so far as it had left a distinctly disagreeable impression. “Edward was a blanked unpleasant fellow. Why the devil did he ever ask him? . . . Jim Blantyre was a fool. And poor old Darcy merely an ass.”

He sipped his port, gazed at the fire-glow through it in a half mechanical way, and sipped again. His doctor had forbidden this. . . . He was an ass too—it was the only thing that kept him alive. . . . Confound Edward, that he must stir up that hornet’s nest about his ears again! The thing was over and done with, thanks to swift and strong action. . . . Well, Harold would thank him for it, one day. . . . He recalled the young, angry face as he had last seen it; the gesture with which his son and heir had refused to shake hands. . . . Harold would understand and thank him one day—one day. Yes, it was a good thing for a father to keep a tight hold of the supplies. And Miss Ruby Mordaunt was a wise young

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woman—she knew that a round sum in the hand was better than a penniless eligible in the bush. “She probably thinks to get both,” thought the father. He had no illusions; but his cynicism had a double edge: calf love, as a rule, does not outlive a journey round the world. The first pretty American—he paused and frowned; then his brows relaxed: Guy would keep a sharp lookout.—What was it that offensive Verney had said? “Clever lad, Guy, knows which side his bread is buttered.” Why shouldn’t he? Guy was no idiot. . . . He was glad of that. Yet there was something a little cold-blooded in Guy’s attitude towards his brother. The devil was in it that he never knew what Guy was thinking of. Harold, now, you could read him like an open book. Pity Guy was not the elder—Ah, no!

The father’s slow-beating heart tightened. If there was a creature he loved, it was his first-born. . . . Where were the boys now? he wondered. What a cursed empty place the house was, these days! How silent, yet how full of echoes!

II

A FIRESIDE IN CLENANE

“MISTHER SHANE was a great boy”—this was the unanimous verdict of the youth of the district. “Sure any one could tell, by the look of him, it was the rale ould blood that was in him. And him with the spring of a Corrib salmon in his backbone! Troth he’ll lep’ through life; and it’ll be the bold fellow that ’ud try the gaffing of him——”

But Father Blake, the old priest of Clenane, was of a different opinion. “It ’ud break anybody’s heart,” he declared to his crony, the doctor, “to see that fine young man going to waste the way he is! Him that ought to be the top of everything—taking his degree at the University. Not Trinity College, Dublin, mind you, but Trinity College, Cambridge—and hand in glove with the best in the land, not running about with the poor, low, common fellows here—no better than one of themselves for all my trouble with him!”

The doctor took his pipe out of his mouth, to deliver himself of a philosophic:

“Musha! What’s the good of going on that way?”

The cronies were sitting together in the little turf-scented parlor of the presbytery. “His Reverence,” in the horse-hair armchair, clad in a homespun dressing-gown, one bandaged foot in a list slipper resting on a

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stool, was evidently suffering from a complaint that need inspire little anxiety. And the doctor, thorough old gossip that he was, was enjoying the hour, his strong tobacco, and his friend's company, with a placid disregard of the fact that it was filched from the middle of his round.

The priest, on the other hand, was in an unwonted mood of depression. The gout is by no means as cheerful a companion as the pipe. Fixing the doctor with a disconsolate gaze, knotting his forehead into innumerable wrinkles, and rubbing his rough white hair into bristling disarray, he presented such a picture of distress that the smoker dropped his bantering tone and continued with sudden earnestness:

"We did what we could for him. You learned him the Latin, and——"

"Latin—!" Father Blake interrupted with a groan. "There isn't a little gossoon, backwards and forwards at the school beyant, that doesn't know as much."

"Well, you taught him what you could. Let us leave it at that; and be jabbers, I think we've done uncommonly well with him! He's as fine a lad as any of the young fellows that do be prancing and bowing up at Dublin Castle in his Excellency's train. A deal finer! Will any of them better him in the saddle, or with a gun across the bogs? They will not. Not one of them. And you know that yourself, for all the way you sit there shaking your old head at me."

The doctor here reinserted his pipe between his lips, to blow forth a rank and contemptuous puff; and, leaving that implement of solace hanging between his clenched teeth, proceeded—in impeded tones, but with no less energy:—

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“The Blake boy taught him the fishing. I showed him how to hold a gun, and I sat him on a horse——”

The priest interrupted.

“And indeed I do be thinking many a time that was the worst kindness any one did for him. It’s the queer wild lot he’s getting mixed up with.”

“Pshaw, what ails you at all? The lad can hold his own, and make a bit o’ money, and he never a ha’porth the worse. As for Latin—that for your Latin! All the use Latin is to a boy is to forget it. I’ll be bound he knows as much as any of the fine specimens I have the doctoring of now and again.”

But the old priest’s face did not light up. These oft-repeated arguments carried no conviction.

“It’s not the Latin alone,” he said. “I dare say you’re in the right of it, doctor. Lord Charles, or the young Kinvara Blakes, or Joyce of Dromore, or the Captain himself, may know as much or as little as my poor Shane. But for all that, they’ve got something he has not, something I’m afraid he’ll never have now.”

“And what’s that?”

Dr. Molloy flung a tremendous emphasis on the usually mute consonant to express the scorn in which he held the anticipated paltriness of the reply.

“Polish,” said Father Blake weightily. He clapped his knees with both knotty hands as he spoke, lifted his luminous pale blue eyes, under their bushy eyebrows, and fixed them with some sternness upon his companion’s good-natured, rubicund visage that had broken into a derisive grin.

“Polish, is it?” The man of medicine had once more

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removed his pipe, and it was in a high key that he gave vent to his feelings.

“Polish,” repeated the churchman, with even more emphasis than before. “Aye, I know all you would say, Molloy, my dear friend. It’s a good lad, a fine strapping lad, and a handsome lad; and he’s got the look of the race about him, with his black hair and his blue eyes and his clean long limbs. Aye, he is the real O’Conor, as like his grandfather whom I used to see riding through the place when I was the poor little spalpeen and would run barefoot out of my mother’s cottage—the Lord have mercy on her, the decent woman!—just to see him go by. Ay! Shane’s as like what his late lordship—may God forgive him for his dreadful sin!—as one fine young oak is like another.”

“Well, now,” interrupted the listener, “isn’t that what I’m saying?”

Father Blake had a faint smile.

“You think yourself too cute for my old brains. But I’ve not lost hold of my text. I’m too well trained in the holding out. There’s all the difference the tree that’s grown up tended in the great park, set alone, so that it may spread, and fenced off from the cattle while its bark is young and tender and the same tree growing wild, and thwarted, and smothered about with the common rough undergrowth.”

“Do you mean to say—” Doctor Molloy was now grinning no more—“do you mean to tell me,” he repeated, and his voice had a quaver of indignation, “that in your opinion young Shane O’Conor has not grown into a gentleman?”

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The priest hesitated perceptibly. Then he lifted his hand to check the threatened explosion.

“In all that matters: in every thought of his innocent soul and every noble impulse of his character, my boy is the best gentleman that ever drew breath. But, wait a minute, wait a minute. In the other things——”

The doctor sprang to his feet with a shout.

“The things that don’t matter. I’ve caught you out now, for all your pulpit eloquence.”

“The things that do matter! that must matter, so long as we are set in an ordered world, and every man has to fill his position in life as best becomes it and him——” The speaker was so much in earnest that the other’s ironic laughter ceased. “Shane,” he went on, “lacks the polish of the mind that comes from proper scholarship. Ay, ay, even if learning’s forgotten, it leaves a shine, so to speak. And he lacks the polish that a lad gains by association with his own class. Oh! I know I’m only a poor old P.P. who’s sprung out of the soil, but I’m as good a judge of the gentry as yourself that has been plastering them and dosing them for thirty years. You know as well as I do, Molloy, my boy, the kind of manner that is not manner at all, but just second nature. The way of lifting your hat, of coming into a room, and out again; the way you shake hands or give a smile. The—the—’pon my word, I can find no better name for it than I have given—the polish that makes a young man take his way through life as easy as the trot of a high-stepping horse.”

“You’re getting uncommon mixed,” growled the doctor. “Oaks, and horses, and polish——”

“Ay, ay, the polish,” reiterated the priest. “Come, now, Molloy, not so mixed as you think. Isn’t it the polishing

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up, the clipping and currying, the shoeing; yes, and the breaking in and the training that teaches the thoroughbred his paces and makes of the colt the grand hunter?"

The simile was too apt this time; Doctor Molloy was silent. Shane O'Connor was a thoroughbred indeed; but he had been allowed to run loose like the wild colts on the mountain side, untamed and rough-coated as they. Was Father Blake right? Had the time gone by for breaking him in?—Was it too late?

There was silence in the little parlor. Though the April day was bright without, a couple of turfs smoldered on the heap of ashes in the hearth. A poor room, in the poor, ugly, two-storied stone building that nevertheless stood apart in great distinction from the irregular line of hovels and the three dismal-looking shops that represented Clenane on the map of Clare.

Through the small window, open to the sunshine, came the great rough voice of those seas that were forever breaking in impotent rage against the iron coast-line, not a quarter of a mile away. The view out of that window, across the scrap of garden and the potato-field, segregated from the wild boulder-strewn stretches only by one of those low walls built of big loose stones peculiar to the West, was certainly desolate. Nevertheless, in the spring light, with the cloud shadows drifting across the fields, the belt of wood-line, purple against the blue of the sky, on one side, the vision of indigo sea, white-flecked, the sad and dreamy poetry of Ireland was over it all.

The airs that blew in were thin and pure and sharp; sweet with some fragrance of gorse; salt with the tang of the ocean. The gusty winds blew, keen and yet soft after their Irish way—winds from the illimitable Atlantic, that

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had caught, as they broke against the little presbytery, Hibernian flavors of turf-smoke, and the essences of uncultivated land.

The west coast of Ireland is as a bewitched country where giants have been at play, flinging from their hands, haphazard, the bowlders that have been their toys. It is all gray, with silver high-light; with running lines of stone walls picked out of the meager grass and to this day piled as prehistoric Kelts piled them. There is no pasture, worth the name, save within the demesnes of the gentry, redeemed from the waste by centuries of labor. Horses, however, take kindly enough to the hardy herbage and roam in herds within the primitive boundaries. For the rest, a hovel or two, each with its potato or cabbage patch, at far distance one from the other, a bunch of hovels forming such villages as Clenane—a poor country!

As the doctor stood looking out, the priest rose and, leaning on a crutch stick, hobbled up beside him, and gazed forth in his turn. And the very words sprang to his lips:—

“A poor country!” he said, sighing.

“You’re mighty doleful to-day,” exclaimed the man of medicine, “with all due respect to your reverence! Poor country, you call it? Doesn’t it raise the best horses? Isn’t it the finest sporting place in the world? Is there a salmon that beats the fellow that comes leaping out of the grand waters of the Corrib? Draw that air into your *chubes*, Father Blake, and tell me, isn’t there health in every pull of your old chest? Health!” he ejaculated, “wouldn’t it break any doctor’s heart? Begorra, if it wasn’t for the two or three old ladies in the big houses, and the hunting accidents, I’d be hard set to get along at all.

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The poor country, as you call it, hasn't it bred the finest young man that you could lay your eyes on, this side of the grave? Look over there, now!"

He shot out a stubby finger. In the gap, guarded by the two odd-shaped, jutting rocks that were as the watch-towers of that stern rampart, facing the menacing ocean, had appeared the figure of a man, leaping up from the shore, silhouetted black against the sunlit vision.

"Shane!" cried the priest, and his voice lost its somewhat querulous note to deepen and soften as over a beloved name.

"Shane himself!" the doctor exulted. "Look at him now! Did you ever see such a lad? Look at the stride of him, eating up the ground with his long legs! He's been in luck, too," he added, rubbing his hands, "look at the shine in his net!"

The priest did not answer. He was gazing upon the advancing figure with too fond a concentration to be able to spare a word. The doctor gave expression to his thoughts: "A glorious lad!"

The figure was coming along in strides that indeed covered the ground at an amazing rate. Around it a retriever, dripping sparkles, careered in circles occasionally broken by a darting plunge. Even from a distance, the perfect balance and strength, the harmony of line and movement, the lithe activity, were a pleasure to the eye. There came a whiff of memory out of the long buried treasures of the priest's student days, when he had yearned for classic lore. The youth, indeed, trod the morning as Phœbus the skies. He was near enough now for every line of the countenance to have grown distinct. In the clear,

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yellow, cold light, its singular beauty struck the old man afresh.

“The Lord forgive me,” he said to himself, “to be thinking of Pagan things, when it’s the look of a St. Michael he has, God bless him! The look of the strong Archangel that has never sinned.”

III

SHANE O'CONNOR

IT was a laughing face that the young man turned upon the two watchers as he came towards the window, having cleared the low stone wall with scarcely an alteration in his stride.

Shane O'Connor had the pale skin, the blue eyes, and the dark hair of the true Milesian, but his natural, clear pallor was overlaid by the smooth tan that such coloring takes on under healthy exposure—something akin to the warmth that comes to ancient marble. His face was sculptured with the clean, almost hard lines which are also characteristic of the race. No wonder that the sight of it should have evoked the Greek ideal in Father Blake's mind. The jut of the low brow, the squareness of the strong chin; the curl of the lip and the lift of the nostrils were such as Phidias might have delighted to model. But here was none of the softness of an Apollo or an Antinous: it was the face of the Greek gone forth on his adventure and turned chieftain in a conquered country. The underlying structure was there, sure enough, in all its original beauty; but upon it the flesh had hardened; curves had passed into angles; self-conscious placidity of strength into an almost ecstatic vitality. The elder man smiled down on that vision of youth.

"Why, me boy, you're as wet as your own dog!" shouted the doctor.

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And indeed the fisherman glittered and dripped as he took, over the solitary flower-bed, a leap which landed him under the window.

Shane, in mock salutation, plucked his cap from his black head that curled in spite of close cropping.

"The top of the morning to Church and Faculty!" he cried, with a sort of gay irony in his lusty young voice. "Glad to see you on your legs again, Father Blake. Wet, is it, doctor? Sure there's nothing so wholesome as the salt water. So don't be building on another case here." He struck his chest as he spoke, made a not ungraceful gesture with his cap towards the priest, and replaced it.

"Troth and it's what I've been saying meself," laughed Molloy in his rich brogue. "If I were to depend on the likes of you for my living! Yet, mind you, a man may play a game too many with his *chubes*. Once you let the mischief get into the *chubes*, as I am always saying——"

The young man cut across his speech with an unconscious masterfulness that confirmed some of Father Blake's lamentations.

"I took my little boat out last night, and it's the grand tossing we had, Mike and myself, and Leprechaun here. And it's poor sport we got in the end of it. Mike's taken the little hakes to his mother; and I kept the pick of the basket, such as it is. Will your reverence accept of the offering?"

He set his net upon the gravel path and drew forth a silver fish which he held up by the gills between slender brown forefinger and thumb.

"'Pon my word," he said, "it was flapping still when I lifted it out of the boat."

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"Take it around to Mary, there's a good lad. It's delighted she'll be."

"And is the hand that vaccinated you to go empty, while the one that baptized you is filled?" exclaimed Molloy. There was a tinge of jealousy in his jocoseness.

Shane laid the fish delicately on the ground while he gathered his net; then, picking it up again, as before, by the gills, held it at arm's length, evidently prepared for departure. This, Leprechaun understanding with the sagacity of his kind, sprang up from his panting rest, shook himself, and recommenced his circling leaps, barking deep-throatedly the while.

"Down, you villain!" cried his master in a good humored voice. Then he grinned impudently up at Molloy.

"And what are you doing there at all, when it's plastering old Biddy M'Gaw you ought to be, and she groaning and rocking herself on the doorstep, as I went by, and asking me in the name of God if any one had seen a sight of the doctor?" He turned on his heel. "I've only the one fish left," he added as an afterthought (it must be owned that he said "wan"). "And I want to give that away."

"Will your honor tell us who to?"

The jibe was delivered by the doctor with a wink and a nudge in his reverence's ribs.

"Who do you think?"

Young O'Connor glanced over his shoulder with a flashing smile and a kindred gleam of the luminous blue eyes. The next instant both he and his dog had vanished round the corner of the house, and the whole sunlit expanse seemed suddenly and unaccountably darkened to the gaze of the two friends.

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“Ah, I’m getting old. A regular old fogey, that’s what I am,” grunted Molloy, stretching himself with a stifled yawn.

“But it’s the grand thing,” said the priest, “there should be such youth in the world to remind us that we had our own day. ’Pon me soul, every time I do be saying those words, as I go up the altar steps: *Ad Deum qui lætificat juventutem meam,* it’s the face of Shane that rises before me.”

“Coupled with the face of Miss Moira Blake.”

The doctor spoke dryly; yet there was a twinkle in his eye. The old priest wheeled on him so quickly that he nearly lost his balance, and had to grip the window-sill to steady himself.

“In the name of Heaven, man,” he exclaimed, “don’t be cutting those kind of jokes!”

“Jokes? Devil a joke, begging your reverence’s pardon. Don’t you know who my brave Shane is bringing his love-token to? And a queer love-token it is! Did you see the look in his face? Sure and isn’t it the talk from one end of the parish to the other?”

Father Blake made his way back to his seat with difficulty, and turned a countenance drawn with pain upon the speaker. The doctor was pulling on a doeskin riding-glove much the worse for wear, with the deliberation of the visitor who means to linger yet a while.

“The talk of the parish?” repeated Father Blake. “And I’m sorry my folk haven’t better things to talk about than to be taking away the character of the innocent.”

In his turn Molloy caught up the phrase with a tone that was half serious, half reproachful.

“Taking away the character of the innocent? There’s

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not a man, woman, or child in the place that would dream of doing that—barring yourself! To think that I should live to hear such an interpretation of the sweetest love story in County Clare from your own consecrated lips!”

“D’ye mean it’s marriage they’re thinking of? Shane O’Connor, grandson to the Earl of Kilmore, and little Moira Blake, my own great-niece, whose grandfather was bred in the same cabin as myself, and ran barefoot to open the gate for his lordship and catch his pennies as he rode by—the same as meself? Shane O’Connor and poor little Moira! You’ll be telling me next he’s asked Micky M’Gaw to be his best man.”

“It’s very sarcastic you are.” Doctor Molloy himself displayed a certain sarcastic emphasis as he spoke. “But there’s another way of putting it. Shane O’Connor, the penniless young man—Musha, don’t be interruptin’—what do you call him but penniless when there’s not enough money at the back of him to pay for decent schooling, as you’ve been lamenting yourself, and he’s grown up as wild as the fisher lads, for all his gentry? Shane O’Connor, with no prospect in the world unless what he can get out of a fling with a horse? Shane O’Connor, I say, the poor orphan boy, hampered with the big name that’s no use to him, and a pack of grand relatives that don’t as much as know if he’s alive, and Moira Blake the finest, sweetest girl in the barony, brought up like a lady in the convent, and, as like as not, to have a tidy bit of her own from that nephew of yours, Blake the warm farmer, who can well afford it—well afford it, mind you——”

“Stop, stop!” said the priest. “You have my brain whirling!”

The doctor pulled the buttonless flap of his glove me-

chanically towards its buttonhole; took up his riding-whip, and, tucking it under one arm, stood surveying his patient with a mixture of good-natured contempt and understanding on his rubicund, weather-beaten countenance.

“When it settles down, ye’ll get accustomed to the idea,” he remarked. “I’m off out of this. Have that window shut the minute the sun goes off it. Let us not have the gout driven up into your *chubes*. No saying mass, mind ye, till I give you leave. I’ll be round again in a two or three days.”

“But the child’s not more than sixteen!” insisted Father Blake, his accents still those of bewilderment.

“Seventeen her next birthday,” said the doctor from the threshold. “Who knows it better than myself?”

He slammed the door, breaking into a whistle the moment he got into the passage. A minute afterwards the brisk trot of his horse rang out from the stony road, fell subdued as the rider passed on to the turf, to die away, in a muffled canter.

The priest, supporting his white head in his hand, sat in a troubled muse, gazing into the red embers. The revelation, made in jest, had startled him. More, it had profoundly disturbed him.

There are strands in the Irish character which you have to be Irish yourself to disentangle, even to understand. The Irish peasant has a singular appreciation of the value of good blood, ancestry, noble tradition. He has his own pride of race, sucked out of the earth; and many a struggling farmer, brought up in a cabin on Indian meal and potatoes, despises in his heart, considers himself vastly superior to, the wealthy son of a shopkeeper who rolls by him in his new motor—“He’s got his money in trade!”—That

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stamps him. He that is starving on a patch of soil, is "on the land," that sets him in the finer pride of soul.

Father Blake himself, who, through long association, had grown into the most familiar friendship with Doctor Molloy, nevertheless, in some hidden, unregenerate corner of his mind, looked down upon him as having sprung from Galway Town, out of a grocery store. This secret contempt found expression now in a muttered exclamation:

"Sure, the poor fellow—how could he know any better? How could he have learned the difference? . . . Shane O'Connor, and Moira Blake. . . . The son of the great O'Connors, and the daughter of the poor Blakes! What if this O'Connor were poor in the world's goods, and this Blake comparatively well off in them?" The difference remained immense, the gap impassable, in the old priest's mind. It was out of the order of things altogether. It shocked his sense of the becoming; struck against some instinct, some sentiment deeply ingrained, which held to argument a front invulnerable. For before sentiment mere facts lose their power, reason is vain, justice insufficient. It is a thing stronger than passion, than prejudice, than enthusiasm. All these may be conquered, worn out, one way or another, laid in the dust—but sentiment, never. And sentiment is the mainspring of the Irish character: therefore are those who would rule, or guide, men helpless before it.

Coming as they did from real old stock, the Blakes might despise the Molloy's; but in the same measure, and through the same impulses, they honored the O'Connors.

The *lacunæ* in the education of young Shane were an old grievance of Father Blake's. But the news he had just received stirred chronic regret to acute perturbation. The

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boy had been brought up out of his proper sphere, hopelessly cheated of his natural rights. That he should furthermore be regarding the priest's own great-niece with eyes of love; that the whole village should have "made the match" in their gossiping talks already, seemed the culmination of long apprehensions, the last touch to foreboding conclusions.

How had he himself failed? How could he have acted so as to have prevented this calamity? He searched his conscience with a keen pain. Shane had been left in his charge, he alone was responsible. How had he acquitted himself of his trust?

"I was too easy-going," thought the old man. "Seeing him run about, such a handsome little fellow, so happy, so healthy, I was too well satisfied to let things be. Maybe I was too fond of him!" He struck his heart with a groan.

He recalled, year by year, the stages of his guardianship. . . . The day when the pale young widow had made her appearance in Clenane, and the astounding fact become known that the child in her arms was one of "the rale O'Conors"—grandson of the last Kilmore who had dwelt amongst them; of him who had roystered and drunk and dueled, and raced and gambled, who had split up and sold the great estates of Kilmore, carried the spoils to England, turned Protestant, married an heiress and founded a new and alien race.

Kilmore the Apostate, who had once been Kilmore the Splendid! . . . He whose memory was the glory and the execration of that simple and passionate folk, once his people! This dazzling, meteoric personage had shone like Lucifer, star of the morning, all in splendor in the skies of Clenane, to fall into regions beyond its ken, still flaming,

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but with a new and lurid glow, even as Lucifer, into the pit of dreadful night.

Over there, in that "black Protestant" England, he had a large family. A son of his, second in the ranks, had in his turn left numerous progeny. And these, impoverished, scattered in many parts of the globe. The eldest was the father of the little Shane.

He had emigrated to America, married a gentle Virginian girl, like himself of finer blood than fortune; born a dreamer. He carried her off to California, sank his all in an orange farm; lost it and his health together and died before his child could speak. The young widow was seized with a strange craving—sprung perhaps of some inherited yearning in the mind of the lost beloved of which she alone had cognizance—to get back to the land that was the birthplace of his race.

She knew it was a kindly land, from the many Irish exiles who came her way; knew it was a Catholic land, and she herself was of the old faith. She knew, too, there was poverty there, so that one who as poor and gentle, might live poor and yet respected. It was all simple as a fairy tale; and as easily worked out. She found the name of Clenane on the map; and she read up in a guide book how the ruined tower of Kilmore, hard by, still dominated land and sea, on the coast of Clare.

An emigrant ship landed her and her babe into Galway port. And all in her weeds, perilously seated, for the first time in her life, on an outside car, she drove from the nearest station into Clenane village, to halt at the priest's house.

"His name is Shane O'Connor," she said, as she placed the wrapped-up child into the arms of the astonished

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Father Blake. Then she burst into tears. "I have brought him to the country of the O'Conors," she said in her soft, Southern drawl, "not knowing where else to go."

Her widow's raiment told more than she could speak.

And so it had gone on—like a fairy tale. The priest found shelter for her in the Blakes' farm till what time they had built her a long, low, rough cottage out of the fallen stones of the ruined tower of Kilmore. The remains of the old castle stood on land which now belonged to the Blakes; of no use save for the making of a show to strangers. No one grudged a child of the O'Conor the refuge it afforded—an O'Conor come back to the old faith and to his lost heritage. There spread a soothing among the old superstitious folk who sat nodding and crooning over their turf fires—old men and old women, wrapped alike in dirty blankets and alike smoking pipes—that all would be his one day and that he would redeem the name, rebuild the glories. And when the widow died, the scattered poverty-stricken community adopted the child as its own.

There was not much mourning for the widow, because, though they were civil to her, they had always kept her at a distance—a stranger in their midst—wondering "what had ailed an O'Conor at all to get himself a wife over away in America; a wife with an English name; and them foreign ways of her, that you'd never know what she'd be at next." They were much shocked that she should dress the boy like one of their own children, in frieze or in cotton; and let him run barefoot and barcheaded, Sundays and week-days. Might she not have provided him with a "doaty" blue plush coat, trimmed with lace, such as Mrs. Blake brought back from Galway Town, last market day,

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for little Tom to wear at the chapel? Ought she not at least to have got him a pair of patent leather shoes "at the shop," to keep his feet, in the name of God, from the flags, when he'd be trotting by her side, between the rows of kneeling people, to the Kilmore pew: that sacred enclosure which no one else had ever occupied since the falling away of the O'Connors?

Irrationally there were equally captious comments over those habits and customs at the stone cottage which marked the gentility of its mistress in the midst of penury. "It 'ud break your heart to hear her strictness with him, as he sat at his bowl of porridge. The poor child could not take a bite or a sup but she was after him." The mothers opined she'd end by draining all the color out of him, with "them baths." There was a positive storm of indignation when it became known that the little boy's head was washed every day—that crop of chestnut curls, destined to turn black with years! And "didn't she put him to sleep under an open window? If ever she reared him it 'ud be a wonder!"

That Shane should thrive; that his eyes should shine as brightly as his copper curls; that, if his cheeks were not deep-hued like those of the village children, they had nevertheless the perfect bloom of health, overlaid with the gold of the sea and the wind and the sun; that he had a chest as strong as smith's bellows and was growing up straight and swift and muscular—altered their opinion not at all. And when he was seven and his mother died, all Clenane agreed that it was well for her, the creature. Sure she was doing no good at all. And maybe it would be the saving of Shane.

The priest had been Mrs. O'Connor's sole support—a

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father, a friend, a guardian angel. It was he who had managed her little money affairs, and extracted from her American family that small inheritance, that five thousand dollars, which he carefully invested in Consols. It was he who communicated with the little boy's uncle, the Lord Kilmore whose name appeared in the papers, who had been given high dignities over yonder; who was scarcely ever spoken of in Clenane without a curse and a spitting aside as one who spent his days (Clenane truly believed) sitting in the House of Lords, making "black Protestant" laws against the sacred rights of Ireland.

When the answer came back from Lord Kilmore—which it did after a long delay—the priest himself was disposed to agree with his flock. The peer offered to take charge of the child if he were given a free hand to bring him up in the religion his father had been born in. When the widow read the letter she tore it in two, a red spot on either pale cheek.

"He'd better go barefoot," she said.

"Ay, child," said the priest, with a kindred flush, "so long as it's on the right road."

On Mrs. O'Connor's death the offer was renewed. Father Blake, as legal guardian—the mother had seen to that—then wrote to refuse, in terms dictated by the strength of his religious feeling and his warm heart.

And so the matter dropped. And the child grew up, with what tutoring the priest and the doctor could inculcate between them—which was small enough—and the splendid physical training that wild, open-air life could give him. Mrs. Blake took him into the farmhouse: he became big brother to baby Moira.

But while he was still scarcely more than seventeen,

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Shane set up for himself in the gray stone cottage, partly in deference to some odd feeling of Father Blake's that it was meeter for an O'Connor to be in a house of his own, however poor, rather than beholden to anybody; and partly because of the lad's own independence of character and that love of sporting adventure which kept him out on the sea or roaming the hills and bogs at all hours of day or night; which habits discomfited and annoyed the worthy farming couple.

A village woman kept the odd gray eyrie for him in some kind of order and cooked his irregular meals; and he went forth and came back to it, like the eagle that knows no law but his own. The doctor taught him to shoot, and gave him his old gun. The fishermen took him out with them, and he learned to better them at their own craft. Mr. Blake's sons—very fine gentlemen, these—dealing in cattle and horses, took him on the Corrib and instructed him in the mysteries of the fly. And Father Blake himself saved the price of a fishing-rod for him out of his poor dues.

Shane would get the loan of a rough horse, now and again, in the hunting season; and this led to his discovering the means of turning an honest penny for himself. "He'd the grandest hand on a horse as iver was; a seat that a beast 'ud feel no more than a swallow's but it 'ud be easier to shake off Hag's Head itself, once me brave Shane had the control of the saddle!" "Sure wasn't it born in him? Couldn't anny O'Connor do annything with a horse?"

So when there was a nag to be sold with some ugly trick of temper or gait, who could ride him off like Shane? Or, if there was a lovely two-year-old to be got into the

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ways of the hunt, or a shyder to be steadied, or a shirker at the walls to be heartened, there was no boy in the whole countryside to be trusted like Shane. So he began to reap quite a harvest of sovereigns and silver pieces.

Father Blake thought of this dangerous and precarious traffic, and shook his head.

“I oughtn’t to have allowed any of it at all. It’s no life for him. It’s no company for him. . . . Maybe if I’d gone over to see his uncle myself—Protestant and English as he is, he’s an O’Conor—he’d have heard reason. Maybe I could have shamed him into parting with a few pounds without bargaining for the child’s soul. Maybe I ought to have swallowed my pride for him, and got him taken in for charity at some school. The Fathers would have had him that way, I’ll be bound. Maybe it was too fond of him I was. Maybe I was too glad to keep him. And now to hear that it’s wanting to marry into my own family he is. What am I going to do at all?”

In his absorption he failed to distinguish that the footsteps approaching along the narrow passage could not belong to Mary the housekeeper’s flapping slipper, but to some springing tread that carried youth. The door opened; a bright head was thrust in and a soft voice inquired:—

“Are you there, father dear?”

With which unnecessary question, Moira Blake entered the room.

IV

MOIRA

MANY women are born to delight and torment the world; many there are whose loveliness troubles while it attracts; some that demand admiration as a right, and some that plead for it with a sort of plaintive appeal; some that coax and cajole, and others that sweetly insinuate. But there are just a few like Moira, who go about life with compassion in their eyes. The woman born to pity—if ever there was one, Moira was she.

When she looked at a child, there was the sorrow for all the unhappy children on earth in her eyes. It hardly wanted the exquisite soft tones in which the words were sure to come: "The poor little child!" . . . The birds, the beasts on her father's farm, the old crones in the village with long griefs behind them, the young mothers with their troubles before them—all came within the radius of Moira's tender-heartedness. It would even seem as if Shane himself, in the grandeur of his lusty youth, at the toppling apex of his manly exploits, presented to her mind more cause for motherly tolerance, for womanly condescending pitifulness towards the male and his rash, nonsensical ways, than admiration.

Now, with a single glance at the forlorn figure by the hearth, she, as it were, spread sheltering wings about it.

"And I'm afraid your poor foot's bad! And the fire down on you, and you perishing! What's Mary about

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at all? There, I know she's busy ironing, the creature! And I ran in to give her a hand with the cottas. And I knew you'd only be having the cold bacon for dinner, father dear. So I brought the finest fish you ever saw—that was given me, fresh out of the sea not a minute ago. And I'm going to cook it for you myself."

Moira, by this time, was kneeling on the patchwork rug, and with deft hands was building up the turf and coaxing the glow with little shreds in the reddest corners.

"Mary's a bit cross. The iron's been contrary on her. So I didn't stop to talk. I just laid my fish in a pail of fresh water, and——"

The priest, after the first smile and look, had turned his gaze downwards, as if the movements of her busy hands absorbed his attention. He now lifted his eyes and fixed them upon her, with grave inquiry. These eyes always shone with an almost startling flame out of their deep setting; but to-day, from the haggard face, from shadows of suffering, they had so piercing an intensity, that Moira, dropping her fragment of turf, sat back on her heels with a hurried:—

"Father, dear, what is it?"

"Who is it you got your fish from, child?"

A smile leaped from Moira's sweet lips to her soft eyes.

"Shane caught it."

"Is it Mister O'Connor you're meaning?"

The color flooded the fair face, dyeing even the white throat. Yet it was with a perfect dignity that Moira said, after a little silence:—

"It would be strange to begin calling him Mr. O'Conor, when he's been Shane to me ever since I could speak at all, if that's what you're thinking, father."

MOIRA

“I’m thinking you’re growing out of the child; that you’re grown up, both of you; that you ought to be laying aside the things of a child now that you are near a woman.”

“You’d not be thinking I’d lay Shane aside?—nor him me?”

The first words were spoken with a flash. The second under her breath. The priest saw that he had made one of those mistakes that trip up the best intentioned; which seem trivial in themselves, yet have far-reaching results. Manlike, in seeking to undo, he hopelessly entangled.

“The folk might be talking.”

“Talking?” Moira rose. “And what could they be saying of me and Shane?”

The girl had the skin which is typically Irish, with the fine grain, the soft texture, which shows the faintest stir of the blood. The color came and went on her cheek. Her lips trembled, and her voice shook, as she cried:—

“Folk would be hard set to find anything to hold up against Shane and me, that have grown up together.”

“I’m not saying. I’m not saying. You’re a good child, Moira, and he’s a good lad. God forbid a word should be spoken! There, there! Thank you kindly for your thought about the fish, but didn’t the boy bring me the match of it? And sure, if Mary let you cook them both, you might be taking the one over to Biddy M’Gaw.”

But Moira was not to be distracted. She came close to the old man’s chair, and stood looking down at him steadily. She was rather pale now; and the fire had gone out of her hazel eyes, misted as with tearful thought.

“Wouldn’t you be telling me what’s at the back of your mind, Uncle Dennis?”

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Father Blake hesitated. His lips moved without speech.

"It's true," he muttered to himself, as his anxious glance ran her up and down. "The doctor's right, it's a woman grown altogether you are, by the looks of you. And I, thinking it was the child you were still!"

Moira Blake was indeed cast in a generous mold and seemed nearer twenty than not yet seventeen. The girl had a richness about her, as if nothing that concerned her could be on an ungracious scale. Her chestnut hair sprang with extraordinary vitality from her broad, low forehead, and was packed in tight coils at the back of her shapely head, to conceal an almost too great luxuriance. She was tall and broad-shouldered, with a set of head and throat and waist that made her tender womanhood give somehow an impression as of a pillar of strength. Even now, troubled as she was, there spread from her a warm domination; an air, in spite of her April years, almost of wisdom, which made the poor, good, anxious elder feel small and foolish in his soul.

"They're coupling your name with that of young Shane O'Connor. The news of it has but now come to my ears."

He mumbled the words shamefacedly. As the explanation was drawn from him it sounded somehow singularly inadequate.

"Is that all?"

Moira's quiet tone took the listener so utterly by surprise that he remained open-mouthed. She broke another turf across the fire, straightened the ragged rug, set the doctor's chair back in its place; then she said:—

"I'm thinking I'd be better getting that fish on the grid

MOIRA

for you. It's gone twelve this long time. Will I be laying the cloth first, to save poor Mary?"

Her tone was extremely respectful, but intangibly stand-off.

"Moira, child——" Father Blake put out a gray, trembling hand and caught at her skirt. "You're not taking what I said in bad part, are you?"

"Ah, no, father. To be sure, not at all." She drew away; caught up the coarse white table-cloth out of the recesses of the mock mahogany chiffonier; shook and spread it with the steady deftness of movement peculiar to her. There was a jagged hole in the middle, and she bent over it, clacking her tongue: "Tut-tut, if I'd known that, I'd have had it mended for you. I daren't be going after another one, with Mary in the state she is, the creature."

"She generally puts the cruet over it," said the priest humbly. And then, with a quaver in his voice: "Moira——!" he appealed.

The girl looked up at him across the table, one shapely, capable finger still planted in the middle of the hole. Then a smile began to spread over her face. From her soft, rather wide mouth with the deep dimple, it ran up to the corners of her hazel eyes in ripples of mirth, and the color rose again along the creamy pillar of her throat, as if from some happy beating of the heart, to mantle rich carnation in her cheeks.

"Ah, sure, and what harm is it, when all's said and done?"

"What is it you're meaning now, Moira?"

With rather quicker movements than before, she whisked the cruet from the open receptacle (which was diffusing

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strong odors of seed cake and apples through the room) and placed it over the hole with a little bang.

“What they do be saying about me and Shane.” She spoke with the nearest approach to tartness of which her sweet voice was capable. Instantly repenting, she exclaimed: “Sure, you’re not well at all, to-day, father, dear! You’ll let me mix you a drop of something hot after dinner, won’t you, now? It’s killing yourself with the cold water you are.” Seeing that the distress on his countenance did not lighten, she added, with a coaxing note: “Wasn’t it always understood between Shane and me, long before we knew the meaning of anything?”

Father Blake gave another of those groans which had punctuated his penitential morning.

“I ought to have foreseen this, Moira. It’s not the kind of match you ought to be thinking of.”

“Father!” Her eyes flashed again, this time with a blazing reproach. “Is it thinking of money you are? What would I care if Shane never had a farthing in the world? Wouldn’t I rather go barefoot and beg for him, than roll in a carriage by the side of the other fellows?”

This turn of the discussion was so unexpected that once more Father Blake found himself speechless.

“Sure the Da’s not been at you, has he?” pursued Moira, a gathering anxiety in her mien. “I know my mother’s on my side.” Tears began to tremble on her eyelashes and sound in her voice as she went on: “The Da has set you on this. It’s real wicked he’s been this past month. He’s got a down on Shane over the chestnut filly. And it wasn’t the poor boy’s fault at all. How could he help her dragging her heels at the fence? Didn’t she drag from the day she was born? Sure, isn’t my

MOIRA

Shane too good a gentleman to play a trick, for the money, on any one? And that's what the poor Da will never understand. I little thought you'd be siding with the Da, father, dear. But let me tell you"—her pleading accents broke into passion—"let me tell you the real reason, father. It's because Mister Clery's been coming round to our place—after me—pretending it's for the cattle. And him with his sheep's eyes, oh! And poor Mrs. Clery not dead a twelvemonth! I don't care how much money he's got. I'd fling it in his face! I'd——"

"Hush, hush!" Father Blake interrupted. He had gathered himself together now, and spoke with a priestly authority before which her flame sank. "I was not considering you at all, my dear; I was thinking of the boy I have the guardianship of. You've said it yourself: he's a gentleman born. It would be an unequal match." The old man struck the table. "An unequal match, and that I'll never consent to. It would not be for your happiness. No, nor for his."

Moira stood for a moment as if all her palpitating youth had been turned to stone. Then she gave a twitch to the corner of the table-cloth, and said in a choked voice: "I wouldn't like to be doing any harm to him," and fled from the room.

The old man heard the front door bang, and the next moment he saw her rush across the window like one hunted. Her head was bent. He thought of the sunshine brightness it had brought into his poor room, and how she had bloomed like a flower as she spoke of her lover.

"It's cruel I've been," he said. He felt bewildered and again propped his head on his hand, striving to collect his

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thoughts. "In the name of God, what is to be done? I don't see my way at all."

He had cold bacon for dinner, cold water to drink, and cold thoughts for company; for Mary declared that if he was expecting her to cook fish in the middle of the washing, his "riverence" would have to look out for another housekeeper, one with two pairs of hands.

V

APRIL TO APRIL

A STERN coast, but not too stern to guard the land from such seas as the west wind raises upon the Atlantic, when comes the wild weather. Even on such a day as this, these cliffs—white rock and gray shale—front grimly the vast expanse, as an enemy. They know that the enemy, though he has, under the April skies, clothed himself in shifting glories—purple blue, shot through with the indescribable amber green of sun-pierced waters—is bent on mischief; that his aim is ever to sap the foundation of the fortress; whether he come panoplied as for a tournament, with white manes flying, and splendor and flash of color, or clad in black armor of tempest shrieking to the shock.

Therefore the west cliff barrier, standing full girt for battle, while the foe beneath has decked himself as for the feast, presents strange contrast—so dark and cold and unforgiving above, so glowing, gorgeous, rich, rejoicing, below there, with myriad play and vast caresses.

There is, half way down towards the beach of Clenane, a shelf of rock, sun-warmed to-day, that had at all times been a favorite haunt of Shane and Moira. It formed a kind of natural seat overlooking a yawning gap. Far beneath, the surf had gnawed away deep into the cliff, and the ledge jutted forward over the wave like the prow

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of some gigantic vessel. On days of storm the spray would shoot right up, even to this perch; and little Moira clinging to little Shane, had passed through high ecstasies in the enjoyment of the fancied peril, just out of its reach.

To-day Moira sat there alone, her hands folded, looking out on the restless beauty that spread before her. The spring wind had great frolic with the sea. Cloud-shadows swept across it: purple patches over the living sapphire and emerald. There was a chaunt of rejoicing in the air, and a wonderful sea smell, vivifying, as it were the breath of a more potent life blown from some vaster world.

As she settled down upon the rock perch, the storm was in her soul. She had a tender spirit, and it was bruised; and where she loved she was more vulnerable than most, and she had always loved Shane. The priest—he was very old, and he rambled as old men will; and, as old men will, had followed the bent of his own mind, testily, without considering the young—the priest had struck her, unconsciously, where a blow most told. For Moira's love, even the love of a girl for her only conceivable lover, had in it that maternal yearning which entered into all her affections, and overstrongly into this, the chief of them.

"I wouldn't like to be doing any harm to him——" With hands locked together, she repeated the words again and again, out of a misery too deep for tears. It was like setting a tombstone on her living hope. She did not question Father Blake's wisdom; acceptance of his authority had been part of her whole existence, and he spoke to her as with the voice of God.

A great love is a humble love. She saw herself all at once, the daughter of Blake the farmer, in her true posi-

tion as opposed to Shane, gently born, one of the real O'Conors.

She blushed fiercely, in the solitude of the cliff, with the soft, salty wind beating against her face, to think how she had misunderstood Father Blake's meaning; how, for a moment, she had actually thought it was because she was the better match of the two that he was making objections. . . . As if the paltry money could have weighed against Shane's fine name and the noble blood! "Are you speaking of Mister O'Conor?" The words rang in her ears. They placed her—oh, on what a poor, common plane, compared to him! How had she come to have such gross, presuming thoughts: to have lost her sense of the right values, the true delicacies of their respective positions? "I'm ashamed of my life," said Moira to herself. And then she was aware that she loved; passionately, desperately, out of all bounds; perhaps altogether beyond the limits set to the heart of every good Catholic girl. And she was crushed under the double burden. For when love and shame come together upon the pure soul, they bring the bewilderment of an unmerited hell.

She bowed her bright head upon her knees over her clenched hands; and the cry of the tide, its dragging withdrawal from the shingle, sounded confusedly as if the great sea were sobbing aloud the grief she must ever keep dumb.

"What, in the name of God, are you doing?"

It was Shane who hailed her from the foot of the rough path that led up to the ledge. She sprang to her feet, steadying herself against the jutting rock. She was all in a confusion and could only look at him piteously, as

with quick leaps he drew close to her. The retriever at his heel thrust his damp muzzle inquiringly against her knee, sniffed and dropped his tail. Then he flung himself flat on the ground, his nose between his paws, with an air of utmost depression; the brown, watchful eyes glinting from one to the other.

Shane repeated his question, staring at her with considerable surprise and some anger in his blue eyes.

“What, in the name of God, are you doing here?” It comes naturally to the Irish tongue to call upon the Unseen Power; and there is no irreverence in this familiarity, but rather a sense of the encompassing Presence. “‘I’m off to help Mary down beyond, at the priest’s house,’ says you, and ‘Won’t this make the fine dish for my uncle’s dinner?’ And it’s away with you, without so much as listening to a word I’d be telling you, when it’s the match of my fish, the second best of the catch, old Mary had the cooking of already. And I dripping wet, having to go and change my clothes, with the doctor’s warning in my ears. ‘You’ll be getting it on your *chubes*,’ says he.” Shane paused to laugh; and then indignation returned. “I wasn’t five minutes, and what do I see when I get down to his reverence’s, but my two beautiful fish lying together in a pail of water outside the kitchen door, and Mary, black in the face, wrestling with hot irons, and his reverence sitting by his lone, and ‘Moira’s off to the shore,’ says he. What took you, Moira?—Moira!”

His tone suddenly altered. He bent to look at her averted face: the flicker of mirthful wrath vanished from his own.

“Moira, what ails you? What’s come over you at all?” She straightened herself, drew a long breath, and turned

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to fix him, trying to smile and speak naturally, but failing. "What is it?" he urged. There was alarm now, in his accents. "You look at me the way your father's heifers do when they take the calves from them." He put out his hand and caught her to him. "Moira, my darling girl!"

But she thrust him from her with vigorous young arms that sent him back against the rock.

"You've no call to lay hold of me that way—Mr. O'Conor."

With which astounding words she smoothed her roughened hair—the instinctive gesture of the woman gathering her dignity, all the world over—squared her shoulders and proceeded deliberately down the path towards the land. For some dozen paces she went alone, and then he overtook her and barred the way. His face was pale under its smooth tan; his eyes blazed.

"I'll get to the bottom of this!" he cried, with contained fury. And then, before she could reply, went on: "Your father's got his way, I take it. It's the second Mrs. Clery he wants to make of you. Shane O'Conor's no match for the rich Miss Blake. And it's the obedient daughter you are. You've just been settling it up with his reverence, and it would not do for a good, pious girl to be going against the will of her parents!"

His lip trembled over a sneer; and all at once, like a torrent breaking loose, his passion escaped him:—

"And if that's the way with you, I warn you fair, Moira, I'll break that fellow in pieces before your eyes, as I break this bit of stone." He caught up a long splinter of shale, crushed it between his fingers, and flung the fragments from him. It was an action indescribably expressive.

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And it was with an equally fierce gesture that he flung out both his hands and shook them under her eyes. "And I'd break any man that dared come betwixt you and me. You and me! You know very well it was always you and me. You know that I was only waiting till it was right for me to talk to you. You know that I never looked at any other girl, up or down, rich or poor. And there's many have smiled on me, Moira."

The boy's earnestness—he was little more than a boy, for all his twenty-three years—deprived this speech of the least fatuity: it rang with a kind of pathos out of the clangor of his reproach.

"And do you think I'd stand aside and look on while that old fellow with his greasy bank-book, and his herds and his fine stone house, puts out a fat hand to try and steal my flower, damn him! My lily that's in its bud; that has got to bloom for me. For me, for me only!"

He struck his breast twice, and then once more made a gesture of wild arms towards her. But the storm had fallen; his voice had sunk from its blast of anger to a husky tenderness.

It is not easy to stand upon a cruel peak of renunciation, when you're only seventeen and the man you love wants to gather you to his heart. And Moira was not of the stuff of which such heroines are made. There was too much pitifulness in her spirit for that; it was already wrung to see that he was suffering and to know that it was through her. She let herself fall into his outstretched arms, with a movement as soft and easy as that of a bird settling on its nest.

Love had been unconscious between them, growing with their growth. They had shared everything that

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could be shared, and no hour had ever been perfect to either without the memory or the presence of the other. Now the ardor of love, the strange mystery which springs between man and maid, had been struck into conscious life as by a lightning flash, the flash that showed the chasm of the possible separation. They clung, as innocent of evil one as the other; as strong in the natural, healthy intensity of their untried ardors, as whole-heartedly one with each other.

Shane pressed his lips on that smooth, fresh cheek that they had so often touched before; but it was the first lover's kiss. Her tears ran down into his lips and turned the strength of his soul to fire for sheer love and reverence of her, delight in her, determination to shelter her henceforth from everything and every one.

"Alanna! Asthore! Mavourneen!" he murmured.

She kissed him back with guileless fervor. These children, son and daughter of a desolate, remote, infinitely romantic land, were as much part of the nature about them as the wild birds that nested in the crags, or the spiced golden gorse bushes that made little glories in the barren soil. They had been nurtured on the same wide airs, ripened by the same mild temperate suns; the salt had sweetened their blood; the freedom and lonely poetry of their surroundings had entered into their souls. There was no more self-consciousness in their coming together than there would have been in the mating of the gulls.

Presently, as they remembered time, they went down the narrow path, reluctantly, upon the homeward way. His arm was cast about her shoulder. The sweetness of holding her was not a thing to be given up a second sooner

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than necessary. The radiance that was on Moira's face was a lovely blend of smiles and unshed tears.

Leprechaun, who had regarded the proceedings with wise, velvet eyes, now broke into hilarious barkings, and dashed on ahead as if his dog soul had comprehended (as perhaps, indeed, it had) the happy conclusion of the perplexed hour.

"And now," said Shane suddenly, "you'll be telling me, if you please, the meaning of that 'Mister O'Conor.'"

The smile broadened on her lips. She could afford to laugh now at Father Blake's misplaced wisdom and her own acceptance of it.

"And indeed it was a strange notion my poor good uncle got into his head. He thought it was the bad marriage you'd be making."

"Is it me? Ah, none of your blarneying, Moira! It's you he was meaning."

"It was not." She drew back a little to look at him; and laughter brimmed in her face. "Mister O'Conor!"
"Moira!"

"Mister O'Conor—own grandson to Lord Kilmore—and Moira Blake, the farmer's daughter. And, faith, when I put it that way, his reverence wasn't so far wrong."

"Ah, the poor old man, it's going dotty he is."

Instantly the compassionate mother-look came back into the girl's eyes, and laughter fled from her face.

"He's very weakly, God help him! Sure you mustn't be talking that way. Isn't it only because he wants to do the best for yourself?"

"Well—and isn't this the best?"

He caught her to him again. What could Moira say,

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but that it was the best, the only possible thing, the most blessed arrangement on earth?

The first human habitation in sight was that of Bidy M'Gaw—a hovel between the beach and Clenane, cleaving to the flank of the rock like some indescribable fungus. The blue turf-smoke was filtering sideways from a broken chimney pot, set like a tipsy man's hat askew on the moldering thatch.

The crone was sitting on her doorstep; and the space visible of the one room behind her was grimed to a velvet blackness. Leprechaun, halting in his looping race homeward, approached the huddled figure with stalking steps, and gingerly sniffed. The old woman turned her head at that, and without noticing the dog, fixed the advancing figures.

“Ah, poor old Bidy,” cried Moira remorsefully. “There, now, if I didn't forget to cook the fish and bring it to her, as Father Blake told me!”

They had, decorously, separated. Clenane was accustomed to the spectacle of Moira and Shane side by side; nevertheless, the widow M'Gaw, clapping her hands together, broke into a pæan:—

“May the Lord be blessed for all his mercies, that I should live to see the day! Glory be to God, you'll be the grandest couple that ever trod the earth of Clare, and of Galway either! Isn't she the darling, girl, Masther Shane, your Honor? And isn't he the rale O'Conor, Moira asthore? And isn't it the wonderful day for Bidy M'Gaw and her your Da's own cousin? A hundred thousand blessings on you both, for the foinest, loveliest pair with the sun shining on you, and shining out of you, so

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that if I was blind this minute, it's dazzling my old eyes you'd be!"

She put up that dirt-encrusted skeleton hand of hers to her white head, as she spoke, and then, in a gesture with which they were singularly familiar, extended it towards them.

"Bring the luck on yourself, Masther Shane, me lovely boy, by helping the poor. It's hungry and cold I've gone this day, Moira darling, and may the Lord and His Holy Mother bless you for the sweet looks of you!"

They were both blushing like school children caught in an orchard; but in the young man's confusion there was something of the conqueror's pride. He thrust his hand in his pocket and drew out two or three loose coins, the last bonus for his clever riding of a willful mare. It was light come, light go, with these earnings of his: and there was a gold piece shining among the silver. Moira looked a little shocked when he selected it and put it into the brown hollow of that palm. Old Biddy herself was struck speechless for a trembling second. Then her fingers closed tightly, and a stream of rapture and encomium poured from her lips which outdid her former ecstasy.

"It'll be given back to you! Didn't the Lord say it with His own blessed lips, 'pressed down and flowing over'? Isn't it lapped in gold you'll be?" Her voice rose to a screech. The rocking with which she excited herself to eloquence, after the manner of her class, became frenzied. The light of insanity kindled in those bleared orbs where vision seemed almost extinguished. "You'll have it all. I see the crown on your head, this moment! All the honors and the grandeurs, the titles and the land—you'll have them all yet, I tell you. Glory be to God!"

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Frightened, Moira put her arm on Shane's sleeve and drew him away. The sibyl stopped suddenly, her inspiration extinguished.

But upon a compassionate afterthought, Moira paused and came back.

"You've given us the first blessing, Biddy, dear, and we shan't forget it to you."

So saying, she stooped and kissed the mumbling mask that had once been a human countenance. Biddy was quite silent till the two tall, strong, young figures had swung out of sight. Then she looked down on the gold; the slow, difficult tears of such extreme eld gathered in her dim eyes.

"I think more of that than I do of the money," she muttered to herself. Then, suddenly, balling the hand that still clutched the sovereign, she shook it fiercely in the direction in which the lovers had disappeared. "God's curse on him if he's not true to her!"

VI

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CLENANE village, lost as it is between the unprofitable land and the waste Atlantic, might seem to the casual stranger the spot on earth most likely to hold an ineffable dullness. But that stranger would little know Ireland. Given three hovels, a mile of road, and—say—the lodge of a great estate, and you will have a background for the play of all the passions that can convulse the human heart.

All is drama to the Keltic soul. The Irish take the common events of life with an antique intensity. The dead are waked with feasting and keened to their graves with tearing of hair and an outflung abandonment of gesture that bring you back to the Greek tragedy. And the birth-chamber will be crowded with well-wishers, all flocking to perform mysterious rites, to cast beneficent spells and exorcise potential evils, after customs the tradition of which is lost in the dark ages. A man will take another's life for some reason which, to a Saxon, would seem scarce sufficient for a word of remonstrance. The passion of the Kelt will fire at a slight that exists only in his own imagination, as the nervous horse swerves at a shadow. A woman will curse her neighbor for a splash of soapy water, and call down vengeance in language that would befit Medea over her murdered children.

And whenever are placed in juxtaposition poverty and riches, the peasant and the landlord, there will brood the

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old wrongs, fester the old sores. Every corner of agrarian Ireland is like a cave of Eolus where the winds mutter, from which any moment the squall may spring, threatening destruction.

Clenane possessed the temperament of its kind. It had had, quite recently, an exciting murder; for a mis-directed shot from behind a stone wall had hit the driver of a car instead of the constable whom he happened to be conveying. Public opinion was agreeably divided as to whether the fellow had not deserved it, for lending himself to the convenience of such traitors; or whether it wasn't a cruel shame for the constabulary to be exposing the poor innocent lads to the danger of losing their lives 'that way.' All were united, however, upon the main issue: the duty of screening the criminal. It was heartily conceded that it was bad enough for the creature to have bungled his shot without having to be tried for his mistake. But thrills in connection with this incident were beginning to die down, and the news that Shane O'Connor had "settled it up" with Moira Blake was received with all the enthusiasm of a new emotion. Rumor ran like wildfire from heart to hearth: "His riverence was wild."—"She's no match for an O'Connor. Hadn't ould Mary heard him say those same words with her own ears? 'I'll not per-mitt it,' he says, with the tears hopping off the white face of him. And him screeching bad with the gout that same minute: as signs on it—wasn't the doctor's horse tethered at me own back gate an hour or more, and him eating the loveliest cabbage you ever saw, while the doctor was within, examining his holy foot."—"Not at all, not at all. It's the wrong end of the story you've got altogether, woman. It's Dan Blake, up yonder, is

lepping mad. He says he'll skelp her alive if she looks the same side of the road again as Master Shane. Sure you know it's rale wicked he's got, since Clery of Kipogue has come round with his courting eye, and herself not ten months under the sod. Blake's head is turned on him altogether, with the grandeur his daughter would be having with all the wealth Clery's gathered by hook or by crook. Sure, it's by hoof and by crook I ought to say; and him with all them droves and flocks. 'Clery's a warm man, Mrs. Mullooley,' says Mr. Blake to myself, no later than last week, when I went up for a sup of buttermilk, 'and it'll be driving a motor car he'll be before we know where we are.'—"Huthen set him up! Is it thinking of motor cars he is when it's a rale O'Connor he could be calling son-in-law?"—"Ah, God bless us, don't be talking that away, woman dear, haven't I got the whole story from ould Mary herself? It's his riverence that has got the true hould of the matter. 'An O'Connor and a Blake,' says he, 'and if she is my own great-niece itself,' says he, 'and if it's break her heart for him she will, in the name of God,' he says, 'I've got to folley me conscience,' he says. 'And if it was on me death-bed and the hoily oils on me palms and the soles of me feet, I couldn't say different. It's an unequal match,' he says, 'and I forbid it.'"

"And he may forbid it!" Young Mrs. Dinny Doyle, newcomer to Clenane from the stranger county of Wexford, and as yet kept at a considerable distance by the rest of the village, thrust a towsled red head over the insecure stone barrier that divided her residence from the Mullooley mansion. "Let him forbid it. What's to hin-

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der my brave Shane from carrying her off and getting wed in spite of his riverence and the Da either?"

Mrs. Mullooley turned in great majesty upon the speaker.

"Sure you're foreign to the place, Mrs. Doyle, and we're all ready to make allowances for you; but I tell you in kindness to yourself, it wouldn't do at all for you to be dropping names that familiar in your speech, and making free behind his back with a gentleman like Mister O'Connor. If it's Master Shane he is to us, it's because he's grown up among us. But it's Mister O'Connor he is to strangers like yourself—and him the gentleman born."

Mrs. Doyle displayed prominent teeth and snapped her fingers.

"Ye'll have me killed with the laughing the way yez ould ones be going on!" she cried. "Maybe I know as much about Master Shane as you do yourself—and more. For isn't he as good as a twin brother to my own Dinny, and both of them away this minute, chasing the colts on Dunvara Hill? Let the one ould Blake or the other carry on as they like. The day's long gone by when priest or parent 'ud be able to keep two fine young creatures apart, and they loving each other as do Moira and—Shane. There's for you now!"

She snapped her fingers again, and whisked back into her cottage, leaving the two elder ladies momentarily stupefied with her audacity.

"Well, that one!" ejaculated the widow Joyce at last. "Where does she come from at all? Sure it's the hathen she is!"

"People do be having very quare talk nowadays," opined her companion darkly.

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Meanwhile there was perhaps more truth in the pronouncement of these clattering tongues than is usual when the Irish imagination gets to work. If "wild" was a somewhat poetic interpretation of Father Blake's agonizedly conscientious opposition to the alliance, "lepping mad" very nearly approximated to the attitude taken by Moira's father.

He was a man of dark moods, and unforgiving. He had long cherished a grudge against Shane over the question of a colt which the young man had failed to sell for him. He chose to think that Shane had played him false. Brooding over this grievance night after night, with his stockinged feet stretched to the turf fire and his little black pipe hanging between his lips, it had grown to abnormal proportions.

The scowling silence with which he greeted the lad's gay visits to the farm, became more and more pronounced. Yet, up to the moment of the rich grazier's appearance on the horizon as a suitor for Moira, he had not given utterance to his feelings. One of the many anomalies of the race is the furtiveness that lurks beneath a seeming expansiveness; the long secret cherishing of a resentment before its explosion. Your Irishman will turn the stone in his pocket many and many a time before flinging it. And Dan Blake bided his opportunity.

When it came it was as the crash of a thunderbolt.

"Is it give my only daughter to an O'Connor? Hand her over to one of that traithorous brood? Faith, and I'd rather see her in her coffin. I would that! Hould your tongue, Biddy." Mrs. Blake was generally treated with great respect by her husband, as having brought him a considerable fortune and as belonging to a good family;

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but in this instance he assumed the full Keltic weight of marital authority. He was "the Master," and he would let her know it. "There isn't one of them but 'ud go back on a friend. Sure, isn't Shane O'Connor a true son of the renegade? Isn't it the blood that's in him, the blood of the renegade? Haven't I taken his measure the day he leapt my chestnut filly for me—and the more fool me for trusting one of them! Sure I might have known it's not in an O'Connor to go straight. What's that ye're saying? 'It's never going over that ould story I am?' Well, and it is, then! What had he got to gain by it? Ah——" Rage was expressed in the long-drawn out exclamation: "How'd I know, woman? How'd an honest man like myself bring his mind to guess at the paltriness of the sum that would tempt an O'Connor to sell his best frind? 'All I know is,' says I to him that morning, as innocent as the baptized babe: 'Ye'll not be looking for any compinsation for riding me bit of a filly, Master Shane—considering the way you took the ould gray over the walls with the hunt last month?' says I. 'God bless us, no, Mr. Blake!' he makes answer. 'Don't I owe you more than I can ever pay'—and him with his smiling face and his coaxing voice. I might have known he was up to mischief, when I saw him in collogue with the Captin that very evening. And next day, if the Captin's horse wasn't ridden and sold by him, and mine given the go-by, may the devil have me soul!"

Mrs. Blake, whose comely countenance had gone white and red alternately during this tirade, stood, the corner of her apron uplifted and mouth open for speech when her lord's vehemence should permit the inserting of a word. As he now struck the table and choked upon his wrath, she glanced sideways at Moira, who sat very still in a cor-

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ner, with wide eyes, into which tears kept rising and waning, and took her opportunity.

“I’m sure, didn’t Master Shane ride your own baste first, and do his level best for it? And sure it wasn’t his fault that the crature tipped the stone at every lep the way she did. Wasn’t it the thrick that was on her ever since the day she was born? And didn’t you have to sell her into Galway Town for a tradesman’s cart at the long end of it, since the docthor himself—and there’s no better horsy man in the barony than the docthor, and you know that for all your gobbing at me as if it was a herring bone you’d swallowed, that strained in the face—the docthor says to you, ‘You’ll never make a lepper out of that one,’ he says, ‘with the drop she’s got in the hind quarters——’”

Here Mr. Blake recovered his breath and expended it in a roar.

“Sthrained in the face, is it? It’s the wonder you haven’t talked it off me, the pair of you! Isn’t it a known truth from one end of the barony to the other that that same Shane O’Conor can do what he likes with any horse the moment he gets it between his legs? And didn’t he have the pull on her at the very first lep? Sure, didn’t I see it?”

Moira, most unfairly accused of garrulity, got up from her three-legged stool, and came slowly up to her father. Her lips were quivering. The gaze she fixed upon him was passionately angry.

“There’s two things I’ve got to let you know, Da,” she said, “and the one is that those that accuse Shane O’Conor of dirty thoughts and dirty deeds, have got the black guilt of them upon their own minds. And when they

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think they're sullyin' him, it's themselves they harm. And the second thing is that I'd rather be carried out of this place feet foremost than marry Mr. Clery, for all the match is so much to your liking."

Here she flung her apron over her head and went swiftly from the kitchen.

If one of the doves that flitted and cooed about his stable yard had suddenly flown into his face, the farmer could not have been more astounded. And it may be said that Mrs. Blake shared the emotion. Moira, the good child who had never in all their recollection given her parents a cross look, much less an undutiful word; Moira, the creature with the soft ways of pity so that she could not endure to hear a cat chided or bring herself to kill a mouse; Moira to "up and fly at her father that way!"

"Ye've druv her to it, Blake," said the wife at last, in discomposed accents, "and I'm of the same opinion as she is herself, and so I tell you straight. And if it's thinkin' of getting rid of her cheap you are, with old Clery, it's out of your calculation you'll find yourself. For Master Shane 'ud take her without a farthing, and thank you. And that's me darling boy, as he lives and breathes. And he gentry in every little bit of him, from the crown of his lovely dark curls to the sole of his noble foot—wouldn't it be a match for her, an O'Connor of the ould stock, that you'd be dreamin' of in the sweetness of slumber, and wake to cry for? What if they'd never more than a sup of milk and the bite of a potato between them?"

"Sure, he'll have to give in," she said to Moira, when later she found her weeping in the dim, pleasant coolness

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of the dairy. "But you'd no call to be speaking to your Da like that."

"I don't know what came over me," admitted the girl. "My heart rose in me, and then it burst out."

Mrs. Blake surveyed her daughter with an odd mixture of compassion and disapproval:—

"It'll be the love you've got for the boy, I take it," she remarked at length, in rather shocked tones.

Such experience had never come her own decent, orderly way. Her marriage had been made up by Father Blake himself; and she'd taken Daniel "on the strength of his reverence's good word, before she had as much as seen him three times." She considered the sacrament of matrimony much as she considered all the other sacraments that had been administered to her, that is to say, as a seal set upon a certain stage of life, like a milestone on a highway.—You were born, and you were baptized. You came to the age of reason and you confessed your sins. You advanced in wisdom, and you "went before the altar." You approached the years when you might have to face the dangers of the world, and you were confirmed. You were old enough to be given in marriage: the Church was ready with the sacrament of matrimony. That marriage should be a consecration of the most powerful of all experiences; that it was to sanctify and spiritualize the most elemental of all emotions; that the wild, tender, crazy, exquisite moments known only to lovers were to culminate and be made blessed by the vow spoken at the altar, was a view of life that had never dawned on Mrs. Blake.

Heartily as she approved of Shane for her daughter,

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she felt estranged and bewildered by this glimpse of her sentiment for him.

Meanwhile, the object of so much discussion was riding towards Clenane, bareback, on a rough, skittish colt, driving before him half a dozen other wild creatures of a like description. To each jagged mane was attached a blue rag which marked the property of farmer Daly, next in the district to Dan Blake in wealth and importance.

The twilight was falling over the land from a sky of indescribable tints; tints that recalled the April flowers, crocus yellows and primroses, and greens like the young lilac leaves, all blooming on a firmament gray-blue as the wood violet. Faint mists were rising over the boggy hollows. The moors spread as far as the eye could see, broken only by rock or bush. The mountains of Clare lay plum-purple, the only deep note in all the shadowiness.

Shane was singing to the broken paces of his mount. He had a clear tenor voice which might have sounded rude enough in a drawing-room, but which was as true to the wild place and the sad poetry of the evening as a blackbird's. He sang in the Gaelic, one of those strange laments which have been handed down from father to son, and which still stir the blood of peasant Ireland, although the injury that gave them birth has long passed into oblivion. Suddenly he fell silent; fixing his eyes upon the dying sunset, he let the dreamy essence of the hour creep into his being and invade his soul with its melancholy.

There was a great peace about him, emphasized by the soft thudding of unshod hoofs upon the turf, the far-away halloos of Dinny Doyle, and the cry of some startled plover. Up in the green sky the crescent of the young moon brightened from dim silver to delicate gold. The

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boy stared, and thinking of Moira, his heart swelled, till joy grew into a kind of pain; and a lump came in his throat.

The darkness gathered, and the colts drew close about him, as if seeking comradeship. The evening land-breeze had risen, and, blowing away seaward, hushed that myriad voice of the waters which was so familiar a sound to his ears that he scarcely knew his world without it. His face was turned toward the coast and he could see, cut as if in some velvet shade, the outline of the ruined tower against the western afterglow.

There was a ghostly wreath of white smoke above; and he knew it came from his own chimney; the chimney of that poor hovel where he sheltered, scarcely better housed than the snail that clung to the crumbling stone.

His thoughts shifted. From an indefinite melancholy, an enervating love yearning, they unexpectedly passed into a fierce discontent. What a life for him! All said and done, he was a gentleman born, and here was he no better than the peasant. Was this how he was to spend the years that God would give him, driving colts for Farmer Daly; jockeying half-bred beasts at the fair, for the casual guinea; hobnobbing with the sons of those who had been his ancestors' tenants, and in no way different from them? Involuntarily he clenched his fingers upon palms hardened to leather, and under the jerking of the rope that served as reins, the untamed creature he rode bucked and leaped with an energy that would have unseated any one else. The flurry of his mount communicated itself to its comrades; and there was a flying hustle that would at another moment have made Shane laugh. To-night, he gave a muttered curse. And then the na-

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tive good-humored self, with which he was most familiar, was surprised.

“What ails me at all? Oughtn’t I to be the happiest man alive?”

The next moment the dark shadow came back upon his soul: “Troth, I’m a fine fellow to be thinking of taking a wife, and nothing better to offer her than that caubeen up yonder! There’s a grand place to bring a bride to!”

He slid off his colt’s rough back, caught it by the bridoon, chirruping to and marshaling the rest of his charges with coaxing noises they well understood. One of them stretched a timid muzzle towards him, bristling with the long hairs that mark the “mountainey foal,” sniffed his cheek with a soft, cautious breath, swerved away when he put out a hand, and instantly returned to be fondled.

“There’s not much about the creatures I don’t know, anyhow,” thought the young man. “It’s a kind of horse-dealer I’ll have to make of myself—and that mostly spells rogue.” He gave a harsh laugh, and then his mood softened: “Moirá will keep me straight.”

He drove his odd cavalcade through a gap in the wall, and out on to the road.

He kept on foot, for he would not ride the beast that was not yet shod upon the stony causeway. There had, earlier in the day, been heavy showers, and long streaks of water in the ditches reflected the orange stain of the afterglow, and the slender moon above it.

“It’s a queer world,” said Shane, as he tramped along.

He had not far to go. Where that light glimmered, where the dogs barked, where the long roofs made a great blot in the grayness, there was his destination. If John

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Daly were in a good humor, he would, maybe, give him five shillings for the afternoon's work. He would offer him a sup of whisky; all very respectfully: "Master Shane, your honor, if it wouldn't misbecome the likes of you to be accepting the nip and the thrifle from the likes of me."

Whisky Shane never touched, and this the farmer would know, though the hospitable ceremony of offering it would be gone through notwithstanding; but the money—"I'll not take his palthry money either," thought Shane, with a quick flare of anger.

It was the first time he had ever known himself to have the smallest susceptibility on such a matter. Once more he was almost anxiously surprised at his own mood.

"What's come to me?" he asked himself again. "Is it because of the step I've taken with Moira, that I've got to have a man's feelings all round?"

He wondered; gave a flick to a lagging colt. Here they were, all in a bunch. There was not another fellow in the west, in the whole of Ireland, for aught he knew, that could have done a job like that, alone. "It's the power I have over them," he thought. Then he gave a quick sigh: "It's all I'm good for. It's a queer world."

For Shane it was a world out of joint, that evening.

VII

THE ENVOY

IF Clenane was agreeably stirred over so fashionable and contentious an engagement as that of an O'Connor with a Blake—of “the quality and the likes of us,” “His reverence agin it, and himself roaring and bawling at the thought of it”—if there was even betting as to whether Shane or the grazier would win the day, there was yet reserved for the village a deeper thrill, one of staggering unexpectedness.

In truth, the news which the stranger, who suddenly appeared on Clancy's outside car, brought all the way from England, to Father Blake, was even more exciting than last winter's murder.

Before the unknown gentleman had conveyed the purpose of his errand to the startled old priest, a few remarks, tossed by Clancy the carman to a passer-by, had sent the tremendous tidings broadcast through Clenane. Women rushed into their front yards; ragged little scamps playing in the mud took up the cry—“Masther Shane had come into his own!”—“They were all dead, the rest of them. The black Protestants, bad cess to them, had gone to their choice place! Sure the diggle had got them! And their own darlint, lovely boy was Lord Kilmore, the Earull of Kilmore, no less, glory be to God!”—it was the grandest tidings Clenane had ever had.

“There's Clancy will tell you all about it: burnt alive

they were, in Americky.”—“Ah, not at all, woman, it was drowned in the ship going over.”—“You’ve not got the rights of it. It’s murdered they were; and the old lord when he git the news let one yell, turned black down the one side of him, and quinched!”—“You’ve got hould of the wrong end of the story, Mam. Didn’t me own little gossoon hear his riverence and the gentleman from London Town, discoorsing together—and him under the window of the priest’s house?—the three of them, the father and the two sons, was took together, the rale spotty fever it was. Sure it’s the tirrible disease: you’re laughing the one moment may be, and the next you’re bending two-double in the backbone and you’re gone. Faith it’s the crooked coffins they have to make for them.”—“Ah, whisht, don’t be talking of coffins! It’s joy bells we ought to be thinking of.”

Father Blake lifted his hands and let them drop on the table when his visitor’s first grave sentence had come to an end.

“Both!—both his sons!” he repeated in a low voice. “It’s a sore affliction. The Lord have mercy on their souls!”

Mr. Clement Parker, a junior partner of that well-known firm, Somerset, Parker, and Blane, Parliament Street, looked down at the top of his bowler hat, which he was holding decorously on one knee with a gray-gloved hand, and emitted a slight cough. He was a clean-shaven individual, of an age unplaceable, between the late thirties and the early fifties. His long gray countenance had turned to lavender hue under the shrewish wind blowing in his teeth during the two hours’ drive from the station.

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It was a countenance solemn of expression, with deep lines running from nostril to chin. But besides natural and professional gravity, it bore to-day a stamp of something faintly approaching distress. After a pause he said:—

“Lord Kilmore is very seriously affected.”

Father Blake groaned; and there fell a silence. The solicitor surveyed him for a second or two with expressionless eyes, dropping his underlip and audibly drawing in his breath through his lower teeth. Then he said, with the first note of emotion perceptible in his voice:—

“My partner, Mr. Somerset, ventured at the time to remonstrate with Lord Kilmore upon the imprudence of sending both the young men round the world together. But Lord Kilmore is not a person amenable to advice. He had his reasons, and”—Mr. Parker looked down again at his hat—“none can prevent the dispensation of Providence. No doubt the young men might equally have been killed together in some railway accident in England.”

“A terrible dispensation!” Father Blake’s face displayed his acute sense of the tragedy. “How is the poor father alive at all? All the children he had in the world, and both gone in a moment!”

“Before I left London his lordship’s health was giving cause for very serious anxiety indeed.”

The emissary said this with peculiar emphasis. Father Blake raised his eyes with a startled movement. Their gaze met.

“My God!” The old man spoke under his breath—Mr. Parker dropped his glance, and passed a hand carelessly over the bowler. Unduly emotional, these Irish people, but quick-witted. He coughed again.

“Is that what you’re meaning?”

The priest’s accents trembled on consternation. Mr. Parker smiled one-sidedly and not altogether pleasantly as he responded:—

“But, my good sir, the facts are self-evident. Failing Lord Liscarell and his brother Guy O’Conor, the next in line is the son of the late Desmond O’Conor.”

“Shane!”

There was no mistaking the nature of Father Blake’s agitation. He seemed to regard the news as unmitigated calamity.

“These are great prospects,” said Mr. Parker dryly, “for an unknown and penniless youth.”

The priest took out a red pocket-handkerchief and wiped his forehead.

“You must excuse me, sir,” he said, with a shade of dignity as he caught the impassive eyes contemplating him, “I have been myself unwell, lately.”

The lawyer drew his chair closer to the table, with the air of one who would get on to business.

“The young man, I understand, has spent all his life, practically, up to the present day, in this, er—secluded place.”

“He has.”

“You were appointed guardian by the late Mrs. Desmond O’Conor.”

“I was.”

“You refused Lord Kilmore’s offer to take charge of his nephew and undertake his education.”

“I did.”

“It was,” said the solicitor slowly, “a curious attitude,

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if you will permit me to say so. One hardly of a kind to benefit your ward."

"Look here," said the priest—he stretched his gout-distorted hands on the table before him, clenching the red pocket-handkerchief between them—"Mr.—I misremember your name. It's no matter. You said yourself a while ago, sir, that Lord Kilmore had his reasons. I can give you no better answer than those same words: I had my reasons for refusing to let the child go. And I still think they were good reasons."

"I trust," said Mr. Parker, who seemed to be very well aware of the whole transaction thus obliquely alluded to, "young Mr. Shane O'Connor has grown up in a manner that has justified your decision."

Father Blake fiercely mopped his brow again. Then he exclaimed:—

"He's grown up wild."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Wild, I say." Father Blake drummed the table with an irritated nail, leaned forward and stared so intensely at the visitor that the latter drew back. "What do you think he'd grow up like, reared here, among us, poor, ignorant folk, but poor and ignorant himself? You'll see for yourself. You'll see for yourself. And you'll see"—excitement grew again in the old man's voice—"you'll see the finest lad, the best O'Connor that the race has ever produced. A real O'Connor, mind you—Catholic to the core."

With this he rose, and his white head towered over the visitor's meager personality. Mr. Parker, prepared as he had been for Hibernian perversity, was shocked and disgusted. He certainly had not come on this long jour-

ney, to the squalid, farther end of Ireland, to enter into controversial discussion with a peasant priest. He got up in his turn and waived the question with a contemptuous sweep of the bowler hat.

“You do not, I presume, reverend sir, claim any further authority over a young man who is now, I believe, entering upon his twenty-third year?”

He waited. Father Blake, who had forgotten the gouty foot, had been forced to fall back into his chair. It was some time before he was able to answer, feebly enough:—

“No authority. I claim none, sir. None at all, save what an old friend may exert.”

Mr. Parker drew his whistling breath, and gave his one-sided smile.

“I was going to ask you to bring me into contact with Mr. O’Conor immediately, But I am afraid you are scarcely well enough. Perhaps you can suggest——”

“There’s not a little boy about the place that wouldn’t take you to him; but——” Father Blake hesitated. “Ay, that will be best. I’ll send for him, I’ll send for him. And if meanwhile I can offer you some refreshment, sir—a glass of port wine and a bit of cake——”

Mr. Parker was already looking for his stick.

“Thank you, thank you. Pray do not trouble on either count.” He spoke with more alacrity than he had yet shown. “Your first idea is excellent. I will call upon the young man myself. Pray, not another word. I much prefer it.”

Nevertheless, with a drawn and sternly set countenance of suffering, Father Blake insisted on hobbling out to the threshold of the little gray house and putting the

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visitor upon his way. He pointed towards the ruins that dominated the village.

“Yon’s Kilmore Castle. And it’s up there he lives.”

“Up there?”

The exclamation indicated surprise and consternation.

“And where,” asked Father Blake, “would be a fitter place for an O’Conor, than what is left of his ancestors’ glory?” He caught a side vision of the dropping lip and the cold eye, and stopped abruptly. “Here, Patsey Dooley!” he called.

An urchin sprang up, like an elf out of the ground, from behind a ledge of rough walling, and came padding up to the priest; just the barefoot, ragged, begrimed little rascal that Mr. Parker would have expected him to be. Meanwhile, the car driver, who had been trying to catch Father Blake’s eye, now at last succeeded. He touched his hat with his whip:—

“Troth, it’s but poorly you’re looking, your reverence! The fut is it? Glory be to God, it’s the safe spot.” Then he pointed with the butt end of his implement towards the retreating figure of the English envoy; winked, and chuckled. “It’s the rale ould fox I’ve brought you; but isn’t it the grand news? Not that you’d drag a word out of that one. But he can’t keep it from the papers. There’s nothing else talked about all along the line. And the boys were roaring it up and down the streets of Dublin last night.” He interrupted himself and again pointed: “Look at that, your riverence, look at that! Isn’t it the escort my fine gentleman is getting through Clenane!”

Father Blake flung an abstracted glance in that direction, and had a wan smile. The traveler marching along

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the stony road, with a rigid back and a general air of painful self-consciousness, was followed by an ever increasing train of children, all barefoot, all more or less ragged, all wildly excited. In their wake, two or three grown-up lads and a crone or two, were already gathering. On the door-step of every poor house, leaning over the rugged bit of wall that separated its patch from the street, stood interested spectators, loudly discussing the appearance of the stranger and the amazing nature of his news.

“Begob,” said Clancy the driver, doubling himself in two with laughter, “I’d give the eyes off my head to be prisint when young Mister O’Conor meets that deputation and hears the news for himself.”

“Faith,” said the old priest, “it’s the mischief it should be a Saturday and all the children loose! What’s that ye say, Clancy?”

“I’m asking your riverence, if it’s his lordship we ought to be calling Mr. Shane now?”

“Not yet,” Father Blake sighed, and added involuntarily: “Thank God!”

Disappointment wrote itself upon Tom Clancy’s black-whiskered countenance.

“Won’t it make any differ to him at all then? Huthen, what’s all the mee-aw about? Good-day, father. I’d better be making the best of my way to the widow Dooley’s, and put up the mare, till the ould image is ready for us agin. Is it after taking the young gintleman away with him, he’ll be, d’ye think?”

The priest, who had already turned to reënter his narrow hall, started and wheeled round, supporting himself by the door-post.

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“’Pon me word, I hadn’t thought of that! You’re likely right, Clancy. It’s very ill the old lord is, I’m hearing.”

Clancy’s visage became illumined with a broad grin.

“Well, now, the Almighty be praised!” he ejaculated piously. “Sure it won’t be long then, for Mr. Shane.”

He gathered his reins, beat the tired mare into a stiff canter and rocketed up the street towards Mrs. Dooley’s mixed establishment, where entertainment for man and beast was combined with the sale of the most varied commodities.

Mr. Parker felt his natural Saxon prejudice deepen into something approaching horror as he proceeded on his way. He had, indeed, an escort increasing with every step. Twice he tried to rid himself of what appeared to him to be the entire juvenile population of Clenane; but each time it was after a method so truly British as to be productive of results diametrically opposite to his desire. He turned, waved his stick in a more or less threatening manner, and said commandingly, but it must be admitted ineptly:—

“Go away, little boys! Go away!”

The little boys looked at each other, grinned, cheered, and halloed in Irish to distant wanderers to come and join them, while closing ever more pressingly on the humorous gentleman.

The patter of all those naked feet, the atmosphere of turf smoke and other odors that emanated from the little savages; their uncouth cries and their ceaseless interchange of remarks, all evidently referring to himself, in a language he had difficulty in recognizing as his own,

got upon the solicitor's nerves. On the outskirts of the village, he stopped, faced his tormentors, and flinging a handful of pennies among them, begged them passionately to go and buy sweets and leave him alone.

"Sure," cried Patsey with reproach, having failed to capture a coin for himself, "your honor didn't ought to have done that. 'Tis tin times worse they'll be now. You might as well thry and drive the mice away with cheese!"

Mr. Parker looked gloomily at his guide's small, dirty countenance. The thought struck him that this unspeakable urchin showed a great deal more intelligence than would the average washed and booted young John Bull of his years; and it added to his exasperation.

It was bleak weather. He had traveled all night; had made but a poor meal in Dublin before mounting the train that was to carry him to a country more God-forsaken than anything he had thought possible. The jaunt on the outside car—a vehicle apparently designed for the purpose of affording a searching wind the utmost play about your person—had further deepened his pessimism regarding an errand sufficiently antipathetic in itself. It was the last straw that he should be cast out on the road, the sport of a squalid crowd and of a gathering Atlantic storm.

The sky indeed was clouding up heavily, and a rain as fine as spray had been added to the penetrating chill of the wind. He regretted the priest's parlor, humble as it was. At least, there, four walls had sheltered him; a turf fire, ill-smelling, but still a fire, had warmed; and there had been one to consort with; only an Irish P.P., it is true, but still a human being. Nevertheless he had made his choice and must abide by it.

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He stumped on, striving to ignore the existence of any one but Patsey, who cheered his path with encouragement, much as a coach on the bank will cheer a racing crew.

“Arrah, you’re the grand shteppeer. Any one can see your honor is accustomed to legging it. It’ll be no time at all before we get there, at the rate your honor’s going. Sure it’s the climber you are, as any one can tell at a glimp. It’s just above you now, in the ruins, sorr. If you’ll take the throuble to lift your eyes, you’ll see the little housheen the way it’s sitting inside the ould court. The castle of the rale O’Conors, when it was lords of the land they were. It’s troops of people that do be coming to see it. Car-loads of them from all the stations. Sure they wouldn’t miss it for the world. Isn’t it one of the sights of the wesht? I wonder, now, if we’ll find him at home at all, once we get your honor up there? No one can tell where Masher Shane will be stravaging. It’s days he’ll be out. Ah, nights too. What did you say? Where would he be going to o’ nights? Out on the say in his little boat. Or, maybe, laying out to catch the wild duck over by the lake beyant the hills. Ah, what matters? Sure you can go in and rest. You’ll have the ruins seen, annyhow.”

They had left the village some way behind by a mounting road, and now found themselves brought up by the usual low, roughstone wall of the country. Mr. Parker had by this time thought himself beyond surprise; nevertheless he was taken aback to see Patsey, aided by two or three other lads, hurl himself upon the barrier and proceed to make a breach by the simple method of pulling down one huge stone after another.

“Will yer honor shtep across? Whatever ye do, Tim

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Lonigan, build up the wall again, or we'll be having Mr. Blake's colts straying on us. And the divil and all it'll be. Sure haven't I got to show the gentleman the way, didn't his riverence lay it on me? 'It's you I've chose, Patsey,' he says, 'because I know I can rely on you. I'd go meself if it wasn't for me fut.' Straight on, sorr, where you see the track."

The field was sopping wet, and the visitor felt the moisture penetrate through the soles of his boots. After the check caused by the passage of the gap, his retinue began to stream close upon him again. He was glad when the arch of the ruin leaped up about his head and Patsey, diving in, informed him with a jubilant crow:—

"Here we are, sorr! If ye'll take three shteps west, it's inside Mr. Shane's house ye'll be!"

The ruins of Kilmore Castle stand on a rocky promontory, which, on the side of the coast, presents a sheer wall of cliff to the sea. But on the land side it is approached by a fairly lenient slope, clothed with wild herbage on which one or two rakish-looking young foals and an elderly mare were roaming. On a fine day, the view to every point of the compass is, for such as love the wide, melancholy Irish scenery and illimitable ocean, one of singular impressiveness. Look which way you will, you see spaces immense, hued with strange colors which seem stolen from magic, and brooded over by the unseizable spirit of a lost romance of life. But in such weather as unkind fate had reserved for Mr. Parker, if he could have spared a glance towards the scenery, it would have been baffled by the universal gray which, driving from the sea, muffled the world in mist.

The tower of Kilmore reared itself, foursquare, barti-

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zoned, crenelated, and defiant; but it was an empty shell. Inside its hollowness the grass grew and the birds nested; the visitor might walk in and look up and see a square of sky at a giddy height above him. The walls of the outer bailey were in a state of still greater dilapidation. One whole side had crashed down in a great storm, and some of the stones lay scattered, isolated or in mounds, just as they had fallen; the rest had been pillaged, partly to build the "housheen" which was now Shane's dwelling place, partly, as easiest come by, for farmer Blake's boundary walls, though in that country stone lies everywhere to your hand.

It was a forlorn enough looking spot, on such an afternoon. A waste enclosure, speaking only, at first sight, of the fall of power and the passing of grandeur. Nevertheless the second glance, to eyes less jaundiced than those of the Englishman, might have revealed a certain picturesqueness in the tiny stone house wedged in between the keep and the outer wall. It looked indeed a place of shelter. The towering masonry stood still strong to defend. The tempest might shriek above and around: here it could scarcely reach.

A path led across the weed-grown yard to the little door; on each side of the stone step of the threshold there was a rough bed of wallflower, thick with bud. The cottage was long and low-built, with a roof of shale-slabs hanging down over its small windows. A faint breath of smoke crept out of the chimney that leaned for support against the keep.

The door was closed. Already Patsey was having a free fight on the step with those of his satellites who were anxious to share with him the honor and glory of introducing

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the visitor from England to the now all-important Master Shane. But neither shouts nor knocks produced any effect within.

“He’s not at home. Master Shane is not at home, I tell you. And the door is locked on us. Sure, sorr, Mr. O’Conor’s off with himself——”

Before Mr. Clement Parker could collect his thoughts sufficiently to form an anathema equal to the occasion—a silent anathema, for whatever the provocation, he was not likely to forget his British decorum—an elderly woman, cloaked, with a hood over her head, and a key in her hand, pushed her way through the group and slipped round to the door with the sinuous movement of a lively fish. A murmur of approval replaced the sympathetic groans and tongue clacking which had heralded the blank draw.

“It’s Honor Keown! More power to you, Honor! She’s got the key, sorr! Sure, she’ll have the door open on you, and it’s out of the wet you’ll be anyhow!”

The key grated in the lock at the same moment and, straightening herself, the newcomer revealed a countenance of almost classic beauty, stern as a Roman matron’s, framed under the shadow of her hood by rippling bands of iron-gray hair. Her voice was severely harmonious, to match her appearance.

“Will you walk inside, sir? You’re kindly welcome. I’m Mr. O’Conor’s housekeeper from the village beyant down there. Walk in, your honor, and take a seat. I’ll wet you a cup of tay in a minute.”

She seemed to the disconcerted traveler of a different stamp altogether from the tatterdemalion company that had escorted him; and the gesture with which she empha-

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sized her invitation to enter had a natural dignity and graciousness.

She stood back, and he passed in, stooping his head under the low lintel. The room in which he found himself was so far superior to the ordinary run of Irish hovels, had he known it, that it boasted a flagged floor and something approaching a fireplace built in the thickness of stone. True, the wide chimney-shaft went straight up with archaic simplicity: if you stooped you could see the glimmer of daylight at the top. But Mrs. Keown averred that "it drew beautiful," and that the griddle cakes she baked by the glow beneath were the best in the barony. There was a curious rug of seal-hide, flung before this hearth. A couple of wooden arm-chairs with faded cushions flanked it. For the rest, the room contained only a deal table and an old-fashioned dresser.

Mrs. Keown had taken matters in her own hands with all the authority of a hostess. She drove the spectators out with sudden fierceness, ordering Patsey to hang over the cliff and bawl for Master Shane and the rest of the children to scatter in other likely directions. The four or five lounging youths, with airs of voluntary discretion, retired; but only to press in turns against the window and discuss the affair, as far as it had gone, in all its bearings.

Having inducted the guest to an arm-chair with quite irresistible ceremony, Mr. O'Connor's housekeeper turned to the turf fire and plied the bellows in majestic silence.

Mr. Parker found himself gazing about him with more curiosity than he would have cared to acknowledge. The young man who, the priest had said, had been brought up as a peasant among peasants, among such creatures as those savages outside—what kind of being was he likely

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to prove? They spoke of him as Master Shane; it was evident, then, that he was treated with some show of respect. But he who would be called upon to bear such honors and responsibilities very soon—the lawyer was sure of that; he had seen death on Lord Kilmore's face—how would he comport himself?

His eyes investigated. Certainly not a tidy youth. But a sportsman. The gun propped in the corner was meticulously polished. The fishing rods lying across the dresser were of the latest pattern. (Fishing was Mr. Parker's holiday relaxation.) Not a book. Not the smallest token of cultivation anywhere—unless a bunch of primroses thrust in a mug on the table could be so regarded. A terribly poor place. The plastered stone walls had once been whitewashed. They were now sallow, smoke-stained. The black pot which Mrs. Keown had removed from the chain dangling down the chimney, to make room for the kettle, no doubt contained potatoes for young O'Connor's supper. Mr. Parker was quite stimulated to meet that traditional black pot, but it added to his sense of the disaster that had befallen the house of Kilmore.

A wretched place! The door of the inner room stood ajar, and Mr. Parker shifted his chair so as to obtain a view into it without too obtrusively turning his head. All he could see, however, was a streak of whitewashed wall and the corner of a narrow bed covered with a patchwork quilt. But his lips tightened and his brows contracted as he looked: for on that section of wall, he beheld a crucifix with a dried branch stuck behind it. Was not this the worst aspect of the whole deplorable affair! His underlip dropped; he drew a long breath with his dismal whistle.

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Mrs. Keown, kneeling by the fire, looked round at him over her shoulder. She presented a more imposing appearance than ever, since she had discarded her cloak, and there was certainly an antique nobility about the line of head and throat.

"It's the down-power of weariness you've got on you, waiting on the young gentleman's coming," she remarked. "I'll have this kettle boiling in a minute, and there's a bit of soda-bread in the scullery beyant that I only baked yesterday. And didn't I bring a couple of fresh eggs this morning, me hins having laid for me? Arrah, God is good! Little did I think how handy they'd come in. Sure that'll help you to pass the time.—Whist, now, it's biling."

She rose with stately movement; disappeared into the recesses of the bedroom, where, with an increase of curiosity, the stranger heard sounds of rummaging. Presently she emerged, her arms full of objects wrapped in paper, with which she stepped across the room and out by another door into what was obviously the scullery. The kettle began to rock and bubble on the turf. And Mr. Parker, realizing that the thought of the tea, the fresh eggs, and the griddle cake, was an agreeable perspective, began to hope that the appearance of "the young gentleman" might be delayed yet awhile.

The woman reappeared, carrying in one hand the two eggs in a saucepan, and in the other a tea-pot; and in a surprisingly short time, there was set before Mr. Parker an array at which he stared in amazement—a tea-pot, insufficiently polished, it is true, but indubitably silver and of a charming Georgian melon shape, chased and engraved. He looked closer at it through his eye-glass. Mrs. Keown was observing him.

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“Ah, ’tis rale silver, sorr. And them’s the arms of the rale O’Conors. Maybe your honor knows about her that’s gone, the poor lady from Ameriky, Mr. Shane’s own mamma that died on us. Hand and foot I tinded her. But she was marked for death before she came to us at all, and the air of the say tuk her in the chest. Musha, if I didn’t forget the salt! And that’s the little jug to match. I’ll thrubble you to observe the cream. Cast your eye on the richness of it. And I’m sorry the sugar should be moist—well aware,” said Mrs. Keown, drawing herself up, “that quality likes the lump. But I have to consider me young master’s purse. The plate you’re looking at, sorr, is a bit of the real old chaney, her ladyship Mrs. O’Conor brought with her. Great store she set on it. But it got smashed on me, the most of it. The ways of Providence,” concluded the speaker piously, “being agin everlastingness in this world.”

Mr. Parker contemplated the yellow Spode plate with some regret. The rest of the crockery was chiefly remarkable for its lack of relationship. The griddle bread on an earthen dish was flat in shape with a wonderfully white crumb and a close crust plentifully floured. He cut a slice, buttered and bit into it; but paused on the strange flavor and looked up at Mrs. Keown: he had unexpectedly come upon a caraway seed.

“Huthen, your honor needn’t be afraid of the butter,” cried she. “Didn’t I bring it straight from Mr. Blake’s, and hasn’t he the best dairy in the whole of Clare? And hadn’t Moira, that’s Miss Blake, sorr, just finished pressing it? And that little pat there she made o’ purpose for me, and no wonder, seeing it’s for Masther Shane.”

The butter was unimpeachable. To his further surprise,

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the tea was of fine quality. The griddle bread had almost a fascination. And as he broke into his egg, its milky freshness overflowed the spoon. A sensation as near to geniality as his nature was capable of: an appreciation that there was a humorous and, yes, actually a comfortable side, to the adventure, began to steal upon the solicitor. His crooked smile was not satiric as he remarked:

“Mr. O’Conor seems popular with you all.”

“Popular?” repeated Mrs. Keown. She paused, and then proceeded with hardly an inflection in her rich quiet voice: “There isn’t one of us wouldn’t lay down our lives for him this minute.”

“But failing that extreme measure,” said Mr. Parker waggishly, helping himself as he spoke, “he is provided with fresh eggs and, really, excellent butter.”

“Butter——” Mrs. Keown broke off, and a glint of mirth came into her tragic dark eye. “Butter is it? Why wouldn’t she make butter for him, and they the regular pair? Why the doves isn’t in it with them!”

Mr. Parker stared, consternation dawning on his countenance. It is quite possible that Mrs. Keown perceived the unpleasing effect her words had produced and shrewdly guessed the cause, for she proceeded with an eloquence not devoid of malice:

“Me fine Daddy Blake will be singing another tune, when he learns the grandeur that has come Masther Shane’s way. He’ll not be so anxious to back ould Clery. Isn’t it the real lord Mr. Shane is now? Glory be to God, to think of Moira being a lord’s lady!”

“Lord Kilmore is not dead yet,” snapped Mr. Parker.

He pushed the slice of bread he had cut for himself pettishly away. Only savages would bake with caraway

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seeds! Mrs. Keown paused for effect. Then she continued undauntedly:

“Troth, then, you must be thinking he wouldn’t last long, or you wouldn’t be after Mr. Shane the way you are.”

Mr. Parker took a hurried draught of tea, and laid down his egg-spoon. The meal had lost flavor for him. Mrs. Keown’s words were only too clear. The countenances against the window panes, the staring eyes, the unceasing clatter of voices outside suddenly got on his nerves. The room had grown dark with the rising squall and the falling of the firelight.

“This is intolerable!” The solicitor sprang from his chair. “I cannot wait here all night.”

The woman who had served him with such dignified hospitality, saw him draw two half-crowns from his pocket and lay them on the table, and heard the ungracious mutter:

“Here’s for your trouble.”

Mrs. Keown folded her arms and stood with her most Cornelia-like aspect. She gave the visitor a black look as he moved stiffly to the door. Here was no way at all to treat any one! Not so much as a thank you, and her lovely egg not finished! Huthen, God send him wanting!

Before Mr. Parker’s hand had touched the latch, there came a shrill cry from without, answered by a shout from the idlers.

“Master Shane!”

VIII

THE HEIR AT LAW

THE wind caught the solicitor, full blast, as he followed the swiftly vanishing band out of the shelter of the bailey walls. It came straight across the Atlantic, that wind; from the icy shores of Labrador, and Mr. Parker took cover hurriedly behind the wall; not before, however, he had had a glimpse of a tall figure driven towards him, darkly glistening all over in a seaman's tarpaulin and sou'wester. About and around, the members of Mr. Parker's whilom train circled; their rags flapped, he thought, like so many demented scarecrows; shrill cries, such as seafowl might emit, rose from among them. A huge black dog, shining with wet even as his master, flew like a streak of lightning into the cottage.

"I really feel," said the poor gentleman to himself, "as if I were in a bad dream."

"What's all this?" exclaimed Shane O'Connor. He had by no means the air of one overwhelmed by fortune's unexpected favors, as he marched through the ruined gateway, and brought himself up short before the stranger. Rather was his countenance frowning. His lips were compressed. He fixed Mr. Parker with a pair of blazing blue eyes, as if he were looking upon the face of his enemy. "What's all this?" he said again, and without waiting for an articulate answer, turned scowling on the excited throng. "I'll have to trouble you to let me speak in peace

to this gentleman. What are you all staring at me like that for? You know me well enough!" He made a sweeping gesture of his wet arm; and then, addressing his visitor, continued in the same tone: "Please step inside, unless you want to be talking in the teeth of the wind."

Mr. Parker found himself as submissive as the youth of Clenane, which latter melted away into the wind-blown drift even as he re-entered the cottage. Shane walked in after him, divesting himself of his dripping coat and casting off the sou'wester under the curves of which his chiseled face had an odd Mercury look.

"Glory be to God!" cried Mrs. Keown. She swooped dramatically upon the wet heap and disappeared into the scullery with her booty, slamming the door. There was no need to tell her "when gentlemen wanted to be private."

"Will you sit?" said Shane with a hostile eye on the bringer of strange tidings.

Without a glance in the direction of the unfinished meal, he dragged up the second arm-chair close to the hearth and stretched his sea-booted legs to the turf, before which they soon began to steam. Leprechaun was steaming, too, as he turned round and round upon the sealskin, rubbing his dripping shoulders. Mr. Parker had seldom felt so nonplussed. It was with a nervous laugh that he began.

"I don't know what you may have heard, Mr. O'Connor, concerning my errand. Your—er—these good people here seem an agitated lot. I had better introduce myself first." He drew a card from his pocket-book, forcing himself to more than usual deliberation because of his really ridiculous sense of being somehow at a disadvantage under the gaze of this odd young man.

Shane took the card in a hand, the lawyer noted, tanned

THE HEIR AT LAW

to the color of seaweed, and still wet as seaweed, yet, as he noted, too, a fine and well-shaped hand. Kilmore's heir hardly glanced at the name and carelessly threw the card down on the table. His look questioned impatiently: "Well?"

"I have come here at the request of your uncle, our client," said Mr. Parker, after a pause. His voice grated harshly. He had been prepared to patronize to a certain point, while deploring and disapproving. Patronage was difficult here. Something like dislike rose up in its stead. "Lord Kilmore—your—er—uncle—has had a severe affliction in the death of both his sons——" He paused. The announcement seemed to himself so tremendous in its import that it demanded a pause.

"Poor chap," said Shane; but there was no emotion in his accents, nor relaxation in his eyes.

"You are no doubt aware," pursued the other, after a whistling breath, "how this untoward event affects yourself."

Shane hesitated; then:—

"I'm not a fool," he replied briefly.

Mr. Parker drew himself up. What an unlicked cub! And yet, it added to his sense of grievance that he could not altogether condemn. Here was a personality, a being full of vital force; Shane O'Connor, when he became Lord Kilmore, would not pass into the unnumbered legion of the negligible. He would stand out. Wherever he went, eyes would follow him; whenever he spoke, people would turn round at the sound of his voice.

The interior of a cottage room, at seven o'clock on an evening of Atlantic bad weather, is hardly a place for defined vision. Nevertheless, enough of the young man's

face and figure was visible to the lawyer for him to realize that the family good looks—yes, and strange indeed, the family air of breeding—were not wanting. But, Heavens, what an accent! And, shades of those conventions which Mr. Parker loved, what a lack of courtesy!

“Lord Kilmore wishes to see you,” said the solicitor frigidly, after a reflective silence.

“Does he?”

“Yes, Mr. O’Conor, and it is a request which seems to me impossible for you to refuse.”

Shane kicked a protruding turf. It broke into transient flame which illuminated his dark countenance and showed a slight satiric smile.

“There may be two opinions about that.”

“Lord Kilmore is very ill.” The tone was profoundly rebuking.

Shane pushed his chair back with an abrupt movement and jumped up.

“And what is that to me?” he exclaimed. “What for should I care whether he live or die, except, indeed”—he broke off to laugh, not pleasantly—“for the difference it makes to me?”

“You render my task very difficult,” said Mr. Parker. “I have been accustomed to deal with”—he had almost been betrayed into the absurdity of insulting a future client. He was about to say: “with gentlemen,” but he altered the phrase, “with sensible people.”

“What does he want me for?” Shane bent his face, pale in the dusk, towards his visitor. “What has he ever done for me? I might rot here, for all he cares, if it weren’t that I happen to come next those that are gone.”

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“I think you are doing your uncle an injustice. Lord Kilmore offered, not once, but twice——”

The other interrupted fiercely:—

“Aye, and how?—How? Oh, you’re horrified at me this moment that I’m not ready to melt at the thought that my uncle is on his death-bed. How did he treat my mother when she lay on hers?” He flung out his arm towards the open bedroom door with a gesture unconsciously tragic. “Didn’t he want her to seal the blackest bargain that ever the devil drew up, for the soul of a child that could not choose for itself? Didn’t he play the same game on Father Blake, down yonder? Not once, but twice, as you say yourself. I owe my uncle nothing. Not that!” He snapped his fingers. “Wait, though. Perhaps I might feel to be owing him something but that he’s got his punishment. That’s not saying——” The heat of passion dropped from him, he stuffed his hands into his pockets; and, wheeling upon the visitor, added in an unexpected colloquial, every day manner: “That’s not saying I don’t mean to go over there, to him. I do.”

“I am glad to hear you say so.”

Mr. Parker got up in his turn. He was very tired and beginning to feel stiff and rheumatic. He supposed, disgustedly, that it was the Irish way to expend yourself in passion that meant nothing after all: it seemed to him an exasperating waste of time and energy.

“The sooner the better, if I may advise.” He had his wry smile. Then, diving into an inner pocket, he produced a letter-case.

“Lord Kilmore wished me to provide for all contingencies. Here are fifty pounds in notes.”

“Take back your dirty money!” cried young O’Conor.

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His blue eyes danced with a fury that was not devoid of joy. It was his first score. "I've got enough and to spare for the journey—and back. And what's this?" He had caught sight of the two half-crowns which Mrs. Keown had disdainfully left lying between the butter-dish and the tea-pot.

Mr. Parker was more discomfited than the discomfiting day had yet found him.

"I gave your housekeeper, something—something for her trouble," he stammered.

Shane's lip curled.

"Ah, and she wouldn't have it. Put it back in your pocket, sir, we do not sell our hospitality in Ireland."

The grandiloquence restored the solicitor's sense of superiority.

"You seem to be, altogether, in the enjoyment of considerable affluence," he remarked. And to his sneer was joined a meaning glance at his surroundings.

Shane retorted hotly:—

"We've enough, anyhow, not to want yours. I made twenty pounds last week at Lishone races."

There was boyish triumph in his air. Mr. Parker, slipping the half-crowns into his pocket, shot the single question at him:—

"Betting?"

"Betting," Shane laughed. "And riding. Any one who wants to sell a horse in this corner of the world, I'm the lad they come to."

"Well, there's nothing need detain me any more, I presume." The Englishman made no attempt to conceal the completeness of his distaste. He took up the pocket-book, extracted from it a sealed envelope: "A letter from Lord

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Kilmore," he said, and laid it conspicuously on the teatray. "It contains the invitation to yourself, and of course the address in London at which he expects you." Then returning the wallet with its despised contents to his pocket: "If you will take my advice, young man," he said, and there was warning in his eye as well as in his tone, "you will not delay an hour longer than need be. It will make a difference to your future position that you should have been received by your uncle before coming into your inheritance."

"I'll not delay," said Shane laconically.

Mr. Parker reached for his bowler hat, folded his muffler about his throat, buttoned his overcoat and lifted its collar.

"The car-driver informs me," he said, as he advanced towards the door, "that I shall not find any decent lodging nearer than Galway Town. I have still a long drive before me in the wet."

"I'll see you down to Dooley's," Shane observed.

Leprechaun, who had seemed lost in profound slumbers, his nose between his paws, his long body shaken with reminiscent shudders, here sprang up, and advanced towards his master, ignoring the stranger as he had done from the beginning.

"Back, boy!" ordered Shane, and with a droop of his whole being, the retriever returned to the hearth, and flung himself down again, giving an almost human sigh.

At this singularly opportune moment, Mrs. Keown appeared in great majesty on the threshold of the scullery door; and stepping forward offered Shane his tarpaulin with one hand and his sou'wester with the other. She, too, now ignored Mr. Parker's existence. The young man

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donned the garments without a word; and then held the door open for his visitor to pass into the gray outer world.

"I shall take the morning express to-morrow," said Mr. Parker, with a painful effort at cordiality, as they crossed the yard together. "And what would you say, Mr. O'Connor, to joining me at your station?"

"I'd say no." This uncompromising statement was, however, qualified, after a silence, as they breasted the blast that met them at the corner of the ruins—Shane had to lift his voice to make himself heard. "I couldn't leave my friends in that way; and I've got to break the news to one—to one who will be first to me, whatever happens."

Mr. Parker nearly groaned as he picked an anxious way across the soaking field. Betting, horse-dealing, probably racing, and an entanglement—the outlook seemed to him as gloomy for the future of Kilmore as was the actual aspect of the land that had once been its own.

"The man is drunk," said Mr. Parker.

He stood in the center of an interested group—it was difficult to avoid publicity in Clenane—and, for him, the bitter cup of the day's experience brimmed. The glare of the paraffin lamp that hung in the narrow entrance to Mrs. Dooley's house of entertainment illuminated the car-driver as he supported himself against the door-post. He was grinning inanely at his fare. It also illuminated a most indignant Mr. Parker, whose lip dropped with some reason. It illuminated Shane's aloof, scornful face, the deeply interested circle, and the widow Dooley's rubicund countenance which now assumed an expression of shocked rebuke.

"Drunk, sorr! It isn't in my house that anybody, let

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alone a shteady respectable man like Tomsie Clancy here, would get drunk. He's not drunk, your honor. It's all along of the cold being driven in upon him in the rain, and him always delicate in the stomach. And me seeing the trembles coming over him, put the ginger into his hot drink. It's that that's done it: the power of the ginger gone to his head."

It apparently had gone to his legs, for here Mr. Clancy evinced a tendency to sit down on nothing, and was only arrested on the way by the clutch of a couple of sympathizers.

Perhaps the prospect of a long drive through gathering darkness, in such weather, was one that could be abandoned without too much regret. Mr. Parker made no attempt to find another conveyance. He wondered wearily into space if there was anywhere he could put up. Instantly half a dozen voices clamored.

"There's my poor place, you know," said young O'Connor, with a smile that forestalled refusal.

Mrs. Keown, classic in the folds of her great blue cloak, with the hood drawn over her noble head, appeared mysteriously at his elbow.

"Sure and you needn't be making little of yourself that away, Masther Shane. It's the grand little room you've got up there; and, by the greatest of chance, it's the lovely pair of clean sheets I have airing for it this minute. And I'll make yourself a shake-down in the kitchen."

Mr. Parker had a gesture more abrupt than civil. Besides the impossibility of facing a walk back to the lonely shanty, the thought of lying in that bed beneath the crucifix filled him with unreasonable repulsion.

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"If anny one is to offer accommodation to the gintleman," said Mrs. Dooley, with majesty, "it would come best, I'll make bould to say, from the proprietress of the Ho-tel!"

"There's the dochter now. He's a nice house. But sure, his sister's the holy terror and all."

"Wirrah, and why wouldn't the gentleman go to Blake's? Danny Blake's, your honor, at Kilmore Farm. It's the fine place he has there, wid feather beds and all, that Mrs. Blake has pick'd every wan wid her own hand. It's the height of treatment they'd give you. And Mrs. Blake would think nothing of wringing the neck of a couple of ducks, or cutting the heads off a pair of doaty little spring chickens——"

"Ah, whisht, all of you! It's the priest's house the gentleman had better go to. Hasn't he got the curate's room with a spring bed in it, and ould Mary that can send up a dinner for a dozen priests?"

Mr. Parker, bewildered by conflicting advice, seized upon the last suggestion. It seemed indeed the only practicable one. The doubtful appearance of Mrs. Dooley's premises, and the undoubted atmosphere of raw spirit, turf, and tobacco smoke, salt fish and cabbage, that rushed richly out of it, made the thought of seeking shelter there impossible. He turned to Shane.

"If the reverend gentleman can really take me in——"

Shane looked at him with surprise.

"Why would you doubt it?" he said, and added briefly, "I'll go as far with you and see you safe in."

Mrs. Dooley received the decision with good humor, ordering Patsey to hurry now with the gentleman's portmanteau, which Clancey, the creature, had had "the sinse

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to bring in out of the rain, and him accused of the drunkenness!" But Shane, declaring he would carry it himself, shouldered it as if it had been a feather weight, and strode away towards the priest's house.

They found the owner still sitting over the turf fire, once again in converse with the doctor, who greeted Shane with a great shout. The red moreen curtains were drawn; a pair of candles in old-fashioned plated candlesticks burned on the table. The doctor, an empty tea-cup beside him, had just started an excellent cigar. The impression was more favorable than Mr. Parker had dared to hope. And although Shane's method of presenting the situation could scarcely be called gracious, it produced a gracious result.

"You'll have to take him for the night, father, for there isn't any other place fit for him—and Clancy drunk."

The old priest rose quickly and limped forward, stretching out both hands.

"My dear sir, with the greatest pleasure in life! I'll have a fire lit this minute. Mary, light the fire in the curate's room! Shane, my boy, run and tell Mary, she doesn't hear, there's a dear lad. Tell her we have a guest. She must do the best she can—supper and all. We'll do the best we can, sir. But anyway, you're kindly welcome."

"I've got the neatest little loin of mutton at home, that ever was cut," said the doctor, "and I'll send it round to you for chops. I'm Dr. Molloy, sir," he bowed affably. "And why wouldn't you be comfortable?" he now addressed the stranger: "I know for a fact that Father Blake's not drunk a drop of that half-dozen of Burgundy I sent him last Christmas—sure it's the poor man's gout he's got—unless, indeed, he's given it away."

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"I have not. At least there's a couple of bottles left," put in the priest apologetically.

"Here, let me help you off with your coat. Drenched, it is. That's how people get the chill in on their *chubes*. Ah, you've got goloshes, I see. That's grand. Take the arm-chair, now, by the fire. And you, your reverence, don't let me see you standing on your bad foot. Sit down, both of you, while I leave these things in the hall."

Mr. Parker, with an approach to a straight smile, let himself fall on the cushion of the chair indicated. These people were uncivilized, but there was, no doubt, a warm-heartedness about them, which—yes—which had its attraction. He rather liked the looks of Dr. Molloy: they had an alertness which commended itself to the British mind. And when this worthy reappeared and offered a cigar, the traveler felt that there were compensations even for one benighted on the west coast of Ireland. Tramping steps resounded all through the little house, as Shane mounted the stairs; the thud of the deposited portmantau shook the ceiling; then came the descending tread.

"Begorra," said Dr. Molloy, "is it going out of the house he is, without another word? I won't stand that! Shane, Shane, my boy!"

"Well, what is it, doctor?"

The young man opened the door, but stood on the threshold obviously bent on retreat.

"Why, what ails you? Here's Father Blake and myself that have a heart full of good wishes for you, with the grand news that's come."

"I've not made up my mind, if they're so grand," said Shane.

The priest looked at him, and his face worked.

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“With the help of God you will make them grand, my poor child,” he said.

“Come in with you, and sit down, can’t you?” cried Molloy impatiently.

“I can’t then. I’ve got to be off.”

And without another word Shane was gone. You might as well have tried to hold one of those swift, dark clouds that were at that moment sailing with the blast across the evening sky. Priest and doctor exchanged a look. The doctor cleared his throat, and addressed his old friend with some defiance.

“Faith, and I wouldn’t want to keep him, for it’s the good girl she is, and she’s the best right to him.” Then he added reflectively: “He’s taking it hard.”

Father Blake sighed again.

“Why wouldn’t he? Whether he likes it or not, it’ll have to be the end of many a thing he’s come to care for, if he’s to start right.”

“I’m not of your way of thinking, and you know that,” retorted Molloy, in sore and angry tones. “I’d have no opinion of him, then, if he was that way.”

Mr. Parker, puffing at his cigar, looked from one to the other, and thought that if these were true specimens of Ireland, it was certainly the most improvident, inconsequent race that ever sensible folk were called upon to rule. Here was the priest sighing like a furnace because of the unheard-of good fortune that had overtaken the youth of whom he had had the care; and there was the doctor, who had looked like an intelligent man, encouraging a folly so outrageous that even the priest recognized it as such.

Dr. Molloy broke in upon his musing.

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“Well, I must be going, or she’ll have my head off. I’d have asked you up to my little house and welcome, sir. But I’ve a poor sister at home there, and she’s very frightful of strangers—with deafness and a bit of a temper and all. Faith, that’s a good cigar you’re tasting? It’s one of a box Captain Joyce gave me; and I always think”—he turned to Father Blake—“that Captain Joyce’s cigars beat his lordship’s any day. I’ll warn Mary on my way out to get her gridiron ready. ’Pon my soul, a chop red-hot off the fire is a dish for a king.”

Without sharing this Keltic enthusiasm, the Englishman was nevertheless ready to admit to himself that the meal served in the little presbytery was, after all, as good as anything he’d ever had, even within the civilization of England. The potatoes bursting out of their skins, steaming and mealy, came up to their national reputation. The doctor’s Burgundy was equal to his cigar.

Mr. Parker was, it is true, slightly disappointed to find that he could in no way “draw” his host on the burning politics of the hour. After the first glass of wine he felt sufficiently restored to think it might be at once profitable and entertaining to get first-hand acquaintance with the real state of opinion in Ireland, accompanied by side lights on the attitude of priests and their noxious influence over their ignorant flocks. At the first question, however, Father Blake had flung his guest a single piercing look from under his beetling brows. And thereafter not the neatest turn of legal ingenuity could extract anything from him but such exasperatingly non-committal phrases as, “May be so!” “’Tisn’t for me to say.” “There’s a

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deal of talk on both sides"—or yet, "God help us, it's a queer world!"

When old Mary had cleared the table, she brought her master a cup of the strongest tea that Mr. Parker had ever seen brewed. The remains of the bottle of Burgundy and his glass were left at the visitor's elbow. The latter, an abstemious man if knowledgeable in wines, was further aggrieved. He had told himself that if the priest had drunk water during the meal, he would certainly make up for it, in accordance with all conventions, by the national brew afterwards. Coupling this asceticism with his reticence, the lawyer told himself that he had to deal with a sly old bird.

Nevertheless, he swallowed down his feelings of antipathy, remembering that he had here an ally on one important point, at least. He resolved to make use of this advantage as far as possible. Crossing his legs and stretching himself as luxuriously as the narrow arm-chair would allow, he began in an off-hand manner:—

"As you told me, Father Blake, Mr. O'Connor is a very fine young man. Quite the family type."

Father Blake made a little movement, as if the patronage of the tone annoyed him.

"I haven't laid eyes on an O'Connor, save him, since his grandfather, Lord Kilmore, shook the dust of Ireland off his feet," he said, and there was bitterness in his tone.

The lawyer suppressed an inclination to express his appreciation of that nobleman's remarkable good sense; he merely observed:—

"It's a strong type."

"Ay," said the priest.

"I hope," said Mr. Parker, sitting up briskly and speak-

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ing emphatically, "that you will exert your influence, my good sir, in persuading the young man not to delay in obeying his uncle's behest to visit him. It will make a difference, as I told him—not, perhaps, a money difference, but a social one, to the position he will shortly have to take in the world, if he should have received open recognition from the present peer."

His host nodded reflectively.

"It struck me," pursued Mr. Parker, with a smile more crooked than usual, "that Mr. O'Connor is—well, to put it mildly—inclined to be willful."

"He won't be said."

"I beg your pardon?"

"He won't be said," repeated the other loudly. "You have to take him as you find him."

"At least," observed the solicitor with acerbity, "you will recognize that what is perhaps the last request of a dying man should not be callously set aside—unless, indeed," his measured accents took an edge, "in your creed it is regarded as wrong to show anything but hostility to a Protestant."

"You've no call to say that," said Father Blake quietly. And Mr. Parker turned purple as he remembered at whose hearth he sat and how he had been entertained. He was vellum bound, but not brutal.

"I beg your pardon!" he exclaimed, after quite another fashion. "I ought not to have made that remark. Indeed you have proved——"

His host interrupted, waving his hand.

"There, there, that'll do, my dear sir. It's little I have, but you're welcome to it."

Oddly enough, this incident broke the ice between them.

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The priest dropped his rather inimical caution, and said, with great earnestness:—

“I’m entirely of your opinion. It is Shane’s duty to go and see his uncle as soon as possible. Poor man, God help him! It would be a heart of stone that would grudge him any attention now. Let’s see. To-morrow’s Sunday. He’d better get off on Monday. No later than Monday.”

“I would wait for him in Dublin,” said Mr. Parker, with some eagerness. “We could cross over together.”

The priest agreed.

“That would be a good thing, if convenient to yourself. You might introduce him to his uncle. It would be a kindness. It would be less strange for him.”

The other brightened more and more.

“Lord Kilmore is in his town house. I should consider it my duty.”

“It would be a kindness,” repeated the priest.

After that there fell a silence. Mr. Parker had something to say, and was cogitating on the best way to express it. He approached the matter obliquely.

“You think then, Mr.—er—Father Blake”—he was bent on being affable—“that you can induce Mr. O’Conor to leave on Monday.”

“He’ll have to go. He’ll have to go.”

Making a mental note of the dictatorial attitude of the Irish clergy to the laity—not a bit exaggerated, after all—the envoy proceeded with elaborate airiness:—

“Your friend, the doctor, hinted—indeed, I gathered from Mr. O’Conor himself—there is an attachment——” He glanced furtively at the pensive old face opposite; but Father Blake received the suggestion with frankness.

“Ay, indeed, you’re in the right of it. It was only what

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might have been expected: a good girl, a fine girl. She's my own great-niece, sir, and I've known her ever since the day I baptized her. And I've never known anything of her but what was the best."

Mr. Parker's mouth was open upon an expression of disapproval not unmixed with sarcasm, when the old man forestalled him.

"But she's only a farmer's daughter. I've been against it from the first. It stands to reason, Mr. Parker—I'm not blaming them, mind you"—this quickly—"it's myself I'm blaming. It's no kind of marriage for him. I couldn't countenance it. And now that this—this——" He hesitated upon an adjective, and said finally, "this strange news has come, it shows me that I have been right. It makes it altogether out of the question."

The listener drew a breath through his teeth.

"I am delighted to hear you say so. I confess, I was alarmed. As you say, it would be deplorable. A handicap from the very outset."

The priest looked sadly and sternly at his guest.

"There's no need," he responded, "to be discussing the matter any further."

"But, I'm afraid"—Mr. Parker, after all, could not conceal some satire—"that your merely saying so, my good sir, will not altogether dispose of the matter."

"Her father's against it too."

"Indeed!" The visitor was full of surprise.

"He favors another suitor, sir."

"Indeed!"

"He's a hard man, and Shane, poor lad, it's little or no money he has."

Mr. Parker's face considerably darkened. He stared

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at his host. Was it possible that his wits could really be so dense? It was without reflecting on the bearing of his words that he proceeded hastily:—

“I should like to have a little conversation with the father of the young person. I could explain to him how very little likely a young man such as Mr. O’Conor would be to want to come back and marry a farmer’s daughter, once he has seen something of the world. We cannot regard it as an engagement where the paternal consent has been refused.”

The other still looked at him with troubled eyes.

“They’re set on each other, sir. Set on each other. And I wouldn’t like to say”—a flush rose on his wrinkled cheek—“now that I come to think of it, how my nephew Daniel Blake might be regarding the matter now, things being as they are.”

“But I think I could make him see—I am sure Mr. O’Conor—as Lord Kilmore—would be the first, the very first, to recognize any claim——”

“Claim?” interrupted Father Blake. He gripped the wooden arms of his chair with both hands. His eyes forbade another word.

But Mr. Parker was staring at the red turf; he saw nothing.

“Compensation,” he went on, “very generous compensation.”

“Is it money you mean?”

Mr. Parker glanced up with a start, and saw his blunder. The priest’s voice had an echo of Shane’s scornful cry: “Take back your dirty money!” But here to scorn was coupled an intensity of anger which quite distressed the well-meaning solicitor.

“My good sir, I assure you no offense is intended. It’s a mere matter of business. You really must allow me, as a lawyer, to take the business point of view. I never meant to hint, I never for a moment thought of suggesting anything discreditable to the, ah, young lady. But compensation for a disappointment, something substantial towards a comfortable settlement in life. My dear Father Blake, I assure you, as a man of the world, it is done every day.”

“It may be, over there, in England,” said the old man, after a long pause. “But I’ll thank you not to be mentioning such doings in my hearing.”

He hauled himself painfully out of his chair. “You’ll be glad to get to your room, I dare say. Will you ring the bell if there’s anything you want? Good-night to you. I’ll send Mary in to light you up.”

The old priest bowed and hobbled out of the room.

The traveler was accordingly conducted to his bedroom by the housekeeper. Mary was a taciturn old woman in a huge white goffered cap tied under her chin. He had already noted its almost fierce cleanliness which extended to the rest of her garb.

She set the flat candlestick on the painted table, cast two more turves on the already blazing pile, made him a straight dip, and departed—all without a word. She had a large-featured, dark-complexioned, profoundly wrinkled face; and the single glance she vouchsafed him from piercing dark eyes, was inimical.

“With her it’s anathema for the heretic, right enough!” thought Mr. Parker. But though he laughed, he was not amused. Neither did he feel happy in his mind. He resented the set-down which his reverend host had just

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administered. He had, furthermore, the uneasy consciousness of having been put in the wrong and seeming to deserve it. The fault was, of course, in the perversity of the Irish character; its absurd tetchiness; its sickening passion for sentimentality and its obstinate elimination of common sense in common life. It was no wonder that a well-balanced Englishman—Mr. Parker knew that whatever he was, he was well-balanced—should find himself unable to cope with such impracticability.

He glanced round the room, and started a little: he was, after all, destined to sleep under a crucifix, with some superstitious nonsense of a dried twig behind it! It hung over the narrow bed with its spotless honeycombed quilt—the spring-bed proclaimed by Clenane.

He did not have a very good night. He was professionally annoyed by the vexing question of the heir of Kilmore's matrimonial entanglement. No one knows better than a solicitor the complicated disasters which an unequal marriage brings in its train. He was personally annoyed by Shane O'Connor's reception of him. He was even rather annoyed with himself for not having succeeded in impressing this half-civilized community with any sense of his importance. The senior partner of the firm would certainly hold him responsible if he did not manage to bring over the young man in time to see his uncle alive. Yet what could he do? It was evident that the delay till the Monday was inevitable. It was folly. It was obstinacy. He tossed from side to side, and heard the rain beat against the window pane; the surge of the sea and the voice of the wind blending in one terrible roar.

Apparently, in the room next to him, Father Blake had a no more restful night than his guest. For, now

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and again, the creaking of the bed was audible through the partition, always accompanied by a stifled groan and the words, "The Lord have mercy on me!" It all made a more unpleasant impression on Mr. Parker's nerves than he would have admitted, even to himself.

IX

THE CHURCH AND THE LAW

No transformation scene could have presented a more complete contrast than did the Clenane of the Sunday morning to the Clenane of the Saturday night.

Clenane, this day, all bathed in sunshine, with coast and hills exquisitely washed in color; the whitened houses with their shale or thatched roofs, picturesque as though set for a sketch; the little old gray church, square-towered; and the procession of mass-goers, decorous, well-clothed; booted all of them, except the children; types of comfort and respectability unrecognizable as the tattered-demon crew of the day before. A few old women had shawls over their heads; many, like Mrs. Keown, wore the traditional cloaks with the great hoods and statuesque folds that fall to the hem; a more practical and becoming garment, Mr. Parker was forced to admit, than he had ever beheld in rural England. There were girls with skirts of the Connemara red, handsome creatures with dark eyes, that drew the shawl or hood, or yet this scarlet skirt itself over their faces, in Eastern fashion, as they passed the stranger. Small maidens dropped curtseys, looking up with glances, half mischievous, half appealing. The boys pulled at their caps. Mr. Parker could hardly believe that they were the same urchins who had screamed and fought like wild animals along his path the day before.

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He stood within the enclosure of the Presbytery garden, leaning against the wall, watching. He would light a cigar, presently, and stroll down to the sea, since in this benighted spot there was no place of worship for a votary of the reformed Church. The morning air was wonderfully pure and restoring after his abominable night. Meanwhile he thought it might be useful if he were to get a glimpse of the young woman who had the heir of Kilmore in her snares.

A man on a powerful black horse clattered by at a swinging trot. Man and beast seemed in an equal state of lather, thought Mr. Parker, as they drew up before the churchyard gate. A loungee detached himself from the group that filled the porch, and going forward, took charge of the horse and led him away, while the rider, who had hurled himself from the saddle, dashed round towards the rear of the building, cracking his hunting-crop as he went.

The lawyer noted that, conjoined to a blatantly equestrian attire, the newcomer wore a Roman collar; and he rightly concluded that here was some priest from a distance to take the invalid's duty. This latter had long ago hobbled into the chapel, to pray with his people, since he could not officiate. The chapel bell stopped ringing. There was a stir among the knot of men in the porch; they uncovered their heads, turned their faces towards the open door, and pressed one against the other, but, to Mr. Parker's surprise, showed no disposition to enter the sacred building.

It was at this moment he became aware of a figure coming alone down the village street; the figure of a girl. As she advanced he saw that she was tall, held herself

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well, and walked with a free step. Her hair glinted under a wide-brimmed hat. She wore a plain, rather ample gray dress, and carried a prayer-book in her hand.

Mr. Parker was not a man of imagination, but somehow he had not the least doubt of this late worshiper's identity. She went by without noticing him, her lids cast down. He thought, with an ironic smile, of Margaret's first entrance in the Faust tragedy. And, as if to complete the effect, Shane O'Connor leaped from behind the chapel where he had apparently lain in waiting, and joined her just as she reached the gate.

"Quite theatrical!" the solicitor reflected, and wondered with a grim humor whether he himself represented Mephistopheles. But, on the second thought, he was shocked at the ribaldry of his own suggestion. On the contrary, was he not here to preach renunciation, to deprecate folly and induct headstrong youth into the ways of conventionality, with all the energy of his respectable soul?

Unwillingly he conceded they were a handsome couple; more unwillingly still, that there was something beautiful about the smile which lit up both faces, as, very quietly, without even a hand touch, they greeted.

Side by side they advanced towards the chapel. The knot of external worshipers parted as Shane tapped one or two on the shoulder, and formed up again after the pair had walked in. The sound of a voice uplifted in rapid singsong was answered with such a burst of unanimous fervor from the congregation that the listener outside actually started. The men in the porch began to sway against each other, some kneeling, others merely bending, all with every appearance of deep attention.

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As the English visitor strolled away, seaward, he asked himself why on earth they didn't go into the edifice and pray like Christians. There was apparently no lack of room within. He decided that it was an inconsequent and irresponsible community; and he doubted very much if anybody would ever get much good of Mr. Shane O'Connor. Perhaps somewhere, in a certainly unacknowledged corner of his conscience, there was a small, uneasy voice questioning whether to separate the young man from his chosen would be an act altogether conducive to his moral welfare. For it was a sweet, womanly face, as well as a handsome, that the girl had revealed to his prejudiced eye. And the look of love that had passed between the two had been—Mr. Parker coughed and told himself that the fatigues of the day before, combined with want of sleep, were positively affecting his nerves.

He glanced at the steep path that led down to the shore and decided it was scarcely good enough. The sunshine was warm, but there was a confounded feeling of dampness. He turned and started to walk inland, with a contemptuous gaze upon the small reclaimed patches visible here and there in the desolate stone-strewn waste. Poverty, rocks, hovels, and a few leggy, wild-looking groups of colts—a God-forsaken country!

Such was the result of his observations as he found himself once more in Clenane village. The chapel bell was just then breaking into a panting peal: the outside congregation went down as one man, prostrating itself in an attitude that was positively Eastern.

Moira had been nearly late for Mass. On her way out to feed the chickens that morning, her father had met her

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in the yard. He had not yet donned his Sunday coat, but was in the homespun of every-day use. His dark chin, however, shorn to blue smoothness, rested upon the startling whiteness of the high Sunday collar.

He gave his daughter an unwontedly bland smile, and addressed two or three observations to her: on "the grand state of the little calves, glory be to God!" and his conviction that the hens were "strewing the place with eggs this fine morning." And then he remarked, without any apparent relevance, that it was the good girleen she had always been, and he and "herself" had had the great talk about her, last night. And, "arrah, wasn't she always his favoryite? Wouldn't he twiced as soon have her than ayther of the boys? And any good luck that came her way, wouldn't they be thanking God for it, it being only what she deserved?"

Moira fixed him with eyes growing wider and filling with a kind of fear. He went on:—

"Any opposition I thought it my duty to make to Shane O'Connor's suit, I here withdraw it." He waved his hand loftily. "Ye have my parintal blessing, both of yez." He dropped his pompous tone to add severely: "Look here, acushla, don't let that English fellow be snapping your fine boy away from under your nose. Keep a good hould of him now that you've got him; for onst they get him over there in England, the Lord only knows——"

The fear that had been dawning, was suddenly full grown in Moira's gaze. Tears welled. "Oh, poor Da!" she said, and looked at him as if she were contemplating some unexpectedly revealed hurt. But Mr. Blake's small

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green eyes were looking anywhere but at his daughter's face:—

“Keep a good hould of him, my girl,” he repeated.

The pitifulness passed from Moira's countenance, chased by a rush of angry blood.

“If it was to be that way with him,” she said, “I wouldn't lift me little finger. I wouldn't do that!” She shifted her pan of meal from the right hand to the left and held a shapely digit under her father's gaze. “I wouldn't lift it that far to call him back.”

“Then ye'll never be Lady Kilmore, I can tell you,” cried he, shooting out his chin, with an exasperated roar. She made him no answer, but walked away; whereat he called after her still more loudly, still more furiously: “But I'll see that you are. I'll have no young fellow, be he forty times a lord, playing fast and loose with a girl of mine!”

When Mrs. Blake came down, robed for Mass, in all the glories of purple silk gown, black satin dolman and bonnet adorned with grapes, she was scandalized to find her daughter still in her morning cotton, staring out of the kitchen window as if it hadn't been Sunday at all.

“Glory be to God, Moira, the bell will start ringing this minute, and you the way you are!”

“I'm not going to walk to Mass with the Da,” said Moira. She turned a defiant countenance upon her mother. This latter was so completely taken aback that she could only gasp:—

“Not going to Mass!”

“Not with the Da.” The soft curves of the girl's countenance set into obstinate lines. “He'd be—he'd be

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going on and disgracing me with every one we meet. I'd be ashamed of my life!"

"What, in the name of God——"

"I'm ashamed as it is," said Moira. Her breast heaved with a sob. "I'll follow after. There's the bell."

She flew out of the kitchen and up the stairs, even as her father marched forth, creaking in his best boots, from the ground-floor bedchamber.

"I don't know what's come to the girls nowadays at all," said Mrs. Blake astutely, as her spouse sent a questioning look round the room. "There's Moira only just in from the chickens, and the bell going. She'll have to folly after, I told her. Musha, hurry, Blake, or it's late we'll be! The boys have gone on this long while."

"Moira'll have to mind herself," said Mr. Blake gloomily, "and so I told her. You ought to have seen that she was ready, woman, since the whole of Clenane will have their eyes on her to-day and she as good as Lady Kilmore this minute."

"And if you don't hurry, Da," said Mrs. Blake, "everybody will be in the chapel and instead of walking dignified, to your bench, you that's more than ever now the chief member of the congregaton—and you know you are, Mr. Blake—it's shoving and pushing you'll be, like one of them poor coyles that's been squeezing his feet into his Sunday boots behind the sacristy door, after his five mile barefoot across the hills."

The farmer had already stalked on. The wife of his bosom certainly knew how to manage him. But though she drew a breath of relief to think that she had warded off a family storm, her kindly face remained perturbed, as she pattered after, genteelly holding up her flowing silk

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skirts so as to display kid boots with patent leather toe-caps and elastic sides.

Moira presently came along in her gray gown and the wide straw hat. She had been a prey to agitations strange indeed for her; angry with her father and with herself for being angry. She had been thinking as she walked: "If I had the whole of the tossing sea in my breast I couldn't be more uneasy."

It was not that she doubted Shane. It was not that she believed that, over there in England, he wouldn't be thinking every moment of her as she of him. True, last night, when he had told her how it was that he must go, she had felt, with unerring instinct, that his spirit leaped to the adventure, even though it meant leaving her. But he had told her also sweet, unforgettable things: how she would always be the first, the only one; the girl for him, the girl he meant to marry. "If we were parted twenty years, it would make no difference to me," he had assured her. "Whatever I find over there, whatever I do, nothing will ever touch my love of you. My roots are in Clenane, with you, and I'd come back and marry you in the end, if it was from the throne of England itself."

She believed him. But the shadow of the coming separation was over her tender spirit. Besides this, from the moment she had heard the news, there had been an intangible dread hovering in the background of her thoughts. Her father's words had suddenly given it shape. If that was the way people were going to look at things; if it was a question of holding him to a word pledged in very different circumstances, where did her duty lie? Yes, even though he wanted to fulfill every vow, might not the finger of conscience still point inex-

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orably to the lonely road of renunciation? "If I had only some one to advise me!" she thought. Remembering Father Blake, her heart sank still lower: "An unequal match!" If he had said that then, what would he say now?

But that Shane should have waited for her, outside the chapel, the mere sight of his smile, the sound of his voice, were sufficient to produce an instant appeasement. She went, with a sort of meek pride, by his side, into the crowded chapel—proud of him, meek in herself. All who looked on her saw her crowned with this double loveliness. In the poor village there was not one envious thought towards her, though many had muttered, "Set him up!" at the sight of Farmer Blake's almost heraldic air.

Yet, as Moira prayed, her torment began again. The more fervently she prayed, the more the call to sacrifice seemed urged upon her. She wanted to do right, to do what was best for her lover, no matter what it cost her. But she could not bring herself to the cruel decision that would separate them. If it had to be done, it must be by some one else's strength. So, after all, with tears driven back upon her heart, she resolved to let Father Blake decide. "I'll have a word with him after Mass," she thought, "and he'll tell me what to do, how to do it. And anyhow he'll speak holy things to me."

So, while Shane was seized upon by him who now hoped so aspiringly to be his father-in-law, she slipped away to the priest's house, and waited in the parlor for his return. Her face was flaming: for her father had been very blatantly affectionate and appropriating and she

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had caught sight of the strange gentleman watching from the other side of the churchyard wall, and smiling all on the one side of his face.

“Father, it will break my heart out and out. But if you say I must do it, I will. I’ll give him up—if it would be the best for him, I mean.”

Moira’s pulses almost stopped beating, when, having made her artless plaint, she waited for Father Blake to speak.

It seemed to her an interminable time before the old man replied: his eyes were fixing her, pale, luminous, tragic, out of their cavernous setting. His mouth worked without speech. At last he said:—

“Look at here, child. I have taken counsel on this with Him who always knows what is good for us. And it’s come to me this way: you’ve got to let Shane go free over to England. Wait a bit—I mean he’s got to feel he’s not bound, nor you either. Now, wait a bit, child! Ye see yerself it’s only right, things being so changed, that he should test himself. That’s what I’m saying: test himself before taking the irrevocable step. But if, after a while——”

“Oh, father; oh, father——!”

“Well, well, hold up, child, say, a year. If he comes back to you in a year—maybe he’ll come before—but it would be right to wait a year—why, then, in the name of God, I’ll not let any one have the marrying of yez but meself.”

The tragedy had gone out of his gaze; and there was a tremulous smile, not very far from tears on his lips.

“God bless you, father!” cried Moira fervently. She

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was all radiance, though with her, too, it was a radiance blended of smiles and tears.

An eminently sober Clancy, in a borrowed Sunday collar nearly as tall as Dan Blake's, picked up Mr. Parker at the door of the priest's house on the stroke of two, and drove away with him along the Galway road. A Sunday somnolence was over the little village; and only Mrs. Dooley from the threshold of her house of entertainment watched the departure.

"Me brave Tomsey Clancy!" she remarked to her potman, with a fat chuckle, "looking as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, and him the scandal of the world, last night!"

Mr. Parker sat, wrapped in his rug, more intent on maintaining his balance on this singularly ill-invented vehicle, than on watching the shifting loveliness of the scenery. When Clancy suddenly drew up with a clatter of protesting hoofs the traveler nevertheless was very nearly shot on his head, and only saved himself by a desperate clutch.

"What the devil——!" he began. He did not often swear; it was a sign of great emotion.

Clancy, who sat on the other side of the car, equalizing the weight, turned an unperturbed countenance and pointed with the butt of his whip:—"It's Mr. Shane."

"What?" Mr. Parker had never felt more surprised. The young man who had been standing at a crossing of roads, came up to him. He had a frieze coat flung over his arm, and was carrying a small battered portmanteau. He looked darkly up at the solicitor.

"Since I've got to go, I thought I'd drive to Galway

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Town with you. It'll save trouble in the end. We can take the Dublin mail together to-morrow. Since I've got to go," he repeated, his frown deepening. Without waiting for a reply, he threw his portmanteau into the well of the car, beside Mr. Parker's superlative leather case, and began to struggle into his coat, exclaiming as he did so: "Down out of that, Clancy, and up on the box with you!"

The change was effected, and the car had already started again, with its new passenger, before Mr. Parker was able to place a word.

"This is a very sudden idea of yours, isn't it, Mr. O'Connor?" he remarked, gingerly turning his head so as to catch sight of the young sullen profile.

"Wasn't it what you wanted me to do?"

The tone matched the expression on the face. It came to Mr. Parker that he had only seen Shane O'Connor smile once, and that was at the meeting with Moira Blake. It was this memory, perhaps, that made him exclaim, hurriedly and politely:—

"Oh, certainly, certainly. I'm delighted. It's extremely sensible of you—much the best thing!"

Shane shifted perilously round and gazed full at the solicitor.

"The sooner I go, the sooner I come back. That's the way I look at it."

"Glory be to God, Mither O'Connor," put in Clancy, whisking round in his turn and flourishing his whip, "there isn't one of us that would doubt you! And you promised to the flower of the barony!"

"Look where you're driving," advised Shane, without unbending. Then he once more addressed his fellow trav-

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eler, and observed: "I was not going to have them keening and crying about me, and shouting good-bys when there's no call for it."

"Thru for you," interjected the irrepressible jarvey.

"And Moira—the girl I mean to marry"—Shane's voice was as hard and sharp as a knife blade,—"is entirely of my opinion."

"Put that in your pipe," murmured Clancy to the mare's tail.

Mr. Parker made no reply. He had succeeded in his errand beyond what he could have hoped yesterday. And for the rest—his wry smile was lost upon a colt that stared at him white-faced over the interminable stone wall, but it certainly expressed skepticism anent the durability of the softer emotions of youth brought into contact with a beguiling world.

Moira and Shane had parted in their own place on the rocks. He had been so buoyant; he had waived away with such wholehearted scorn her attempt to carry out Father Blake's instructions and set him free, that for the moment she had felt comforted even though it was good-by.

But when the gallant figure disappeared round the bend of the path, she had to admit to herself: "It's the light of my eyes that's gone from me!" Leprechaun, lying submissively at her feet, as Shane had ordered him, looked up at her with an agony of question in his gaze and faintly moaned.

"It won't be for long," she said to the dog, repeating his master's last words, and braced herself morally and physically to courage. "If Mammie would spare me, I'd

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go back to the convent and get educated for him. I'd ask for the extras, French and the piano."

Her confidence grew with the guileless plan. There was a great weight off her conscience, since she had met it so squarely and discharged herself of her obligation, only to be lovingly laughed at for her pains.

When she came in sight of the widow M'Gaw's barnacle-dwelling, the old woman was sitting on her doorstep as usual, her head bent on her knees, looking more like a bundle of sea-weed than anything human. Moira went up to her. She would fain have avoided conversation just then, but it was not in her to pass the desolate without at least the alms of a kindly word.

The hag lifted her head and shot a strange glance at her through those dim eyes, which were somehow so uncannily clear-sighted.

"I seen him go by," she remarked, without answering Moira's greeting, "and him running and not a word for poor, old, decent, respectable Biddy! He'd the mark of travel on his brow. And it's far he's going—far he's going—far, far, he's traveling from Clenane and you! Glory be to God, them's terrible roads his steps is bent for! Will he ever turn back? Pray for him, alanna!"

Moira's heart sank like a stone. She told herself it was unreasonable to pay attention to such a poor old crazy creature as Biddy; nevertheless the specter of ultimate loss, which she had thought laid, rose up again, and that with more substance than before.

The gleam went out of the crone's eyes; she stretched her claw with the professional whine: "Haven't you got a penny about you? I'm out of 'baccy this long time, me darlin' girl."

X

THE DEATH-BED

“WHAT do you think of him?” Lord Kilmore hardly touched Mr. Parker’s hand; did not reply at all to the respectful, tactfully low-voiced inquiry: “I trust I find you better, my lord.” He made an impatient gesture towards the chair placed in readiness at the foot of the bed; and, propping himself on his elbow, flung the question again: “What do you think of him?”

The hospital nurse had just closed the door of the dressing-room upon herself with conscious discretion. Mr. Parker, as he sat down, glanced round as if to make sure he was alone with the sick man; not that he cared in the least, but to gain time. Lord Kilmore looked dreadfully ill, he thought; certainly the eyes that were fixed upon him were fierce with an unnatural light. It was quite clear that here was one who ought to be spared all possible emotion—especially that of anger. Yet how was this to be done? What to say?

“Well, my lord,” he ventured at last, ineptly, “you’ll soon see for yourself.”

“Do you think I sent for you first to come here and tell me this? Good God, man, I haven’t much breath to spare. What’s he like? Out with it!”

Mr. Parker plunged:

“He’s a regular O’Conor. ‘A—a very handsome young fellow. He is indeed”—he glanced at the face on the

pillow, ghastly as it was, and was struck—" 'pon my word, he's more like your lordship than——" He broke off. Horror, he had been about to say: "your own sons!" To cover the unpardonable blunder, he drew a whistling breath and proceeded: "than I should have thought possible. A fine, handsome fellow."

"You've said that before. Come, come, Parker, you know what I want to hear. What's the creature like? How has he grown up? A savage or a clod, which?"

"Oh, not a clod, certainly!"

"Ha, a savage. Savage it is. Eats with his knife, I suppose. A brogue as long as your arm. Well, it is only what must be expected, brought up by an Irish priest."

The twist of the mouth, the flash of the hollow eye, were as scorn incarnate. Mr. Parker made a sympathetic grimace.

"On that score, I am afraid——"

"What? Steeped in holy water? A superstitious savage! Nice look out. What else? Come, how old is he? Twenty-three, isn't it? He's not married into the next pig-stye yet——" He broke off, his eye pinning the unhappy solicitor. "What—what? Don't tell me the villain's married!"

"No, no"—Mr. Parker stammered in his eagerness. "Only engaged."

As he spoke, he became aware that the dressing-room door had been reopened and that the nurse was advancing into the room.

"Now, now, now," she said, as if speaking to a child, "I cannot allow visitors, Lord Kilmore, if you excite yourself."

THE DEATH-BED

Her patient shifted himself on his pillows; and, as she afterwards expressed it to the night-nurse, "positively gnashed his teeth at her."

"Get me a glass of port. And you, Parker, go down and send up"—his livid face worked with a spasm—"send up my heir!"

The nurse looked at the solicitor; nodded and moved away noiselessly to fulfill the behest of the sick man who had fallen back, panting and exhausted on his pillows. She brought him the wine. It was strictly against doctor's orders, but nothing mattered now: he was already so far beyond the help of human wisdom.

Shane halted just within the door, and stood, every nerve on the alert. Mr. Parker had not, as has been said, a lively imagination; but as he looked at him he was reminded of some untamed animal: a stag at gaze, or a wild stot, sniffing danger and doubt.

The gaunt hand from the bed beckoned:—

"Don't stand there. Come near me, you!" The weak voice was imperious. "Leave us, nurse. And you too, Parker."

Shane walked slowly up to the bed. The vast, dark splendor about him, the thickness which muffled his tread, the regulated stateliness which pervaded the mansion and which had laid hold of him from its very doorstep; above all, the brooding sense of tragedy culminating in what even his inexperience perceived to be a death chamber—all these things were as a spell upon his spirit.

His uncle devoured him with a burning gaze; and again the spasm twisted his face. Shane thought it was pain, and rolled an anxious eye. What was he to do if the

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poor man were "to die on him"? It was pain indeed that convulsed Lord Kilmore's countenance, and to the death. But the end was not yet.

"Sit down," he said harshly.

Parker was right, his sons had been less of O'Conors in their fair, square comeliness than this savage from the west. The father whose heart was broken ran an appraising eye up and down the splendid figure which even the coarse, ill-cut clothes, the clumping boots, could not disguise. And he was envious for the dead! His accents had still a more grudging harshness as he said, after a pause:—

"So you've got it all—or rather, you will have it all—very soon!" He laughed. "Good God, what a story! You won't know what to do with it. It's not my fault, you know, that you have not been brought up a gentleman."

It was a thrust straight at the breast. Shane jerked up his head. His uncle was an old blackguard, of that he was certain, but he liked straight dealing, and he suddenly felt they were of one blood.

"Gentleman? A renegade, you mean."

Blue eyes blazed into blue eyes. Had any one been there to see it, the likeness between the two faces—the young face instinct with life, the old one marked by death—would have been startling.

"Do you bandy words with me?" The menace in Lord Kilmore's air was sinister, coming as it did from a dying man.

"Mustn't I answer you, then?"

"Look here," Lord Kilmore again propped himself up on his elbow, "you are not here to answer me, you are here

THE DEATH-BED

to listen. I shall not be able to talk to any one very long. There's no one I want to talk to, except you, and I've saved myself for it."

Shane's gaze questioned. It was not a sympathetic, but a darkling attentiveness.

"Understand me—what is your name?—Shane. Absurd Irish nonsense. Understand me. For you, as you are, I don't care a hang. I don't care what you do with yourself, or what you make of your life. But as my heir, as the man who takes the place my son would have had in the world, for you as Kilmore, I do care. I don't know why I should," he went on a little wildly, rolling his head from side to side on the pillow, "it's instinct, atavism—it's—no matter what it's called—I do care. I can't die with any kind of peace—— Peace? rubbish! I can't die with any kind of stoicism for thinking of the mess you are going to make of things."

There were many words Shane did not understand in this speech, but though he was inclined to think the sick man was wandering, some of them touched him nearly. He felt himself common enough, inappropriate enough, God knew, in this house of grandeur. One look at the bloodless hand on the purple silk counterpane and at his own brown, toil-worn fingers, was sufficient to measure the gulf between them. He parted his lips for speech, but could find no phrase to fit his thought. His thought, indeed, was itself confused. He was humiliated, and yet afire with pride. The jeering, bitter voice from the bed went on:—

"A man's last words are supposed to carry some weight. Listen to mine. I am the only near relation you have in the world, and I am going to die. There is one thing

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I've got to say to you: cut yourself off from the whole thing, and start afresh."

The young man's intent face whitened.

"And what do you mean by the whole thing, if I may ask?"

"I mean Clenane—that's what it's called, isn't it?—that miserable Irish village of yours. Clenane and the rebel, Fenian lot, priests and all—and the farm boys, your associates, and the farm girl your——" He paused, and with a sneer, dropped the word: "your fiancée."

Shane jumped to his feet.

"My fancy?—is that what you say? I'll not hear such a name from any man's lips for the girl I love. Take this from me—and take it to the Judgment Seat, and maybe it'll help you there—if you were to rise out of the grave at me, you'd not turn my heart from Clenane. No, nor from my faith, nor my friends, nor"—his voice took a sudden lowered note of music—"nor from her I mean to make my wife."

He swung on his heel and flung himself out of the room; nearly knocking over Mr. Parker, who stood in anxious watch just outside the door.

"Give me the rest of the glass of wine," said Lord Kilmore to the nurse, who had once again hurried in at the sound of raised voices.

He lay, shrunken in his pillows as if all vital essence had suddenly left him. After a gulp he pushed the glass away.

"A devil!—a young devil!" he muttered. Then: "Pity," he said to himself—"there is stuff there. What's that you say, nurse? Yes, send Parker in, I can still cut him out of something."

BOOK II

My soul hath been delivered as a sparrow out of the net of the fowlers; the snare is broken and we are delivered.

—PSALMS

I

THE EYES IN THE PORTRAIT

“WHO would think of finding you here!”

Young Lord Kilmore started and turned sharply, to face the one man in the whole of London with whom it might be said, he was intimate.

“And why shouldn’t I be here, as well as another?”

It is the Irish way to answer question by question: and Shane had remained Irish in thought, speech, and feeling. Nevertheless, he was singularly altered since the day when, some sixteen months ago, he had stood by his uncle’s death-bed. He had learned very quickly, for he was alert of wit, how to wear the clothes of a gentleman, how to speak like a gentleman—approximately, for the Hibernian intonation was ineradicable on his tongue; how to walk in the street, and comport himself in the house, after gentlemanly conventions.

As he now stood in the square room of the Royal Academy, there was little to differentiate him from the other smart society youths who sauntered about in attendance upon pretty women, save a certain air of shy aloofness; a fine carriage of head and shoulders, more vigorous movements and less ready speech.

The silk hat, of latest pattern, was set at a slightly rakish angle on the close-cropped black head. The clean-shaven, fine-featured face beneath had lost its tan and grown harder of expression, intangibly matured. Shane

had learned to carry gloves, though he never could endure to wear them. He held them now, between fingers that were still brown, with a catalogue presented to him at the door, and a fine gold-mounted malacca cane. He had a fancy for a good stick and he could indulge his fancies.

"Why shouldn't I be at a private view as well as yourself?" he said, and there was a hint of offense in his voice.

The other laughed. He knew Kilmore to be a queer-tempered fellow.

"Why shouldn't you, indeed?"

The speaker was a fair young man of slight build and medium height, dwarfed now by his friend's inches. He had the complexion of a girl, appeared strangely young, though he was four years older than Kilmore, and had a gentle innocence of manner, a soft speech, that covered an amazing amount of impertinence. Valentine Blythe could say the most audacious thing in a dovelike tone, and blush thereafter engagingly. He was the first favorite with many dowagers; and "that nice young Mr. Blythe" was invited to houses where middle-Victorian principles prevailed—they still existed in "nineteen-fourteen." But he was yet more in demand in rapid bachelor circles. Val Blythe could keep a club dinner table, or a worn-out supper party amused, where the finest intellect would have failed. He had a whole series of imitations of different great hostesses and distinguished old gentlemen, which afforded high diversion. Nothing, and nobody, was sacred to him; and, in a society which had no ideal beyond amusement, he was easily *persona grata*.

Why he should have attached himself to Lord Kilmore might, at first sight, have seemed inexplicable. But the reasons were, after all, fairly obvious. The young savage

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who had so romantically inherited wealth and position was a new sensation, and was, moreover, excellent "copy."

Mr. Blythe's imitation of Lord Kilmore on his first introduction to a celebrated tailor, was a priceless item in his repertory.

He had instituted himself bear-leader; and had found Shane both interesting and attractive. There was almost affection and a certain pride of achievement in the glance with which his prominent pale green eye now ran him up and down.

"Why shouldn't you?" he repeated. "You are a good deal more worth looking at than those daubs. If there's nothing here likely to appeal to you, you appeal uncommonly to the crowd."

"I have found something that appeals to me."

Shane spoke slowly. And, as he spoke, he turned on his heel and planted himself once more firmly before the picture he had been contemplating when he was accosted. Blythe's eyes wandered in the same direction.

"I say," he exclaimed and bent forward to examine closer. "Who's done it? Jolly clever," he went on. Then, stepping back to get another angle, he nearly knocked over a spreading Jewess in cinnamon satin and apologized airily as in parenthesis: "Beg pardon, I'm sure!" to inquire again, "I say, Kil, who is it by?"

"I don't care who it's by," said Kilmore. He still spoke in a pondering tone; and the fashionable crowd swayed about him, whisperingly, even audibly commenting upon him, for it was true he excited a great deal of attention, without his being in the least aware of it. "I want to know, who is it?"

"Why, my good lad, haven't you got your catalogue?"

It's Lady Hobson, of course." His voice dropped to rather sickly sentimentality. "Dear Venetia!" he murmured.

"Lady Hobson. Who is she?"

"Dear boy, just let me see first who's the fellow that's done her. If it's not Lavery, it's one of the newer ones. The cleverest thing, upon my word!" He drew the catalogue from Shane's fingers. "Excuse me, old Lady Mauleverer's clawed minc."

"Who is Lady Hobson?"

Shane repeated his question with the same level, determined accents as before. He very seldom spoke to his new friends with the old impulsiveness; that was part of the change in him. His companion raised his eyes from the pages he was turning over with an odd, quizzical look. "'Who is Sylvia, what is she?'" he quoted. Then, seeing Shane's frown, he added, speaking very quickly with his mellifluous insolence: "Lady Hobson is the wife of Sir Timothy Hobson, at present. She's a dear. I'm awfully fond of her."

"You know her!" The words came with a spurt of the old eagerness.

Valentine broke off short to survey Shane, pondering. The color raced across his fair face, but his eyes were full of calculation.

"Certainly, I know her, as I think my remarks imply. But, I suppose, dear boy, you really mean to convey to me a desire to share the privilege."

Shane crimsoned in his turn. But unlike Valentine's purely physical change of color, his blush sprang from a real emotion.

"Do you mean you'll introduce me?"

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“Och, sure, I’ll introduce you!” Valentine mimicked the brogue; then, meeting a steel-blue flash from young Kilmore’s eye, he slipped his hand affectionately through his arm. “As a matter of fact, Kil, I was just thinking there was nothing in the world could be so good for you as the friendship of a woman—a married woman. Now, Venetia—how she could ever have linked that sweet name of hers with such a dreadfully sounding one as Hobson! Ah, Kil, money, money! It rang gold, once!—Never mind. Venetia is the woman for you. I feel, my dear fellow, that your social education demands that finish which only a feminine touch can give. You like me to be frank: the touch of Venetia’s delicate hands—the artist has not flattered them, they are just as exquisite. I always said if a soul had hands they would be like Venetia’s. Devilish clever! Just one moment, Kilmore, I must see the name. Ah, *un des jeunes!* I thought as much. A bit of a genius. Best thing he’s done yet. Look at it, Kil!”

Shane did not require the injunction. He was contemplating the portrait with intentness, and with equal intentness listening to the easy patter of his companion.

He had come to the private view merely to fill an empty hour. There was a great deal of emptiness in his life just now; the old interests were cast out, the new ones did not fill the void. His attention had been caught, Irishman that he was, by the green of the scarf which vividly draped the figure of the picture; and, drawing closer, he was caught by something very different.

Grace, poetry, pathos were embodied in a woman’s loveliness before him. The artist who had painted this portrait was, as Mr. Blythe had said, “a bit of a genius.” Besides genius, he had the cleverest audacities. The

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ethereal frailty of the figure, the slightly drooping head on the long throat, the narrow, pale face, were limned with a most exquisite delicacy against a background of dead white. The eyes, looking up, with a gaze of sad appeal, seemed to hold all the color of her countenance, in their strange violet. One hand fashioned—as Valentine had not inaptly implied—with a kind of spirit beauty, held together against her breast the folds of the green scarf upon which the painter had lavished all the emerald fires of his palette. Just at the opening under the throat was visible the sheen of pearls, pearls of unusual size.

The whole presentment subtly gave the impression of a being too frail for a rough world. One could have sworn that the slender figure shrank from those rich wrappings, but that it had to protect itself from some invisible airs for fear of being blown away. The hand had a movement as if to conceal the splendor of the jewels some blundering generosity had cast about a form which nothing grosser than a flower should have adorned. The lips were parted as upon a smile that quivered into a sigh. And the eyes appealed, appealed!

Shane had never seen, had never dreamed of, such a creature in this mortal sphere.

“What ails her?” he asked himself. “What is it she wants?”

The eyes he was gazing into were looking straight back at him. They cried to him: “Help me!” . . . And here was his friend, Val Blythe, offering to take him to her.

“When will you do it?” he asked abruptly.

“Do what?”

“Bring me to Lady—what is her name?”

“To Venetia?” put in Mr. Blythe impishly.

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"Venetia," said Shane slowly. Then once again he darkly flushed. The name had a mysterious charm, which filled the vision. It was unknown to his tongue, and because of that the more stirred him. But he seemed to himself to be taking a liberty. "I couldn't be calling her that way," he said in grave rebuke. "I haven't the right. Nor perhaps you either," he added, with a glint of anger.

"Lady Hobson, then—Hobson," Blythe laughed. "Rub it into your memory. I call that the insult to her. You're in something of a hurry, aren't you, Kil? Regularly bowled over! I'd bring you to see her this moment, with all the pleasure in life, only she happens to be on the west coast of Scotland."

The eager light in Shane's face went out. A blank disappointment swept over him. Again his bear-leader laughed.

"My dear Kil, you're as good as a play! The west coast is not an inaccessible spot. And I'm—by Jove, I really think I am the most good-natured fellow in the world. Come, dear boy, we're stopping the traffic; and old Lady Mauleverer has got her parrot eye on me. Let us trot to the drawings and plans, it's always pretty empty, and there we can talk quietly over ways and means."

Shane gave a last look at the fugitive figure, and obeyed the pressure of Valentine's hand on his elbow. When they reached the room devoted to the less popular display, where indeed only a few thin groups were sauntering, Mr. Blythe drew his companion down upon a settee and exclaimed:—

"Now, unburden your soul."

Shane gave him that glance, half fierce, half shy, like

a wild thing on the spring, which had struck Mr. Parker in the late lord's death chamber. Valentine was pretty well accustomed to the expression. It amused him to arouse it; but he always recognized the warning.

"I only mean, I'm ready to be of use," he said meekly, looking down at his immaculate boots.

"Do you really mean that?"

"Rather!"

This was a word that had once puzzled the peasant-bred youth. He knew what it meant now. Placated, he exclaimed:—

"Thank you, Val. It's the real good friend you are. I know that. Ah, don't be teasing me, man! That picture has—the sight of the face there——" He choked, and went on doggedly: "Faith and there's something that I've seen in the portrait of Lady Hobson—have I got it right?—Lady Hobson, that makes me want to know her, more than I've ever wanted anything since I came to England. Now, you're thinking I'm the most extraordinary fellow——"

"Not at all, not at all." Valentine's tone was soothing, but his eyes danced. "The most ordinary thing in the world, dear boy. We've all got to go through it. But you're young, you see, and untried. And Venetia must seem rather a revelation after that place of yours, Clenane—or whatever its name is."

A stillness came over Shane. He sat rigid, his mouth parted upon the words that Blythe's last phrase had frozen on it. Untried, was he? The image of Moira rose before him, with eyes of mournful tenderness, of brooding love. Moira, tall and strong and brave, with the toil-worn hand and the sunburnt cheek; with her print

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gown, her spotless apron, sweet of the lavender. Moira and Clenane, the old simple things that had been his all; that had filled his life; and that had fallen away from him! He could not hear them dismissed in this light contempt without wincing. His heart swelled. Almost the great voice of the sea was in his ears, and the tang of the salt airs in his nostrils.

Valentine watched him sideways under his eyelashes. Never was there any one that kept close counsel like Shane. Those who were now his constant associates knew nothing of the years of his early youth, save what all the world knew, and what was unmistakably to be inferred from his rustic simplicities: that he had been brought up among peasants. Yet little was there about Shane of the conventional Irish peasant; and those who were familiar with Irish folk were surprised at his quickness, his swift certainty of gesture and speech; the air with which he held his head, the fashion in which he set his swinging steps. While they laughed at a hundred blunders, at turns of mind and words that placed him suddenly apart from his company, he was something so vastly different from the clod or the "bounder" they expected, that his presence began to be courted as that of a celebrity.

He had been invited to exclusive country house parties; and those who had seen him ride and shoot welcomed him as a sportsman. "Gad, he's a flyer," was the verdict of youths with a kindred taste, while an elderly politician of distinguished birth and fine culture had set the hall mark of his rare approval upon him, by declaring that he for one would ask for nothing better than to sit and watch young Kilmore: the Greek ideal reincarnated.

Added to which he, the catch of the season, was as

shy of women's society as a cloistered monk. It was small wonder that Valentine Blythe should feel puzzled as he now surreptitiously scanned his face. Just one moment before he had been making merry in his sophisticated soul over the small psychological drama unexpectedly unfolded before him: Love at first sight—and that, at sight of a picture. Shane Kilmore, the Wild Boy of the West, and Venetia—it was really too funny! But how *apropos*, how perfect, how indispensable!

He had expressed his sincerest conviction, when he had declared that his own work of education had come to a standstill; that Shane now needed a woman's touch, and that he could not fall into better hands than those of Venetia. Dear, delicate, subtle Venetia—and Shane—*ce garçon tout neuf!* Val Blythe often expressed his thoughts in up-to-date French.

Here was amusement afoot for the onlooker! Indeed, Valentine would be more than that, he would be the instrument. He had been promising himself not to miss a single shade of the comedy, when the expression of Shane's face bade him pause. He was himself a youth of intuition.

"Confound it," he mused, "the fellow's thinking of an old love—and I who believed him virgin soil!" The new idea produced a sense of irritation. Here had he been spending his best energies for months on the barbarian! There was actual tragedy in Shane's set features. Just the kind of fool to take this sort of thing tragically; to destroy the most delightful possibilities that had ever opened before any human being by some inconvenient twist of conscience; to let himself be dragged down to the depths of one of his own bogs by the clasp of a woman he was no longer in love with.

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“Of course,” he said aloud, with an exaggeration of his usual flippancy, “I’m only jesting. You are such a solemn fellow, Kil; you quite belie your Irish reputation, unless, indeed”—the inconvenient color rushed into Valentine’s countenance—“you were making the joke—pulling my leg, as people say over here. I’m sure I don’t want to tear off to the Scottish coast. It’s a beastly climate. Scotland’s not warm through till the end of August. And I hate fishing. I loathe country houses.”

Shane turned upon his friend a gaze that justified the accusation of solemnity.

“And why, in the name of God, should you go up there, if you don’t want to?”

“To take you—ingrate!”

“Me?”

“Even thee. We are pretty lax in society now, and all that; but we haven’t quite come to the point of walking into a man’s house just because we admire the portrait of his wife.”

“Will you speak plain, for once, and tell me what you’re driving at?”

“Speak plain yourself, Kil. Do you want to know Venetia?”

“I do.”

Shane gave the asseveration after the Irish mode. And Valentine Blythe laughed out loud.

“You’ve said that as if it was the marriage service. You’re not pulling my leg, then?”

Shane sprang to his feet.

“I am not,” he cried violently. “You’re—you’re like the flies about the horses.”

“Steady, steady!” The bear-leader got up in his turn.

"Kil, I'm the incarnation of friendship. Here am I, ready to sacrifice myself, cut the best days of the season and take you to Creewater. I think it had better be Whitsuntide. It sounds more natural to propose ourselves for Whitsuntide, don't you think? Of course, you know nothing about such things, dear boy. But you will soon."

"I wouldn't like to be thrusting myself——" began Shane slowly.

"Thrusting yourself? Pooh! nonsense! Venetia will say no, quick enough, if she doesn't want us. But she'll be delighted. Oh, yes, bless my soul!" Blythe was seized with an inner chuckle over some point of humor that he enjoyed all the more because it was so completely lost on the innocence of his companion. "She'll just love to have you. It's awfully dull for her up there, poor girl. Frightfully hard lines that Tim should be up a tree, when, really, the only thing that justified his existence as a husband for her was—well, the setting. I'll tell her to tell him what a sportsman you are. You can kill a salmon, I suppose."

"Is it kill a salmon?"

The saturnine gravity of Lord Kilmore's countenance was broken up with glints of mirth.

"I've no doubt," cried Blythe peevishly, "that there isn't any horrid, barbarous amusement you're not proficient in. Personally all my sympathies are with the fox and the salmon. But you'll go down with Tiny Tim, right enough."

"Tiny Tim?"

Valentine was again moved by his private pleasantry.

"Sir Timothy Hobson's nickname, to be precise. You'll see its appropriateness when you meet. I'll write, then,

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and suggest that we should visit Creewater—that's the name of Hobson's place up there on the coast. You have guessed that. Bright boy! as they say in America. Oh, I'll write one of my graceful letters—you may have noted that I have a choice style—and I'll say: I'm longing to be out of the racket, and the dust, and the heat, and the emptiness, and all that. And will dear Venetia give me a few days of the lovely peace and serenity of her surroundings, and all that. And may I bring my friend, Lord Kilmore, to whom I would really like to show what a country house can be under the ideal hostess, and all that. And what an Admirable Crichton my friend Kilmore is in everything connected with sport, and all that. And she'll write back how awfully pleased she and Sir Timothy will be to see us up there, and all that. Whitsuntide. Can you wait four weeks?"

He planted himself before his friend, a veritable Puck of mischief peeping from every line of his quivering face. The other had gone back to gravity.

"I can."

"The letter shall go this very night. I say, whither away?"

Kilmore made no answer, save by a valedictory wave of the hand. There was something peremptory in the gesture: it bade Blythe not follow.

"If I don't take care," thought that young man, gazing after the retreating figure, with no very pleasant expression, "my barbarian will be getting too tall for his boots. 'Pon honor, there's a lot of the old lord in him, and a precious disagreeable lot it is. Well, Venetia will tame him."

When Mr. Valentine Blythe passed through the great

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room, about five minutes later, he saw Shane standing before the portrait of the lady with the green scarf, his hands behind him, rooted in contemplation, even as he had found him. He wagged his head and passed deliberately between the picture and his friend, without Shane being aware of the circumstance.

The gilded youth went grinning down the great stairs. The joke was really excellent! But he would not share it with any one yet.

II

SMOKE OF THE PAST

SHANE had refused to live at Kilmore House; the place, he declared, gave him the cold shudders. Mr. Parker, with the air of one privately deciding that it was no more than he expected, had thereupon dryly advised him to let the mansion and go into rooms, a counsel which his client had followed. Not having yet the benefit of Mr. Blythe's leadership, he had allowed the lawyer to choose a fitting domicile.

Therefore was he established in a large pompous suite in Buckingham Gate, furnished in a style which Blythe never failed to remark, each time he crossed the threshold, positively made him ill. Nevertheless, Shane declined either to move away or to alter them. Every place in London, in his opinion, was stuffy. Here were big windows, anyhow, if they were draped with maroon velvet curtains. He could not see that Valentine's own spindle-legged furniture was so much more to be admired than his saddle-back settees and deep leather arm-chairs.

"It's mine that are more comfortable, anyhow. And those black walls of yours would make a fellow think he was having the horrors. And what is to me if my clock is mock bronze, so long as it tells the time?"

What could a cultivated youth like his new friend do, but shrug his shoulders? How, indeed, argue with a mind so devoid of selective instinct as to see nothing

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to choose between a Viennese atrocity and an exquisite piece of red Buhl? How discuss such a delicate thing as art at all with one who had never even heard the name, and certainly—Valentine was sure of this—spelt it to himself “bool,” to match fool? Blythe gave his cynic snigger at his own cheap joke; yet the more he knew of the amazing young nobleman, the more certainly he discovered that Shane was no fool.

In the first place, the wild Irishman always knew what he wanted, and generally succeeded in getting it. If his wants were few, uncomplicated, manly, they were definite, and he did not care how much money he spent to satisfy them. Already he had a stable in Rutlandshire which was the envy of the Quorn. He drove a rattling pair of horses in the smart mail phaeton along the roads that took him most swiftly to green spaces. To Valentine's dudgeon, he would have nothing to do with motor-cars, and preferably walked to what parties or theaters he allowed himself to be persuaded to attend. He announced his intention of buying a yacht which would be the finest sailing craft obtainable. Steam, he vowed, was as abominable as petrol. His own estates, save the hunting-box, he avoided; and all his lawyer's sermons, and all the appeals of the local clergymen and estate agents had, so far, failed in changing this attitude, which sprang half from fierce shyness of, half from deeply ingrained antagonism to, that English set to whom he felt himself alien in blood and spirit.

“Sure they wouldn't be understanding me, and I wouldn't be understanding them,” he said sullenly to the head of the firm who had called in person to remonstrate upon so great a neglect of territorial obligations.

“Understanding! . . . My dear Lord Kilmore, senti-

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mentality! I can see no necessity for any such thing, so long as tenant and landlord carry out the essential duties of their position. Do you think that any landlord in England really understands his tenants, or any tenant his landlord? I do not; and I may claim to know something of both classes. No more, I assure you, than your Irish landlord and your Irish tenant."

Shane listened with a darkling face. Then he looked up suddenly and cast the defiance of his blue eyes on his adviser.

"All the same, I'll never go next or nigh those grand English places of mine, and I give you fair warning. Run them as you think best. Get the money out of the fellows that owe it to me, and keep the land decent and the houses warm—and I'll tell you what"—he struck the table with his hardened hand—"I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll sell them!"

"You cannot, Lord Kilmore. The property is entailed."

"I can, then. I'm not such a fool as you take me for. I've talked it over already with my cousin, the fellow that comes after me. And he's as ready as rain if I make it worth his while. I'll buy back Kilmore."

"Kilmore?"

"That same. Kilmore, the old place and lands that ought never to have gone out of the keeping of the O'Conors. And I'll go back to my own, and build the castle up again. And then I'll see whether an Irish landlord can't be understood by his tenants."

Mr. Somerset had had a quiet smile. These were early days.

"All this will take time," he remarked soothingly, as he rose to leave.

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"Well, you have my instructions," said Shane loftily.
"Quite so."

Mr. Somerset had gone back to his office, where, as far as any sale of the English estates was concerned, he maintained month after month a masterly inertia.

From the Academy Shane went straight to his rooms, and told the porter that he was at home to no one. Seated at the bureau which excited Valentine Blythe's derision, he drew a bundle of letters from an inner drawer.

Letters from Clenane—Moira's tied in a bundle by themselves. Three from Father Blake. One from Dr. Molloy. And four—Shane frowned as he looked down at them—in large, smeared handwriting from Moira's father; a couple, too, which he had never opened, scenting annoyance in a yet more archaic scrawl. The young man's countenance was that of one in pain as he held these messages from the old life. But his jaw was set. He meant to go through with the task.

In all Moira had written some twenty times, and the date of the last letter was four months ago. There was an interval of six weeks between it and the one before.

"Dear Shane," began the first. Moira wrote nicely, painstakingly, as the nuns had taught her, with commas and full stops in their right places and small flourishes to the capital letters. Her style was as formal as her calligraphy; but it was a love letter for all that. Something leaped out of it that stabbed the reader to the heart: the innocent warmth and trust behind the artless words . . . "I'm thinking of you all the day. . . . I said my rosary for you in the chapel. . . . I keep wondering when I can hope to hear from you. . . . It won't be very long

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now, before I hear. Once I get a letter I won't be minding near so much. . . . Leprechaun frets a lot. He sits watching the door."

The next letter betrayed more emotion. She had received her first love letter, and it had contained the news of his accession. He remembered well in what a heat of passion he had written it, with the memory of his uncle's dying assault upon his loyalty burning within him. "And what do I care for it all if it isn't to bring it to you?" he had said. "Moirra, my own girl, my sweet Moirra!" He had taken a great deal of trouble over his budget to Clenane that day; the words to Moirra had rushed from his pen as upon the flood of his tenderness. The spelling may have been in places peculiar, but Shane had never written a better letter in his life, one more honest and manly. He knew that, and now stifled a groan as he took up Moirra's reply to it:—

"DEAR SHANE, or ought I to be calling you my lord? —I wouldn't like not to be doing right by you, and you know you're free, Shane. And you so great now in the land, and rich, and me so humble. But, oh! dear Shane, this once I couldn't but be telling you how I love you, with your beautiful letter before me! I do love you, I'll always love you. But you know you're free, and I would never be thinking bad of you to change your mind. I know it will be the right thing by yourself and by me, whatever you decide in the end. The Da says you'll be coming over at once. But Father Blake says that is not likely at all, with everything you will have to do over there. So I'm not counting on it. But, when you do come, I think the soul will rise out of me with joy. . . ."

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There comes a point when a sense of remorse turns to irritation. Shane crumpled the sheet in his hand and getting up cast it into the grate. He would set fire to them all presently. What was the good of keeping them? If Moira had loved him then, it was over and done with now. It was she who had cast him off. He would never have broken his promise, no matter what it had cost him to keep it.

It is chiefly in attempted self-justification that we give ourselves away. Shane did not pause to consider how that very thought condemned him.

He turned again to the table and stood tossing over the remainder of the correspondence. What was the good of going back upon it all? He knew pretty well by heart what each sheet contained:—those two letters, of recent date, which he had never opened, and which, he felt quite certain, emanated from Mrs. Blake—she never had been much of a scholar; the doctor's exuberant felicitations, peppered with jocosities and "my boy's"; the old priest's lines, as constrained and sad in the first as in the last—beginning, "These are terrible responsibilities," and ending, "Moira, the child, has come to the right conclusion. She will be happier now that it is settled."

Yes, it was she who had done it. Shane's hand fluttered among the papers, impatiently, yet it trembled.

There is often a fundamental disingenuity about the Irish character, but Shane had had a crystal integrity of soul; he had not lost this yet. What Moira had done, she had done for his sake. She was only a farmer's daughter and he was a rich and noble lord; he had a fine consciousness of his own importance. But she had loved him

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nobly; and never more nobly than when she had written to sever the tie between them.

From the moment when his own letters grew rarer and he ceased to make allusions to his immediate return, Moira's replies became increasingly diffident and formal. "Don't be minding anything the Da would write to you," she had added in a hasty postscript to one prim, copper-plate epistle, of which the nuns would certainly have approved. The Da!—if it had not been for that old ass, for that cursed, interfering, scheming old fellow, things would never have turned out as they did. But it was more than any one could stand, and, if his daughter was not Lady Kilmore by this time, Farmer Blake had only himself to thank. Actually hectoring him—Kilmore! Threatening to come over and fetch him, no less. Hinting at the law. Breaking the flower of their love with his coarse hands, trampling on it, till there was nothing left of its sweetness and color.

"I could not ever think of it now," had written Moira. "The Da has made me feel so ashamed! Don't answer him, dear Shane. It's Lord Kilmore I ought to call you, but you'd think that strange. And, indeed, it would be strange to me. Don't answer him at all, that will be the best way. I have told him how it is with me, and it is only the truth I'm speaking when I tell you that I'm quite content, knowing it's right."

Why had he not gone back, while it was still easy—while, in truth, he wanted to? Shane asked himself the question; and then flung up his head with a short laugh that had not much mirth in it.

"Troth," he answered himself, "for the same reason that the colts will kick up their heels and run away from

the man who holds the halter even if he has the sieve of good corn in the other hand." Yes, that was it. He loved Moira, but, for the moment, he loved freedom best. And freedom, with the new power, and the new wealth behind it, had gone to his head. If Dan Blake had not come meddling! It was only natural, it was only fair, that he should have a year or so, to see and to know and to taste what the new life brought.

He reverted to the comparison that came so naturally to him: was he not like the young horse turned into the field? "Oh, Danny Blake, my fine Danny Blake, if you hadn't come after me with that halter! Faith and cracking the whip at me!"

Yet there was something else too that had kept Shane O'Connor from going back, in his new *rôle*, to the old home; a feeling which, however honest, no youthful mind would have acknowledged to itself. To return, just the same Shane as ever, rough, uncultivated, hail-fellow-well-met with his peasant comrades, there would have been no pleasure in this, no honor and glory. It was not in him to treat his former associates otherwise than before; but he was boy enough to want to impress them. How could he do this till he was at home in his new clothes, till his broken nails and toil-worn hands had grown to look like those of other gentlemen—in fine, till he felt himself the gentleman?

It had been a slow process, this assimilation of the manners and customs of another class, and Shane, as he piled these records of the past in the empty grate and set fire to them, had a singular impression that he was even yet hanging, as it were, between two spheres. He could never take up the lost thread of that wild, irresponsible

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life; he could never again feel at home in the poor community, never again find content in its ignorant ideals. On the other hand, was he a bit more at home with those among whom he was now by position an equal? They talked in a tongue which still puzzled him constantly; they did things which amazed him. These fashionable young men, his companions, now and again expressed views which revolted him. He could walk and talk with them; he could eat and jest with them, ride and shoot with them, and command admiring respect on this score at least. But could he think with them? Could he feel with them? Shane knew that he could not. His heart rose. "God help me," he said to himself, as the flames thrust little licking tongues in and out of the crumpled papers, and a word of Moira's, a phrase of the doctor's, writhed at him out of the charred mass, and was gone, "It's nobody I can turn to, and it's nowhere I want to go!"

Then an image slipped in between him and the flickering pile; a pensive, delicate face, a drooping head, the gaze of violet eyes which seemed to plead and plead. The memory of Moira suddenly faded, sank far, far—like the figure of one who walks away into the night.

III

THE HOUSE PARTY

“WELL, what do you think of my barbarian?”

Valentine Blythe put the question in a low voice to his hostess, with his flickering smile and his inconsequent blush. Lady Hobson gave a look across the room at Shane and then dropped her long-lashed lids.

Shane was sitting apart, his chin on his hand, brooding. Ever and anon he had a furtive glance towards the delicate lady who had received him with such sweet indifference and had instantly removed herself, or so it seemed to him, to immeasurable distance. One of those furtive glances met her wide gaze, and the color rushed into his face. These were the eyes of the portrait; mysteriously pleading, profoundly melancholy. They wanted something of him. What was it?

“He’s going to be a little heavy on hand, isn’t he?” murmured back Venetia Hobson.

In the space of a few minutes the two or three friendly individuals to whom Blythe had airily introduced him, had given up the attempt to converse with the new Lord Kilmore. Even so genial a being as Colonel Darcy, all agog as he was with a benevolent curiosity, had found himself baffled by the blank stare, the inappropriate monosyllable with which his remarks had been met.

“’Pon my honor,” thought the Guardsman, as he withdrew to the more congenial neighborhood of young Lady

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Thurso, "he's got all poor William's disagreeability, with none of his intellect. What a substitute for that fine lad, Harold!"

He heaved a sigh from the depth of his magnificent chest, selected a *petit pain fourré* with discrimination, and turned his charming smile upon the young peeress whom he regarded with a double tenderness, because of her vivacious prettiness, and because of certain memories pertaining to those days when she had been "dear little Dorrie Prince, the sweetest thing that ever tripped the boards."

Creewater was a large, comfortable Georgian mansion, romantically set on the coast, with admirable distant views across the Solway Firth. Its acres of park, girt by a ten-foot wall of red sandstone, was traversed by noble avenues leading to wrought-iron gates. This on the landward side—on the other side, stretches of stone-pine alleys, undergrown by a fantastic luxuriance of rhododendron, ended suddenly upon cliff and sea. To come out from bosky glades, one's eyes filled with the carmines, purples and roses of those great bushes, and to meet the sudden cliff, the dazzling of the blue waters beneath, was to dream oneself in some enchanted land where in radiance North and South had met.

Within the house a taste had presided, sure, fastidious, ambitious, and unfettered. The great room where Lady Hobson's guests, this afternoon, were seated at tea, was one that might have been found in a Venetian palace. At first sight it gave an impression of space, almost of emptiness; but any one who could discriminate would, at the next glance, find that it was filled with treasures which it would take him a lifetime to appreciate. Not more than half a dozen pictures on those white panels delicately

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wreathed with plaster work, but what pictures—a Romney's Lady Hamilton; a portrait of an Italian princess by the Rubens of early days; a golden Claude and a no less golden Turner; some Italian primitive, adorably rich, serene, and naïf. The furniture, not exclusively of one period; chairs that had indeed come from a doge's palace; cabinets of lemonwood here, there of priceless lacquers. For color: cool grays, fainting greens, primroses, and ambers, with a vivid note of flowers such as Shane had never seen in his life; or again the challenging glows of some superb brocade. Lapis lazuli, malachite, alabaster; he would not have known the names of these strange and beautiful things. Ivories, too; niellos, silver and gold inlays, colored glass fashioned, it seemed, out of soap bubbles, or foam in the sunset. And a slender, naked loveliness from which he turned his eyes away—Eve holding the apple, shining white on her pedestal, with the green spray of exotic ferns about her.

The woman who was the center of it all moved like a nymph, as if unconscious of her surroundings; delicate, aloof, with mysterious smile and still more mysteriously haunted eyes.

Shane knew nothing of nymphs; nor as yet, indeed, anything of the meaning of beauty as expressed by art. But he felt inarticulately, dimly, almost with a kind of pain over the sense of his own limitation, that the loveliness that met him on every side was only the background for that other loveliness—Venetia.

We each of us live in a world of our own, isolate, as it were encompassed like a star in the making, by the nebulae of feelings, thoughts, doubts, instincts, and impulses that come to us, we know not whence, and carry

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us we know not whither. Often two isolations draw together; sometimes, rarely, they become fused in a perfect whole. But for the most part we carry on our course in an immense loneliness. If ever there was a lonely creature, that Whit Saturday of May, nineteen-fourteen, it was the new Lord Kilmore.

From the moment of his crossing the threshold of Creewater House, he had been seized with a paralyzing self-consciousness. Arrogant, ready to take umbrage, fierce to resent the imaginary slight, he had had, nevertheless, through all his curious experiences, an upholding conviction that he was a better man all round than any of his fine acquaintances. What if he was not yet up to their social tricks; if he had not yet learned which painted old lady was the widow of a city knight and which a dowager duchess; what if Valentine Blythe found cause still to blush for him, and laugh at him, twenty times in an afternoon—was not he, Shane, the better fellow, who neither blushed nor laughed for a mistake, but could afford to cast the memory of it away, as something to disdain?

Disdain! That was, in the recesses of his soul, his attitude towards the novel existence which yet held him in its toils so completely as to oust the claims of the old.

“What’s come over me at all?” he asked himself now, as he felt his hands turn to ice at the touch of the satin smooth ivory-hued fingers.

“I am so glad to see you.” That was all she said to him. Her voice was very low and soft.

Her elusive, fragile beauty, as the picture had shown it, had filled his vision with incredible constancy. Day by day he had gone back to look at it, at odd early hours

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when he had the place more or less to himself. Now his ear was filled with the music for which it had been so long unconsciously straining. It was with a kind of recognition that he received the gentle sounds. He could not have repeated one single name, of those which Valentine Blythe reeled off to him. He could not have said how many spoke, or what their speech had been. It was just all he could do to hold a cup of tea without spilling it; to resist the impulse to spring up and dash from the room, away from the turmoil of spirit that had fallen on him like a spell. Then their eyes had met and he forgot himself in the recurrence of the strange impression the portrait had already given him: she wanted something—something that he alone could give. What was it? He almost checked the words on his lips: he had almost jumped to his feet; the overpowering crimson had rushed up.

Valentine Blythe, surveying him with a critical sense of proprietorship, was surprised.

“I declare,” he said, “there’s my fellow blushing, as badly as ever I did in my life. Dear lady, see what you’ve done already! Heavy on hand? What a remark to make, you of all women! I thought you’d be so grateful to me. I’ve brought you something new: the newest thing out, the freshest thing that has come our old dusty London way, for years and years. It’s as wild and green of the pasture as a Centaur. And as beautiful too. Come, you will acknowledge it’s beautiful. Be grateful to me, dear Venetia. I knew you were the one being in all the world who could appreciate”—he paused, smiled, and blushed—“*un homme tout neuf.*”

Lady Hobson’s poetic gaze pondered upon Blythe’s countenance. She sighed in a tired way, and said:—

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"In truth—most people are very much used up. What was it you said, just now—a dusty world? And this young Lord Kilmore is—we have no real equivalent, have we?—is brand new? But——" Her eyes wandered round the wonderful room. "I'm not so very fond of brand new things either."

Her accents took a plaintive note.

"Oh, but Shane is not new in that sense!" cried Valentine Blythe, stammering in his eagerness. He had thought Venetia a cleverer woman, somehow; or at least more intuitive. "Unless you call Endymion brand new. There are things, you know, as old as the hills yet as young as the crescent moon; and my barbarian is of them. Haven't you heard that old Lord de Lacy declares that he has stepped out of ancient Greece——?"

He broke off. The door at the end of the room had been noisily flung open, and a man of great height and corpulence came in, followed by two bulldogs.

"I forgot," exclaimed Mr. Blythe in his impertinent way, "that we had not yet said how-de-do to Tiny Tim."

"Ah——" Lady Hobson rose, with the faint sigh which seemed to mean so infinitely much. She moved like the mists, with a stealthy, uncertain grace. Valentine, as in duty bound, got up too. Their eyes were on a level. Suddenly she smiled exquisitely. "I was wondering why you thought a brand new man would be a novelty," she murmured, and stepped across to the hearth where, towering upon the white bearskin before the wood fire, Sir Timothy Hobson was already devouring scones with great bites while his two prize bulldogs looked up at him, grinning and dribbling.

"Timothy——" Venetia Hobson was the only person to

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address the baronet by his full name—even the servants called him Sir Tim—and there was always an echo as a protest in the delicate resonance of her voice. “Timothy, I don’t think you know that Lord Kilmore is here.”

She turned to Shane, who was still sitting rigidly in his corner. He jumped up and came forward hastily. How had he forgotten that first rule which Blythe had impressed upon him with such imperativeness, never to sit while your hostess stands?

“Lord Kilmore, here is my husband. He is a very busy man—are you not, Timothy?—or he would have been here to receive you.”

Sir Timothy gave his new guest a single comprehensive look, then flung out a huge hand, and grasped Shane’s with such ferocious heartiness, that, strong as they were, he felt his knuckles grind one against the other. Sir Timothy grinned.

“If I didn’t look after things,” he said generally, “they’d jolly soon go to pieces, I can tell you.”

He had a great face, with a nose disproportionately small, a protuberant jowl, gray eyes, round as marbles, rather bloodshot, that rolled with a sort of watchful uneasiness although the general expression of the countenance was jocose. His was the kind of pink blotting-paper complexion which turns purple under sun and wind. He was clean-shaven, his close-cropped hair was sandy.

He grinned at Shane approvingly, and the young man thought him extraordinarily like his bulldogs. But these latter he admired with a sportsman’s appreciation, while their master filled him with an instant and profound antipathy.

Shane stepped back and turned to Sir Timothy’s wife,

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upon an impulse so swift as to be unconscious. Their gaze commingled; then hers fluttered away. He had been asking himself what was the enigma of those beautiful sad eyes: now he understood, or thought he did. He looked back at the baronet, flinging bits of cake to his favorites in turn. The three grins, how horribly similar they were! And this was her husband. "God help her!" thought the lad, with the old instinctive call on the supernatural. "It's the unhappy creature she is. How in the world did she ever come to marry him?"

The room was full of talk and laughter. Sir Timothy spoke indoors as if he were shouting across a field. His mirth was nearly as noisy. A tall, dark woman, not very young, and highly painted, had come forward from a corner behind a screen, followed by an elderly, white-faced man. Shane noted them for the first time, and with that same unhesitancy as in the case of his host, hated them.

These feelings were unusual with him; he often felt a contempt for his company, but it was always a good-humored one. This was antagonism, almost indignation. The dark lady, with the lips as red as sealing-wax, screamed witticisms to her host, while he rolled his eyes at her and grinned more than ever. Valentine, with real pleasure in his voice, hailed the pale, elderly man.

"Hallo, Joss Sticks, I'd no idea you were here. My dear fellow, it's a relief—forgive me, Venetia, dear, but the sight of Joss Sticks does bring one back to civilization."

"Dunno, I'm sure, about civilization"—it was the lady of the red lips who spoke—"but it would be a blessing if some one would teach Val a little civility. How do, Val? You are the limit, you know. Civilization! We're savages, Ojibways, you and I, Tim, I suppose! I'd rather

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be that than a mandarin, anyhow!" She shrieked with laughter as she pointed the remark with a fleeting glance at the man whom Blythe had addressed as Joss Sticks.

Following this glance Shane saw that the gentleman in question had indeed a Chinese cast of countenance.

"Talking of rudeness," cried Mr. Blythe, more airily insolent than ever, "who has not said how-de-do, Lady Kenneth?" He shook her outstretched fingers from side to side as he spoke. "Savages? Oh, no, Lady Ken, that's not the word. Costers would be far more appropriate. You and Tim would be first class in the Old Kent Road. Ah, by the way, that reminds me, you don't know Lord Kilmore, I think—Shane, let me introduce you to Lady Kenneth MacIver—Mr. Joscelyn Browne, Lord Kilmore. We call him Joss Sticks, dear Kil, because he's more Chinese than the Chinese, and if ever you want to invest in anything priceless in the way of Celestial art, here's the man for you."

This speech might have been in Chinese, as far as Shane's comprehension of it was concerned. The gentleman gave him a loose finger touch, one cold glance, and turned away. The new Lord Kilmore was not Mr. Joscelyn Browne's "sort." The lady's bold eyes appraised him, as if, he furiously thought, he were a beast at a fair.

"Ah, wait till you see him on a horse," cried Blythe, in corroboration of the approval in Lady Kenneth's eye.

Sir Timothy intervened.

"Shut up, Val!—I say, I want a cigar. Come and keep me company in the billiard room, will you, Lady Ken, since her ladyship makes such a blank fuss about the smell of it here? A sight better than her filthy cigarette smoke, I tell her."

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"You shall try one of my Egyptians, Lord Kilmore." Lady Hobson's soft voice was like balm to Shane, after the loud, coarse clamor. "Come and sit by the fire with me. It's always chilly up here in the North."

"We're going for a turn," said young Lady Thurso briskly, as she jumped up from the sofa where she and Colonel Darcy had been absorbed in each other.

Mr. Blythe broke into laughter, rocking himself backwards and forwards. Shane, neophyte as he was yet in society, perceived nevertheless clearly enough that there was an offensive thought behind this mirth. He glared at Valentine, as he followed Venetia Hobson's slow drift across the room. Blythe stopped, blushed, stared back, and broke into laughter again.

"Dear Joss Sticks," he then cried mincingly, "take me into a quiet corner, and let us talk of old Nan-kin."

IV

THE HOUR EXQUISITE

“So she’s given you the Chinese room,” said Valentine Blythe discontentedly. “I do call that mean! She knows how much I like it. And really”—he went on, nursing his knee and displaying a vast amount of black silk sock with elaborate purple embroidery—“really, if she did not give it to me, she ought to have given it to poor old Joss Sticks. He’d have sat and worshiped. Whereas you—I don’t suppose you know a ‘Ming’ from a bit of Lowestoft.”

Shane was wrestling with his tie. Divers crumpled streamers on the floor about him testified to previous failures. He stopped, frowning, and cast a roaming glance about the room.

“Chinese, is it? It’s precious ugly. And, faith, I’ll be afraid that pair of beasts by the fire there, will be wanting to jump at me in the night. I’d feel happier with the bulldogs.”

He turned again to the lacquer-framed mirror, and tore the fifth tie from his neck with a smothered curse.

“If you’d taken my advice and engaged a valet, as any other man in your position——” said Blythe.

“Huthen, I’ve enough of fine gentlemen without that!”

“Yet, dear boy, you’d like your tie to sit straight. This is in consequence. Allow me.”

He rose, delicately inserted a fresh tie round his friend’s

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collar, and proceeded to form a perfect bow. As he manipulated, he flowed on:—

“So you don’t appreciate the Chinese room? Sometimes, Kil, I despair of you. Was there ever anything so exquisite as that brocade on the walls? Such a color, so rich! So purely yellow without a tinge of the banality of gold, or the impurity of green. See how it throws out the picture—oh, Kil, what a picture! The best Opie ever painted, to my mind. That dark girlish head against the luminous amber background—it’s perfect!” He stepped back. “Your tie is perfect, too. But, let us understand each other. Is it possible you do not see the beauty of this furniture? Chinese Chippendale, the absolutely satisfying combination of its elegance, its slenderness and sparsity, with the opulence of its black and gold lacquer——”

He paused. Shane was inducing himself into his coat with swift shrugs.

“Faith, and I think you blethering a good deal,” the young peer remarked with restored good humor, and stood still, while, with another “Allow me,” Blythe gave a couple of knowing twitches to his friend’s garment.

Then the connoisseur pursued his theme:—

“I grant you the creatures by the hearth are not what you may call handsome. I’m not, myself, enamored of bronze monsters.”

“Look at the grin on them!” cried Shane. “Sure no wonder he bought them! Aren’t they the born image of Sir Tim himself?”

“Ah, by the way”—Valentine Blythe turned briskly from the rapt contemplation of the cloisonné jars which were the chief treasures of the room, to look round with

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a simmering curiosity—"what do you think of Tiny Tim?"

"I think it's the poor joke," said Shane dryly.

"Dear boy!" Blythe laughed. "It all depends how you look at it. But I've such a simple mind—well, well, I see you don't like him. You're wrong, you know, it's the best fellow in the world. A really jolly, good-natured, generous-hearted chap: and a sportsman. I hate sport myself, you know, but I like a sportsman. And you think him like a Chinese monster. Dear me!"

"Or one of his own bulldogs," put in Shane, tearing open drawer after drawer of the black and gold chest. "Where in the name of God, has that fellow put my handkerchiefs?"

"Don't be so passionate," murmured Blythe. "There's one on your dressing-table, of course, dear lad. Venetia's servants know their business. A bulldog? Oh, fie!"

"Only not one quarter so nice."

"Dear me," said Blythe again. Then blushing, and upon a titter: "And what do you think of our Venetia?"

Shane wheeled about, thrusting the handkerchief into his breast pocket. He stood for a moment in contemplation of his friend, his chin on his chest, a darkling fire in his blue eyes. Then he said:—

"I wouldn't be telling you what I think of her."

"And why not? As you would say yourself," said Mr. Blythe sweetly.

"Because of the respect I feel for her," retorted Shane promptly.

Blythe became aware that he had reached the limit of his companion's patience; he knew the symptoms. He pulled himself together, and, with a certain gentleness

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which no one could assume better than he, and which was always disarming, said:—

“You’re quite right, there is nothing more odious than talking lightly of a charming woman. It is only a way I’ve got. Dear Kil, you think nothing’s sacred to me, and there you’re wrong. I assure you, I have it in me to value Venetia.”

“You couldn’t look at her,” said Shane, and his voice grew husky, “without seeing——”

“Quite so,” said Mr. Blythe, as Shane paused, brought up short by his own emotion.

“Do you really think,” said the Irishman, suddenly and boyishly, “that she—that she picked out this room for me, because—or, confound it, what you said yourself—that it’s rather a favor? Sure, then, it’s the ungrateful devil I am.”

His companion was again all on wires with mischievous amusement.

“My dear Kil, you really are delightful. Your modesty, I do assure you, your freshness!—I declare I’ll call you Daisy, as Steerforth did David Copperfield. You’ve read your Dickens? No? Well, I’m with you there, but I wish I could think it was eclectic rejection. I’m afraid your literary education has been sadly neglected. I’ll tell her ladyship to superintend it! I wonder, by the way, what she has left for you. She always chooses her guests’ books herself. I told you, didn’t I, she’s the best hostess in the United Kingdom? Ah, this is touching indeed—Yeats—‘The Keltic Twilight.’ Lady Gregory’s delightful collection—Synge——”

Shane called out hotly:

“Synge! I wouldn’t read a line that fellow wrote!”

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“Dear me, Kil!”

“Pretending to be knowing about us, and understanding us, when there’s not a word out of him that is not lies!”

“You can’t think how you interest me. But I remember. It was the ‘Playboy of the Western World’ that stank in your Irish nostrils, wasn’t it?”

“I’d Playboy him!” exclaimed Lord Kilmore. With which thoroughly Hibernian threat the conversation came to an end, for the dinner gong was booming through the house.

Shane had already stayed about in different country houses, but these had been somewhat of the old-fashioned type: the halls of hard-hunting squires, who had been with his father at Eton; the decorous splendor of DeLacy Castle; the rectory of a clergyman uncle, his father’s second brother, filled with jolly, happy girls and boys, who had admitted the papist cousin into uproarious intimacy, and taught him some of the ways of his class with a good deal of kindly fun.

But in spite of his odd comradeship with Valentine Blythe, he had never been one of an up-to-date country house party. Creewater amazed him. Its luxury, its elaborate refinements, its lavish comforts; the evidences met there, on all sides, of reckless expenditure, and a feverish yearning for beauty; these were things which, with all his ignorance of life, his acute wits did not fail to appreciate. Certainly there was no sign of the financial difficulties his friend had hinted at, in the Academy. What bewildered, what, if truth he told, revolted him, were the manners of his fellow guests with each other; the freedom, not to say the license, which prevailed among them.

Every one seemed to him at once atrociously rude and

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abominably friendly. If it had not been for her, whom he had called in his heart Venetia, during so many longing days, he would have shaken the dust of the place off his feet that first night of all; never would he have gone back up the white marble stairs into the Chinese room, to give himself to impressions that surged through him like great chords of music.

Venetia! . . . He remembered once on a St. John's night, when they had all had great games, over yonder at Clenane, about a huge bonfire, how, in the middle of the leapings and the shouting and the laughter, the smoke and the scorch, he had looked up and seen the evening star above his head, exquisitely pure in the violet arch of the heavens. So had she seemed to him, here: a star above the bonfire; a creature apart from that unholy, noisy crew, moving delicately in lofty spaces.

He no more knew Milton than he knew Dickens, or he might have thought of the Lady in Comus:—

“A thousand liveried angels lackey her,
Driving far off each thing of sin and guilt.”

Yet the poet's idea, if wordless, was in his mind.

Shane had learnt by this time that the hostess takes the highest in rank to escort her in to dinner. Nevertheless, his heart leaped as to a favor when she said:—

“Lord Kilmore, will you take me in?”

Perhaps there was something subtly, sweetly possessive in her tone, which justified the moment of rapture.

“Come along, old girl,” said Sir Timothy, thrusting his jowl and a stalwart elbow in the direction of Lady Kenneth. “It's your turn to-night, you know.”

“Well, I'm sure!” said Lady Thurso behind him.

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She was standing on the hearthrug, exceedingly pretty, impudent, not to say bacchanalian, brandishing a cut-glass goblet. It was her second cocktail.

That was one of Shane's amazements. He had refused a whisky and soda, or a glass of champagne, when he went up to dress, and on coming down to the library where they assembled before dinner, he had found a footman offering cocktails from a huge silver tray. This, too, he had refused. Lady Hobson also waved a hand of denial, whereupon Lady Thurso, with a crow, had fallen upon one of the rejected glasses and set it behind her on the chimney-piece. It was from this she was now sipping. She tossed off the remains of it with a knowing tilt of hand and chin, winked at her host as he turned round, and allowed Colonel Darcy to relieve her of the goblet.

"Well, I'm sure——" that was what the whilom Miss Dorrie Prince was saying. "You needn't apologize, Tim. There is such a thing"—she looked round the circle with an impudence so light-hearted that it was attractive—"as mutual satisfaction."

Colonel Darcy twisted his mustache. Sir Tim guffawed, and again thrust his elbow at Lady Kenneth, who, in a glittering sequin gown, shamelessly cut, was crouching on the fenderstool.

"You'll have to give me a haul up," she cried. "Gréville will insist on pasting one's skirts on one."

Sir Timothy stretched out a hairy hand to grasp hers. Shane kept his eyes fixed on the ground as he stood beside Venetia. Her ivory face had maintained its pensive calm unchanged during the little scene. Robed all in misty grays of some intangible crêpe that made no sound as she moved, she presented an amazing contrast to the other

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women—to Lady Kenneth, on whose handsome face paint had been spread with the audacity of a flag unfurled to the winds, whose hazel eyes were drunk with belladonna, who jingled and clattered and cast heavy odors of perfume as she went, laughing with vermilion lips over strong teeth that seemed dark by contrast with the plastered white—to Lady Thurso, the bride, who on the stage carried all before her as the “child of nature”; while her outrageous naïveties could have been tolerated in no one less deliciously youthful and engaging; who, nevertheless, in society, remained so frankly the favorite of the footlights that she gave the impression of being always before them.

Shane raised his glance to stare after them, wondering, once again, with actual pain, how there came to be such company in a house of which his lady was mistress. Did the bulldog fellow, who so extraordinarily had succeeded in laying his coarse grasp around this pearl, impose his own chosen company upon her? Every drop of Irish blood in his veins revolted at the thought. Shane came from a country, he had lived among a people, where, if the husband's authority is regarded as established by unchallengeable, almost sacred, laws, no less unchallengeable is the sanctity of the wife's position, the respect due to a good woman.

The scarcely perceptible movement of Lady Hobson towards him, and Blythe's titter behind his back: “My deal Kil, you're moonstruck!” roused him to the fact that the scarlet of Lady Thurso's gown had already disappeared through the door.

He started and offered his arm. As he did so, he was once more overwhelmingly aware of the loveliness beside him.

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"It's not moonstruck I am," he exclaimed, "but star-struck!"

The words leaped from his mouth, and he would have given worlds to recall them. Sure there was something dreadful about this place that made a man lose his hold over himself. Many a time had he seen a young colt slip from the controlling hand and off with him just that way! Blythe tittered again, sarcastically: he was not pleased to have to follow up with "old Joss Sticks." The Hobsons might have raised a lady a piece, he thought, or given a new-comer preference.

Shane's pulses were hammering in his ears; he moved mechanically in the direction indicated by the pressure of the frail hand on his arm. She went in silence. Had he irredeemably offended? In the middle of the hall, he blurted an apology:—

"I beg your pardon, I don't know what came over me at all. Forgive me."

At that she opened the full flower of her eyes upon him, and smiled. The smile, he thought, was sadder still than the glance.

"Have I anything to forgive? I didn't know. Somehow I don't think, Lord Kilmore, that you would say anything to me that could need forgiveness."

"It's dead I'd rather be!"

He spoke without measuring now, or feeling the need of it. Eyes, smile, sweet voice, had given him the same assurance. She had not misunderstood; she would never misunderstand him. Joy ran through him like a cordial. Thus, before they had known each other a few hours, the new Lord Kilmore entered into an exquisite intimacy with Venetia Hobson. He was like a wayfarer who, on a

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dusty, torrid journey, coming upon the sudden lure of a secret pool, leaps in to find himself caught out of his depth, in a delicious mystery of wrapping waters.

The dinner was an uproarious meal, but the noise and laughter went by Shane scarcely noticed. He sat in a kind of dream beside his hostess; neither seemed anxious for speech. Now and then, when a too blatant pleasantry or a too pointed scream passed across the table, he could see the shadow of a frown darken her white brow. Then he himself would glower on those who had caused it. He was well aware that some of the amusement was connected with himself, and that the fun was intensified each time he cast that angry glance about. "If it wasn't for her," he thought, "I'd think nothing of flinging a glass of wine in their faces, at bulldog's first of all."

He hardly realized yet how it was with him; no longer a question of thinking of her first, or even of articulately thinking of her at all: her presence possessed him. She could not stir beside him but he was conscious of it in every nerve. He knew without looking when the eyelashes lay shadowy on her pale cheek, and when she lifted the pathos of her gaze. He felt her inward shudder at the trivial laugh, springing from the yet more trivial joke; and his own being was convulsed in a raging sympathy. When she spoke the rare word, his soul became as a cup tensely offered to receive it.

He was abstractedly staring into the ruby of his untouched glass of port after dinner, when his host came round the table to sit beside him. Shane turned a scowling countenance; he wished to heaven the fellow would not be so punctilious all of a sudden. It's little he thought

of his manners all the dinner through. Why wouldn't he now be talking to any of the others? The Chinese-looking chap with the cold, slow eye; or the soldier whose looks and genial, courteous ways Shane could not help liking, but who "ought to be ashamed of himself for going on the way he did with that little woman—and he old enough to be her father!" Could he not talk to Blythe, even? Any one of them could stand him, he saw that. He could not. He had a sense of almost physical sickness as the bulldog grin appeared at his shoulder.

But Sir Timothy with his male guests was a very different kind of person from Sir Timothy, the host of his chosen fair. One large hairy hand fingering his brimming glass of champagne, he began:—

"Aren't you the lucky man who bought Sally-the-Lass, when poor Wycherley's stables were up? Confounded nuisance, I was out at Cannes. Only place in the world for April, Cannes. You're sick of hunting, you know; there ain't a bird in the air, and my fishing's late. Cannes is the only place. But I was sick when I heard that I had missed Sally-the-Lass. What did you give for her? Whatever it was, she was worth it. The most promising filly I ever laid eyes on. I offered poor old Tom whatever he liked for her—but he wouldn't sell, not he!"

Sir Timothy drained his beaker at what seemed one gulp, and refilled. Wiping the froth from his shaven lip, he drew a long breath and rolled his gaze reflectively on Shane:—

"What are you going to do with her? Do you think she'll be ready for the Oaks?"

"For what?" Shane exclaimed, with his Hibernian aspiration.

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Sir Timothy stared for a perceptible space; then he cried:—

“The Oaks—you’ve heard of the Derby, I take it.”

“Ay, I’ve heard tell of the Derby.” Shane’s tone was dry.

“You mean to race her, don’t you?” There was a strain of anxiety in the old sportsman’s whole air. “Good Heavens, what have you bought her for?”

“To ride her.”

“To ride her!” The host’s astonishment was blent with incredulity. “You’re pulling my leg. Ah, you’re a close fellow: to ride her. You ride thirteen stones, I take it, thin as you are.”

“Begging your pardon,” cried Shane, “not an ounce more than eleven six.”

“Hum. Lucky fellow. But that’s not the point. There, never mind, keep your own counsel. I’ve no notion of prying. But you’ll not tell me you’ve given all that pot of money—a jolly pot it must have been too. I know the value of money, and I’d not fling away fancy sums for a hack. If I bought her, it would not have been to ride her, you imagine.”

He laughed good-humoredly, looking down at his own bulk; tossed half the wine into his mouth and, swirling the rest round and round the glass, proceeded:—

“It would be a sin not to race her. Good Lord, you’re a sportsman. The minute I clapped my eyes on you, I knew that. You’ll do the sporting thing, you’ll race Sally.”

With one final dexterous swirl, he disposed of his champagne and seized the bottle again. Poising it, he glanced at Shane.

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“You’re not drinking that port, have some more fizz?”

“I haven’t had any.”

The severity of Shane’s countenance had relaxed, his grave lips were almost smiling.

“Not had any!” roared his host.

“I can’t abide it,” said the lad. He, who, for choice, would never have drunk anything but what was given him by the well in the old keep of Kilmore—that wonderful spring that Clenane boasted as the finest in the barony—could not, as he had told Valentine Blythe time and again, “do with the drinking at all.” To sip a glass of port at the end of a meal was as much as he could bring himself to.

“I can’t bear the stuff,” he repeated, with a jerk of his head at the big bottle, “but I don’t mind this.”

Sir Timothy gave his full-throated laugh.

“Hear that, Darcy? My lad here does not mind my Sixty-Three. Nay, now”—he laid his palm on Kilmore’s knee affectionately—“you’re a wise man. You’ll never have a hand like this.” He lifted his great fist, and it was plain to see that it shook. “You’ll not believe it,” he went on, “but I can still do my day with the best of them—can’t I, Darcy? But it takes me a couple of goes of brandy to steady myself in the morning. Odd thing, that . . . But fact, you know. Hair of the dog. Ah, my boy——”

Sir Timothy leant back in his chair, his immense white waistcoat spreading like a turbot, and let his eyes rest on the youth beside him with fond melancholy, an emotion in which that half magnum had certainly some share. “Deuce take me, but I envy you. You’ve got it all still, and you’re canny. You’re wise, I say. You won’t fling it away. And to beat all you’ve bought Sally-the-Lass!

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Did you know that, Darcy? He's bought Sally-the-Lass."

It would not have been human nature, especially such young human nature as Shane's, not to be flattered. Colonel Darcy drew his chair nearer with an interested smile.

"The most promising filly of the year, I'm told," he said, "by Robert-the-Devil, out of Duchess Sarah, isn't she? Ought to do well, what?"

"He's not going to race her," grumbled Sir Timothy.

"What!" ejaculated the Guardsman in quite another tone.

"My lord is going to ride her, just to show himself off in the Row."

"Not at all, you're out of it altogether." Shane was smiling broadly now. "None of that circus business for me. It's after the hounds I'll take her."

"Good God!—Sally-the-Lass!"

But Colonel Darcy did not seem to share his host's consternation. He, too, ran a gaze over Shane that appraised him from head to foot.

"If he wants to, why shouldn't he?" He turned to Sir Timothy. "Lucky young man."

"That's what I said."

"Isn't she the grandest lepper I ever saw?" Shane took a pull at his port and the rare color mounted to his cheek bones; his eyes flashed, he looked extraordinarily handsome. "And I know something about it, I can tell you. 'Tis a bird she is! Of course, I'll have to wait—but it's worth waiting for."

Sir Timothy's grasp was going rather uncertainly

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towards the bottle again, when Colonel Darcy intervened:—

“Talking of waiting—I say, Tim, charming ladies—dull without us. Hadn’t you better drink your coffee? Excuse the liberty of old friendship, you know.”

Sir Timothy grunted and tilted his liqueur glass of brandy into his coffee cup. Shane slowly finished his single glass of port. At the end of the table Valentine Blythe and Mr. Joscelyn Browne were lost in cigarette smoke and a discussion on Oriental ceramic. Through the fumes Valentine’s eyes, however, kept a careful watch on his pupil.

“Extraordinary thing, Lord Kilmore,” said the Colonel, as they rose from the table, “you’re so like your late uncle—and so unlike! Watched you drinking port just now. Poor, dear fellow, it was poison to him, but he would have his way—I expect you take after him there—would have his port, you know. Drank it to the very last, I’ll be bound—had a glass just before expiring, what?”

Shane stopped in his walk towards the door to stare; his face darkened:—

“And that’s true,” he said. “And how did you know?”

“What, he did—did he?” cried the Colonel, delighted. “That’s good. Came to me in a kind of flash, what! You see, I knew your uncle very well. Yes, great friend of mine. You knew old Kilmore, didn’t you, Tim?”

“He despised me.” Sir Timothy gave his rumbling laugh. “Couldn’t swallow the soap, whatever he may have done with the port.”

Once again Shane was struck with the imbecility of the witticisms which so highly amused these people. While Sir Timothy gave himself to the enjoyment of his own

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humor, the Colonel—perhaps upon him, too, the passage of so many noble vintages had left a certain effect—proceeded reminiscently:—

“You remember him, anyhow. Isn’t our young friend here the very image of him? A hundred times more like than his own poor, dear boys. Only there’s one tremendous difference, what—poor William was a cold fish—a cold fish. And you, Lord Kilmore,” his glance twinkled, “you are, well, there’s some fire about you—ain’t there? All alive, what?”

“I trust and hope,” said Shane, “I am not like my uncle. I can’t help my face,” he cried, “but faith, if I thought I had his black heart——”

Sir Timothy stopped chuckling. Blythe and Mr. Browne came curiously forward at the sound of the raised voice. Colonel Darcy stepped back. In the society in which he moved, you can make as much noise as you like, laugh as loud, be as rude and vulgar, even offensive, so long as it is all merely jocular; but the moment you display a deep feeling, you have sinned against the code: you are out of it, impossible.

“I say, we are forgetting the ladies.” The old flirt hurried forward and opened the door himself, standing back to let Kilmore pass out.

Shane had become suddenly overshadowed as by a thundercloud; his spirit cowered beneath it. The Shane that had stood and flung loyal defiance in the teeth of the dying Lord Kilmore had not known this dreadful feeling—remorse. For one wild moment he heard that old Shane call to him, and he hated his present self and his present world. Had he still the power within him to lift strong

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wings, and, piercing the cloud, return to those spaces where he had been so nobly free?

Through the open door of the drawing-room there came to his ear broken chords and the melody of a pure voice uplifted; to his eyes the vision of a slender gray figure, seated at the piano, of a pale face turned towards him, of a singing mouth. No, he had not the strength. Here was a light to make even darkness dear!

He went straight to the piano and sat near her. She gave him a little smile, as if welcoming him—she who held herself so apart—into the circle of her thoughts.

“Dear Venetia!” said Mr. Blythe, coming up, with his most ingenuous air, as the last note ethereally faded, “how quite too perfect! But give me the pleasure—as our grandfathers used to say—of hearing you in *L’Heure Exquise*.”

She looked furtively at Shane and hesitated. Then striking vague, murmurous harmonies:—

“Why do you want that?” she asked. “It is so decadent.”

Blythe blushed and wriggled.

“My anomalous nature! In most of the arts I am for the eighteenth century, certainly. But in music—well, if you call it decadent, I do prefer Debussy to Scarlatti.”

Before he had finished speaking, Lady Hobson had begun the song.

Shane did not understand one word of French, but perhaps all the more poignantly did the bizarre languors, the vague intervals, the singularity, the plaintiveness, the mystery of the music seize hold of him. Her voice rose wild and sweet like the cry of a flying bird: “*C’est l’heure exquisite . . . !*” it faded at last, and fell silent.

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The silence held for a spell. Blythe had walked away from the piano: it was one of his minor impertinences to slip unexpectedly from the height of enthusiasm to the depth of indifference. Shane drew a long breath; then she spoke:—

“Don’t you think it’s decadent?”

“I don’t know what that means.”

“No, I’m sure you don’t.”

He still did not understand; but he could not mistake the caress of a delicate approval.

“It’s the ignorant fellow I am,” he said, with a dogged humility. “Sure I couldn’t tell in the world what language you sang in, nor anything, barring the loveliness. I understood that right enough,” he added between his teeth.

“It’s French. You’re not more ignorant than many another, I assure you. If you think Sir Timothy understands any French except”—her lip had a faint twist of scorn—“what’s spoken over the roulette table. *L’Heure Exquise*,” she went on, with a sudden smile like one dropping sadness to turn to joy, “means the Hour Exquisite.”

“Faith, I knew as much!”

On the Irishman’s intent and ardent face came an answering smile, transfiguring.

“Of course,” she struck a chord, “the words are almost the same, are they not?”

Jocundity still hovered on her lips, but Shane felt as if he were subtly thrust out of the privileged circle; most courteously, but most certainly rebuked for presumption. He sat dumb.

“I have sung for Mr. Blythe,” said Venetia Hobson, at the exact moment when the pause seemed to become un-

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bearable, "now I will sing for you 'My Little Gray Home in the West——'"

The song was familiar to Shane. It had already, indeed, been sung to him by a musical damsel who thought that she could very well overlook the lacunæ in the new Lord Kilmore's education. He had found nothing to admire then in it. Little they knew about Ireland, and little he cared to hear them chant of her in their fine English accent. But to-night——!

Venetia's voice was wonderfully flexible and pure, though of no great volume; one of those voices trained to that perfection of art which seems like nature. It rose as crystal clear as waters springing; it trilled as sure in sweetness as blackbird to the dawn. It had exquisite falls and tender veilings, and always that ring, pathetic, indescribable, that so unerringly pierces to the sadness which lurks somewhere in every soul. Shane's heart swelled.

"In the name of Heaven," he cried, when she had finished, "how did you come by it all?"

"By what, Lord Kilmore?"

"The sorrow and the longing of my own poor country."

"But it's quite a happy song!"

She was striking one ivory note with a finger scarcely less pale, and smiling at him, with sidesweep of eyes under long lashes. She had two ways of looking at him, as he had found already. One with a full gaze of sorrow and appeal in which she admitted him to some secret of never-to-be-spoken tragedy; and the other, as now, with a kind of enchanting, mocking invitation, swift given, swift withdrawn. Shane turned a little giddy under that look.

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"Your home was in the West, wasn't it?" She struck single notes, barely audible, between her words.

Up among the ruins, built of the fallen stones of the castle of the great old Kilmores. . . . Such a poor place! A kind of nest in the rocks, just a shelter from the storms. He told her of it in stammering phrases, each one of which held its vivid picture.

"The winds will come tearing across from the Atlantic—you'd think they'd blow the cliff away. The wind's always upon us. You may say the boom of the waves is never out of our ears, over there. Ay, I've got a little gray house in the west—and, as you sang, I saw it, and my heart was heavy to think of the door barred and the cold chimney."

"And you were longing to get back?"

"God help me!" cried Shane, staring at her with haunted blue eyes, "I was not."

"Ah!" She passed over his self-betrayal with a consummate unconsciousness. Like an elfin knell the scarcely sounded note rang on. "I'd like to see the nest in the rocks, some day."

She flung across the keys two or three rippling chords which rang like a sweeping of harp strings, then she got up. Shane sprang to his feet, too, and planted himself in front of her.

"I ought to be thanking you," he cried with an effort, "for the room you've given me. I'm told it's beautiful. I can see for myself it's grand—though," his lips twitched with a boyish smile under his small black mustache, "I'm not educated enough, Blythe tells me, to admire that pair of monsters with the grin on them, sitting by the hearth. But there are things I'm quick enough to see for myself,

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for all I grew up as wild as the colts—and that's your sweet kindness. To think of your leaving those Irish books for me to read——”

She had listened to him with downcast lids. Once again the faint smile flickered and was gone. Then a gravity came over her: gravely she fixed him, gravely she spoke:—

“I know what it is to feel like a stranger in a strange land.”

“Ah, God help you!” he exclaimed, “that was what your eyes were saying out of the picture.”

She lifted her finger to her lip.

“Hush!”

He was not sure, but he thought, and it nearly unmanned him, that the tears rose as she moved away. He wheeled quickly to follow, and saw to his amazement that the room was empty. Through the open door from across the hall, came the click of billiard balls, the noise of voices and laughter.

“Well, if that's manners——”

Lady Hobson looked over her shoulder with her wistful smile.

“Oh, yes—not such bad manners, after all, Lord Kilmore. They wouldn't drown my poor little pipe with their conversation.”

Shane listened a moment, then to his clear-cut face there came a fine disdain:—

“Glory be to God—and will you tell me, is that the way they're going on from morning till night?”

He was beside her again, and slowly they stepped into the great hall.

“Not only from morning till night,” she said, her gen-

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tle voice unmoved by satire, "but right into the small hours."

"And that is what's called pleasure? The unfortunate creatures!" Shane's tone dropped from contempt to pity. "Will no one of them ever have tasted the blessedness of silence?"

"Ah, Lord Kilmore," said Venetia, "thank you! The blessedness of silence! It is not often I hear a word I can take away with me into"—her voice fell to one of its entrancing inflections—"into my silence. Good-night."

He watched her mount the wide stairs with her slow grace. Then he went straight to his Chinese room. "What would I be doing down there among them? Wouldn't it drive me crazy—after—after my exquisite hour?"

He was still sitting between the monsters, before the white ash of his fireplace, when a red-eyed, pale-cheeked Valentine Blythe poked his head gently into the room.

"Lord, Kil, not in your beauty sleep?"

Shane roused himself and looked at the clock.

"By the powers," he exclaimed, "it's close on two!"

"And what have you been about, my fine young man?" said Valentine, entering and closing the door behind him. "You're going it pretty rapid for a pious youth just out of the catechism class."

"And what might you be meaning?"

Shane got up, to turn a blazing gaze upon his friend.

Mr. Blythe arrested himself in the middle of a yawn. He was a trifle swimmy in the head—Tim was such a fellow for thrusting drink upon you! And he'd lost more than he cared to think on over that last game of bridge.

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But he had wits enough left to perceive that his barbarian was "looking ugly." He hastened to retract:

"Don't frighten me! I'm not strong. What should I mean? Nothing at all, except that these are late hours for a man to keep—especially alone." He paused, then curiosity got the better of discretion. "What did become of you?" he questioned in his most insinuating voice.

"What became of me? It was sitting here by the fire I was, Mr. Blythe. And if you want the truth, I'm thinking my own company is a deal better than that you'd have me mixing with downstairs. Look at here, now——" Shane was very much in earnest, unwontedly fatigued, bodily and mentally; and this was the wan hour, just before the dawn, the hour in which humanity is most forlorn. The old turn of phrase, the strong Hibernian intonation, came back in full force to his tongue. "Look at here, we may as well understand each other first as last. I never was one to be spending my nights in the public house. I never liked drink, nor cards, nor found anything pleasant in the talk that does be going with them."

"My dear Kilmore!" Mr. Blythe took a backward step; he was really affronted. The coarse, common nature of the peasant was coming out with a vengeance!

"Ah," went on Shane, with his native intuition, "you think I've no call to be saying these things—you'd rather see me half drunk, like our host down there, or that old soldier that might be showing a better example, he that's had the command of men! But there's just two things that had best be made clear between us. And one is: I'll have no part with your crew here. I hate and abominate them and their ways, and their talk and their looks! They're no fit company for any one who wants to keep his

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self-respect. Public house, is it? I seen you cock your nostril at the mention of such low things. Huthen, I'll tell you the people you meet there—and what if they had drink taken, the poor creatures, they'd be ashamed——”

“But really,” interrupted Blythe, struggling between alarm and amusement, “do remember, dear lad, who wanted to come here.”

Shane's face altered.

“That's true for you—I'm not blaming you, Val. You can't help it. You're a decent fellow yourself, I know that; and it's not your fault if these are the ways of the fine folk you've got to live with.”

Mr. Blythe's face was a study. As Shane paused, he said with airiness, but narrowly watching, the while, his companion:—

“And of course, Kilmore, there's nothing easier for you than to get away. That's one comfort about our lax principles—lax we are, I own it: it's so much better than being hypocritical—nobody will care how soon you take the train.”

“I'll do no such thing!” cried the other, with a return of fierceness. “Didn't I know, when I saw the picture, how that poor lady wanted a friend? Well, it's what I came up here for. And if she'll make a friend of me, I'll be proud.”

My Blythe opened his mouth to laugh and exclaim, but shut it again at sight of Shane's countenance. “Good Lord,” he cried to himself, “the fellow's in deadly earnest! By Heaven, it is Launcelot—thinking himself Galahad!”

“And that brings me to the second point of my remarks to you,” went on Shane, still hotly wroth. “I'm

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not accustomed to have comments upon my conduct from any one; and I'll not take them from any one, mark that. I go my own way, and I've got no account to render, barring to God." His anger suddenly dropped, and he added rather piteously, passing his hand over his forehead, "I hope I'll never forget that."

"I hope not," said Valentine, with a kind of feminine spitefulness.

He went out of the room in a huff. As he shut the door, he began to whistle under his breath—rather false, because Shane had said two or three things that stung even his well armored conscience.

Shane's conscience was not well armored. And Blythe, on his side, had left a sting in it which rankled sorely. A pious youth from the catechism class!

Shane had said to the old Lord Kilmore that he would never give up his faith and his love. His love he had cast away—was his faith going, too? What was the worth of a man's faith if he didn't act up to it?

"Oh, no, no!" he cried aloud, and falling upon his knees beside the bed, prayed, wringing clasped hands, almost in agony, "I want to keep good—Help me to help her without sinning!"

V

“QUEER SAYINGS”

“You come along o’ me,” Sir Timothy had whispered, nudging Shane in the ribs after breakfast. “I’ll give you as good a morning’s sport as you ever had in your life. Got a bit of water up there in the hills, kept it for you to-day. I like going out with a fellow who understands the job. Hush! don’t let on. I don’t want those other chaps to come and fool over it. No—nor the women either.”

Shane hesitated and stammered.

“We’ll just slip out as if for a bit of a stroll. I’ve told ’em to put your rods and all the rest of it into the car. It’s waiting outside the stable gates, and we’ll jump in and off with us. Right away in the hills. The loveliest spot,” added Sir Timothy in a gusty whisper, “you ever saw in your life.”

But if the sportsman in Shane was tempted, there was yet a stronger entity in him, that of the lover.

“If it wasn’t that I promised Lady Hobson——”

Sir Timothy who had approached his guest with all the elation of a good-natured man about to confer an immense favor, drew back, scowling heavily. Shane went on steadily, though he felt his color rise.

“It was after tea last evening, she said she’d show me the gardens. I wouldn’t like to seem to be forgetting her kindness.”

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“Her ladyship? Her ladyship won’t be out of her pillows for another couple of hours. Such a morning with the clouds coming up and bit of a wind and all! And she’ll keep you dangling, and ten to one not show her nose till lunch.” As Shane stood silent, his host went on, glowering ever more:—

“Please yourself; this is Liberty Hall.”

Lady Kenneth’s strident voice sounded, from the stairs.

“I say, Tim, what are you up to?”

Sir Timothy made a gesture enjoining secrecy on Shane and hurriedly proceeded to haul himself out through the open window. Shane, set though he was on his purpose, looked after him with a double regret. No one is more sensitive to kindness than the Irishman.

“The fellow meant it well, and he’s in the right of it. It’s real fisherman’s morning. ’Pon my word, I’d have liked to have gone off with him into the hills and shown him that I can kill a salmon.”

Sunshine and cloud wrangled in the high heavens, and there were tart and sweet winds with the tang of the sea in them, which brought Shane’s soul with a leap back to his own cliffs. “I’d have liked it fine”—but there was something finer that he liked more. As he stood meditating, feeling rather like the vessel that tosses on tumbling waters, and is yet anchored, Lady Kenneth appeared at the door—Lady Kenneth, appropriately attired for breakfast in the country in a short tweed skirt and a grass-green sports coat, with her black head marvelously waved and curled, larger pearls in her ears than Shane had conceived possible, and all her war paint on.

“I say, where’s Tiny Tim?”

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“Huthen, I haven’t a notion,” said Shane, with perfect truth.

Lady Kenneth dashed away the cigarette she had been waving, and began to scream.

“He’s up to something—*Tim!* He’s bolted. I said he was up to something this morning. *Tim—Tim!*” she ran to the window and cast out of it her utmost shriek. It was answered, as if mockingly, by the hoot of a car. She turned angrily upon her fellow guest. “He’s given me the slip. He’s left me here alone with the Chinaman and that idiot Val Blythe. It’s too bad!”

“What about Colonel Darcy?”

Shane put the question banteringly. After all, he could not altogether avoid passing a word or two with the creature; and though she railed, there was something frankly jovial about her which belied her words and tone.

“Darcy!” she laughed with a crow. “You don’t know me yet, Lord Kilmore, or you’d know I’m not a spoilsport.”

“What about me?” said Shane, with a broad grin, “will I fill a gap?”

“You?” Her handsome black eye rested ponderingly upon him.

“If I could be of any use for an hour.”

“An hour? Well, upon my word!”

“Lady Hobson’s going to show me the gardens, she said, some time about noon.”

Lady Kenneth pursed her mouth for a soundless whistle.

“Now, Lord Kilmore,” she cried. Then: “I’m wondering, are you the coolest card that ever came my way—or——” She paused.

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Shane made no answer. Here it was again. What a set they were, that they must be judging everybody by their own crooked standard! After a moment she answered herself.

"I do believe—yes, positively! Lord Kilmore, I'm glad to meet you. It is extraordinarily refreshing to think that such guilelessness even exists." An odd change came over her hard, painted face. She blinked, the corners of her mouth went down; then she sniffed, and unabashedly drew a large white hand flashing with jewels across her nostrils. "Do you know," she said, "I had a little boy once, and he died. It drove me distracted. I always said if he'd lived I'd never—oh, well, never mind: I dare say I would, all the same. But when I look at you, I'm glad he's gone. He might have grown up to be just what you are. He was a good little laddie—what you are now, Lord Kilmore, what you won't be in another month or two. Couldn't have escaped, no more than you will." She came quite close to him as she finished these extraordinary remarks, and laid her bejeweled hand on his arm. "You won't be advised, I suppose? Just get a telegram, or, better still, walk to the station and take the first train, and telegraph for your luggage? Come, I'll walk with you part of the way."

She was so close to him that he could see the paint gritty on her skin, the smudges under her eyes, the vermilion varnish on her lips. "I've seen a clown do better," he thought disgustedly. And what was she after at all? The next moment she explained herself very clearly.

"If you let Venetia Hobson get hold of you, you unhappy child——"

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He flung a single glance at her, and walked away. No blasphemy could have sounded more hideous in his ears. Ah, but wasn't it always the devil's way to blaspheme against the best, the purest, the holiest? Wasn't she as good as the devil's daughter? A man had only to lay eyes on her and her goings on with another woman's husband, and she screaming for Sir Timothy, only a moment ago, tearing the place down because he had escaped her for once! And did not his own lady keep her at a distance and show with every look, and every silence and every cold word how she despised her and the rest of them? Likely, indeed, that he would believe a word from that tongue against Venetia! He wanted to get out into the clean airs and feel them blow about him; wanted, too, the solitude to put some order into the turmoil of his thoughts; but he had hardly crossed the hall before Lady Kenneth overtook him.

“I say,” she began, in the most everyday manner. “It's only just a quarter to eleven. Let's take a stroll and smoke the cigarette of peace.” She added hastily, as she saw denial in his eye: “I've been a fool . . . I'm sorry. Don't be a fool, too. And, after all, what does it matter, since you don't believe a word I said?”

She smiled with those fine teeth, that looked so oddly discolored against the unnatural scarlet of her lips. He thought her horrible; but he went.

“Come,” said Lady Kenneth, “when you've seen a little more of me, you will find I'm the best fellow in the world. I told you just now I wouldn't spoil sport for any one—and I won't. We'll just keep up and down here; and you can let Venetia see how patiently you're waiting for her—when she appears.” She blew the cigarette

NEW WINE

smoke through her nostrils, smiling with closed lips the while, fixing Shane through narrowed lids. "When she appears," she repeated. They had reached the end of the terrace; she pivoted on her heels with an abrupt movement that brought her up face to face with her companion. "She won't come, you know," she added airily.

Sir Timothy had made the same remark. Shane thought he knew better than these two; he gave no reply.

"Ah, you've got a lot to learn, young man," said Lady Kenneth, starting to walk again with a freedom of gait which was not without a kind of insolent fascination. After a few steps, she resumed: "I can't help wondering what in the name of all that's odd, brought you and Valentine Blythe together. You and Val Blythe—it's preposterous!"

"Why not?" Shane had fallen back on his ineradicable Hibernian evasiveness.

"Why not? Why, every not in the world! He has not one thought in common with you. He's not a fit companion for a jolly, open-air creature like you. He has not one single manly notion in his rotten little head. And he'll not do you any good. He's as bad a little hat as ever came into this house—and that's saying a good deal. And you—I told you just now you're too good to be here at all."

Contemning the compliment, Shane removed his cigarette to remark sarcastically that Lady Kenneth seemed to have a good opinion of her friends.

"Friends!" She gave a short laugh, "I know the people, that's all. You don't. Every time I look at you I ask myself, '*Que diable vient-il faire dans cette galère?*' Beg pardon, I forgot, you're not likely to have picked up

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French on the west coast. Well, it just means: ‘Who the devil has brought you into such company?’ ”

Shane’s mind went back with a leap: some one else had spoken French to him, and had translated: *The Hour Exquisite!* That hour impregnated with fragrance, with music, with sweetness; with, for him, worship. He was not likely to tell Lady Kenneth what had brought him here.

“As for poor Blythe, what have you got against the fellow?” he asked suddenly.

“Val, you mean?” she laughed again, with a sniff down her nostrils. “Oh, nothing, only that he’s a little worm!” She dropped her half-smoked cigarette and put her foot on it as if she were crushing the said worm; then, stopping to pick out another from her case, she proceeded: “Just now what I’ve got against him is his bringing you here.”

“Well, you’ve nothing against him, then, if that’s all. For, as to my coming here——” He paused for a moment, his eyes fixed with rapt gaze on the far-away hills. “There’s nothing in the world I wanted so much as to come here,” he said. Then, bringing his glance back to her, with a glint of mirth: “You want to know what I find in Mr. Blythe. I’ll tell you, now: good nature. He’s always willing to oblige. And he’s obliged me.”

“But—please don’t walk on, Lord Kilmore, I must light my cigarette from yours—but I hadn’t the least idea—I thought—certainly I understood that you’d never met Lady Hobson before, nor Tim either.”

Shane had already said too much. He patiently allowed his fingers to be clutched while she lighted her cigarette: she, on her side, paused frequently in the process to stare up at him with avid eyes of curiosity.

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"Maybe," he said, as they drew apart at last, "I'd heard what a sportsman Sir Timothy is. Maybe I had a fancy to kill a Scotch salmon. Anyhow, I wanted to come."

"Bosh."

"If it comes to that, why are you here yourself?"

She gave him an angry glance over her shoulder.

"If you're going to be cheeky——!" she checked herself. "Why do I come here? Because I like to get away for Whitsuntide—and I like a place where there's a lot of money going—there's money going here still, though poor Tim is in a regular financial mess—and I like good food, and I can have a decent game of bridge. And, besides, I like old Tim. Yes, I like old Tim. I'm awfully fond of him. And I'm sorry for him, too."

Perhaps she read on his countenance something of the contempt that filled his soul; she dropped the sentimental tone, and burst forth:—

"Why do any of us come here? Because we can't go anywhere else. Who's going to come up here, do you think, excepting creatures like me; creatures like Dorrie Thurso?" her laugh became dreadful. "And Venetia's got to have some one, if only for the men to take in to dinner!"

They were close to the end of the terrace, and Shane paused by the balustrade. Stone vases were set on it at intervals, brimmed with forget-me-nots, out of which tall tulips rose; the sweet wine-scent from the yellow chalices came to his nostrils. There were white narcissus, too, at the foot of the walls. And the airs were full of the indescribable perfumes of young beech leaves and of the sappy thrusting green that was lush everywhere. So

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fresh and fair a day, so noble a prospect, so vivid a sky, where white cloud and sunshine made glorious play; in his own heart such high, reverent, tender emotions, and in his ears—this talk! Oh, how must she suffer, when even he felt every breath he drew poisoned!

“These are very queer sayings,” pronounced the young man at last; “and I don’t know, I’m sure, how we came by this sort of discussion at all. It wouldn’t be for me to be judging you, or Lady Thurso either. I’m no judge of grand ladies,” said poor Shane.

She interrupted him.

“Grand ladies! You’re too delicious! Dorrie Thurso—the Frivolity girl who married a wretched imbecile youth——”

“Well, it’s no matter. She won’t do me any harm, anyhow—nor will you either.”

She made an odd grimace. “Oh, you foolish child. I want to do you good and you won’t let me. You know too much about me, I expect.”

“I know nothing at all about you.”

“What?”

“Barring what I’ve seen for myself.”

Amazement had been stamped on Lady Kenneth’s countenance. Now, under her paint, she crimsoned.

“Thank you. It sounds complimentary. Of course I don’t believe you: I know Val’s tongue.”

“He never so much as mentioned your name.”

She became exceedingly thoughtful.

“What’s his little game?” she said, half audibly. Then, staring at Shane: “Yet you were together an hour before dinner last night. What is his little game?” she repeated aloud. “Listen to me, Lord Kilmore,” she went

NEW WINE

on, as he met the question with the silence which he found his best weapon. "I'll tell you then. I'm as well-born as any woman in this kingdom. I'm a duke's daughter. I married a Campbell of Inverisle. He was a beast to me, and I dare say I was a beast to him. And when I lost my boy, I couldn't stand it any more. I ran away with a cousin of my own, the brother of the man who stepped into my father's shoes. He's about as sick of me now as I am of him. He goes his way, I go mine. I've made every mistake a woman can make, and of course I'm jolly well punished. But that's justice. Hit a woman when she's down, because she's down. However, that's neither here nor there, you needn't turn your eyes away like that. Ah, you shall listen to me! Don't think I've told you all this to stop now. I will say it. Bad as you think me, I'm better company for you this moment—you're safer with me, poor innocent, than with Venetia Hobson."

Her voice was high and strained as she called these words after him, for he was marching away at the utmost stride of his long legs.

As she watched him disappear down the terrace steps, she stamped her foot. "I'm a fool—I'm a fool!" she cried. Tears sprang to her eyes. She let them run down her cheek; her paint was of the kind that does not wash off.

Shane came back into the house round by the stables. The stable clock had not yet marked the half-hour before noon. He hung about the hall; he read, without understanding, several columns of yesterday's paper; ventured a reconnaissance in drawing-room and library; peered

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into the billiard-room—where the mere sight of Blythe and the expert in things Chinese drove him forth in a hurry. One o'clock struck. She had not kept her promise: both her husband and her friend had been right! The luncheon gong boomed through the house. Lady Thurso, looking extraordinarily pretty, in her rapsallion way, in a black and white jumper and a red leather hat, appeared with the veteran in faithful attendance, twisting as usual his trim mustache.

Lady Kenneth, black as thunder, holding a yellow French novel between finger and thumb, descended the great staircase, a cigarette sticking between revarnished red lips. She flung the book at one of the bulldogs that was snoring loudly before the wood fire, tossed her cigarette into the flame, and declared with a loud, unmirthful laugh, that she did not care whether Vee came down or not, she must and would have her lunch.

“So hungry, Lady Ken?” The man with the Chinese face, whom for no reason, Shane hated more than any other being in a house full of people that he hated, stood rubbing his hands and smiling.

“I’ve a right to be hungry, I’ve had a walk. I haven’t been stewing before the fire like you two pigs. I had a lovely walk with Lord Kilmore.” She gave Shane a challenging look.

“I’m always greedy, thank the Lord, like the man in Punch,” said Blythe.

“I’m only greedy for chocolate creams.” Dorrie Thurso thrust her round kitten face engagingly forward, and licked her lips quite unconsciously, Colonel Darcy regarding her the while with a kind of tender patronage;

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very much, indeed, as an amiably disposed mastiff would regard a kitten.

"Will any one," screamed Lady Kenneth, "do me the favor to bang that gong again? Here, Mr. Browne, you. Isn't playing on the gong a Chinese accomplishment?"

"Stay your hand, Joss Sticks!" Val made a gesture towards the great stairs. "Here comes our dearest hostess."

Venetia was stepping slowly towards them. She looked very slender and distinguished in white serge garments of severe cut. The rather broad brim of a white-winged hat threw a shadow over her eyes, but Shane could see that they were fixed on him.

"Good morning to you all," she said. Then he shuddered to see her lend her cheek to Lady Kenneth's kiss. She gave a hand to Lady Thurso with formal greeting; to the other men a smile. And then her gaze was upon him again.

"Did you wait?" He had never heard a voice so expressive, so controlled; singing or speaking, it gave the pure music of her emotion. Now it was low and full of sweet courtesy, and yet imperious. "Ah, you waited! You did not forget? Neither did I. I could not come—but postponed is not lost. The gong went, didn't it? Come, Isobel."

Lady Kenneth made her grimace.

"There's no reason because you don't happen to care for food, Vee, that you should prevent other people from enjoying theirs. I'm sure your cutlets are ruined—sure to be cutlets—and I've lost the fine edge of my appetite."

VI

THE HOUR DIABOLIC

"It's too bad of Tim!" said Lady Kenneth. She had not recovered her temper. "He knows quite well I only came here for him. What am I going to do with myself now?" She rolled her bold, discontented eye from Valentine Blythe to Joscelyn Browne.

"There certainly is," said Blythe, with a titter and a blush, "a remarkable simplicity about the social arrangements in this house."

They were all three standing on the terrace. On the right, in the direction of the rhododendron glade and the sea, Lady Thurso, in her jumper, could still be seen, leisurely strolling away with her elderly Adonis. To the left, in the direction of the garden, Lord Kilmore and his hostess were receding, the white slimness seeming to drift by his side. Now and again these two halted, to go on slowly: it was evident they were absorbed in each other's conversation.

"The animals went in two by two," hummed Blythe.

"Well, if you don't pair, what's to be done in a place like this?" snapped she.

"I'm agreeable, I'm sure," Valentine protested, with his blushing impertinence.

Lady Kenneth laughed disagreeably.

"Mr. Browne did bore me so, yesterday, with his Ping, or was it Pong, periods."

NEW WINE

“Ming,” corrected that gentleman, smiling back no whit more pleasantly. “I’m very sorry, Lady Kenneth, to have inflicted art talk upon you. Lady Hobson is so remarkably cultivated and appreciative, she has encouraged me too much.”

“She’s got a young barbarian to-day to play with: you and your pots are nowhere. He’s off! Quite right, old man, we don’t want you a bit. Do we, Lady Ken?”

“Not a bit.” She looked at Val derisively. “So it’s Hobson’s choice for me.”

“Hobson’s choice for me,” repeated Valentine, cackling. He suddenly broke off. “I say, how deadly appropriate!”

“What do you mean? Don’t be a fool. Let’s sit here and smoke. Roaming palls, in my old age. What do you mean by Hobson’s choice? I wasn’t—worse luck. It’s that wretched Irishman that’s got her to-day.”

“Oh, my dear lady. *Tout cela est relatif*. Dear old Tim, of course, he’s had a good many. I was speaking of the present.”

An unwilling satisfaction crept over Lady Kenneth’s sullen face. She once more perfunctorily bade him not be a fool; then, striking a match, she turned challengingly.

“I’ve just been asking myself all day what your game is with that young barbarian, as you call him.”

Valentine wriggled and colored; his green eyes glinted their most insolent mockery.

“My dear Lady Ken, I rather think I’m playing your little game.”

“Now what do you mean?” The darkening of her whole face showed that she understood well enough.

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"I mean that I love helping lame dogs over stiles—I'm the most good-natured fellow in the world."

"That's what the poor lad said of you, only this morning."

"Well, it does give me a vast amount of pleasure to be good-natured all round. He wanted, oh, quite madly, to know our dear Venetia, fell in love with Cornelius James's picture of her in the Academy. Awfully clever thing—have you seen it? He simply raved. I knew poor dear Venetia was boring herself to extinction here, and that Tiny Tim and she are more fed up than ever with each other. Why shouldn't I do my best to make everybody happy, all round? You remember the sweet little hymn—'Little deeds of kindness.' Come, you can't say it's not your little game!"

Lady Kenneth was sitting forward, her clasped hands between her knees.

She puffed for some time in silence, then removed the cigarette and turned a searching look upon the smooth, innocent blond face.

"Granting every one's little game," she said slowly, "what puzzles me is why you should be playing it."

"Doesn't my good nature explain?"

"Not at all—and Val, I'll box your ears if you look at me like that! Why have you fastened on to that boy? What kind of advantage is it to you to fling him into such hands as Venetia's? Do explain, I'm really curious! It's not as if you were badly off. (If you had had to work for your living it would have been the making of you.) But you're not up a tree, are you? No, I thought not; you're a careful little thing; it's not sponging then."

"Sponging!"

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Valentine Blythe flamed in earnest.

"Well, I have just said it's not. What is it?"

The color slowly faded from Mr. Blythe's forehead. He let himself sink deeper into the yielding manila of the garden chair. Staring up at the chasing clouds and holding his cigarette between his first and second finger, he seemed to give himself up to reflection. Presently, without moving, he remarked:—

"Has it never dawned upon you, dear Lady Ken, that there is such a thing as artistic pleasure?"

"I do wish you would speak plain!"

"That's just it." He sat, his rather too long hair ruffled, his eyes dancing. He stammered a little, as he always did when excited. "That's just it. Plain. I was born two-pence colored. Ah, you haven't read your Stevenson. Never mind. I'll be as plain as nature will allow." He grinned. "The pleasure an artist takes, dear lady, is in the beauty of a work of art. You understand that? Quite so. If he's a generous, second-rate sort of fellow, he will take pleasure in the beauty of any work of art. But if he is a real genius, if he's possessed with the jealous fury of his own capacity, he will be altogether absorbed in his own work. And the sole ecstasy of life for him will be the fashioning of the clay in the perfect statue."

"I'm not quite so stupid as you think. But I don't see the application."

"Don't you? I am the genius in this case. My young barbarian is the clay."

"Not at all!" The retort came swift. "You've handed your clay over to Venetia."

"Not at all," he mocked back; "the artist uses instru-

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ments. Dear Venetia is one of mine—the most important.”

“Valentine Blythe!” Lady Kenneth sat up. “Give me a straight answer for once in your life! What’s at the bottom of it? For what conceivable reason can it give you pleasure to throw an innocent boy——”

She stopped. An indescribable change had come over her companion’s face—a something evil that squinted in the eyes and jeered in the mouth; a sudden blighting of all the smooth fairness as if under a withering wind.

“Innocent!” he exclaimed. “Pah!”

Lady Kenneth rose.

“Val Blythe,” she declared, “you’re a devil.” And as she walked away, she muttered to herself, “God knows I ought to be a judge.”

The garden at Creewater was after the Scotch fashion, set away from the house, enclosed by high walls. It was a very fair place, this Whit Saturday on the lip of June. For the apple-trees in the long espaliers were still a drift of blossom, and the May-flowering tulips and all the other late spring flowers were at their high diapason of beauty.

Shane, in all his life, had never seen such lavish loveliness. He was able, now, to taste the incense of the narcissus. The driven clouds sent shadows racing up the garden slope, and color leapt behind each as it passed. A blackbird was singing somewhere. He could not speak; Venetia smiled as she contemplated him.

“I love my garden. I only bring friends here. That is why I locked the gate behind us just now.”

She shook the key. Delicate laughter ran over her face, as the sunshine over the garden, chasing the sadness.

NEW WINE

"I'm fine and glad to hear you say I'm a friend," said he.

It was an effort to him to speak at all to this wonderful creature, his own voice sounded too rough; he felt his untutored tongue hopelessly blundering. An odd, inarticulate conviction was on him that she would understand him best of all without speech. She, however, took his remark with amity.

"But I kept my friend waiting. That was unkind."

"Ah, it was not!"

"No, it was not unkindness. It was just——" she paused so long that he had to urge:—

"Wouldn't you be telling me?"

"My friend—I think it was, on the contrary, kindness."

He did not understand; his troubled face showed that. After a pause, with the faintest accent of vexation, she went on:—

"Why should I inflict my sadness on any one, above all, on my friends?"

He gave her a swift, questioning glance: that was not what she had meant. He wondered.

"But why should there be sadness to-day?" she cried, with an assumption of gayety that struck his quick sensibility as infinitely more sorrowful than her melancholy. "After all, nothing can rob us of these God-given things—the flowers, the birds, the sunshine, the quiet hour apart from the turmoil of an empty world."

"The Hour Exquisite."

She regarded him with curious searching from under lowered lids. The ghost of a smile flickered on her face, and was gone.

"Let us sit on that bench, it is quite warm, and we

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shall smell the honeysuckle. It *is* an exquisite hour," she went on, drawing off her loose wash-leather glove and clasping her bare hands on her lap. They were not be-ringed, these slender hands, save for the single circlet which looked too heavy for such frailty. Staring down at them, Shane remembered an odd phrase of Val Blythe's—Empty fellow as he was, he had a gift of clothing the thought as it flew with a filmy garment. The hands of a soul—and on one of them the fetter! He knew now what a fetter, and why she was sad.

"When you go back to your room," said Lady Hobson—it was not in her to be abrupt, yet she was forever startling him—"you will find the monsters gone."

"The monsters from the chimney corner?"

"You did not like them. I have ordered them to be taken away and put outside the door of my sitting-room."

"What matter if I liked them or not, I like worse to think of them near you. There ought not to be any ugliness where you are."

"Ah, but it cannot be helped! I must make up my mind to ugly things. That's why I have had them put there—as a reminder."

He recalled how they had seemed to him like Sir Timothy, and a strangling sense of impotence and wrath prevented speech. Then, very slowly, she turned her head and shifted her gaze till it was fixed full upon him; the eyes of the portrait; the eyes that pleaded, that called such unutterable things to his manhood, out of the unfathomable miseries of her woman's soul. He cried:

"In the name of God, can nothing be done?"

NEW WINE

Like last night, she put her finger to her lip and whispered.

“Hush! ‘The heart knoweth its own bitterness,’” she sighed! “How wonderful those words are!—Ah, there’s a blue butterfly! You have not seen my little sitting-room?”

His gaze, which had followed the gesture of her hand, came back to her face. Shane’s smile had always a peculiar radiance; but now, as he smiled on her, there was an extraordinary tenderness on his usually hard young face.

“I’m thinking,” he said, “it’s like the butterfly you are yourself—flitting from one thing to the other! How am I to keep up with you at all?”

“Butterfly—the emblem of the soul!” she smiled back. “But I was saying, you have not been to my little sitting-room. When they’re all at church to-morrow—Tim is a regular church-goer,” her lips twisted ironically, “the rest will follow suit, you and I can be pagans; and if you come to my own sanctum, I will sing to you. I couldn’t really sing last night, the drawing-room is too big for any voice, and it was full of—well, I keep my room, like my garden, for my friends.”

“To-morrow’s Whit-Sunday!” Astonishment was in Shane’s wide-open gaze, and something like fear in his voice.

“What of it—are you, too, such a church-goer?” Venetia drew into herself, as the flower that closes at evening.

“Whit-Sunday, or any Sunday, it’s no matter. I’ve got to go to Mass.”

“To Mass!” Her tone was bleak and thin.

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“Didn’t you know?” he exclaimed, frowning. A thunder-cloud gathered upon him. “It’s the Catholic I am.” Enmities centuries-old, unforgotten persecutions, inherited battle-ardors, flashed from his whole being as in fires. “Maybe,” he went on, “you’d not have been having me up here, if you’d known?”

“Oh, it’s not that!” She wrung her hands. “I never thought——” She was pale, trembling. Here was no cultivated emotion but genuine distress. In a moment, however, the composure, the aloofness which formed, as it were, her own special atmosphere, shut her away from him. That inner self, of which he had had a startling glimpse, was thrust back into its prison, only to look out at him as before, through barred windows.

“I ought to have known, my friend,” she said, with a sweetness which might have rung false enough to any ears less infatuated. “From the moment you came I knew, I felt the difference. Oh, the blessed difference! There is nothing in the world better than a *good* Catholic. I am glad you are one of them.”

But even while she spoke thus, in a tone even more honeyed than the words, there was something in her eyes which he miserably felt thrust him from her. Two thoughts, both anguishing, rushed against each other in his brain. “It’s the old story, after all; the English Protestant, and the Irish Catholic!” This was the first thought, a sore and angry one. The second was a leaping horror. “It’s no religion at all she has, the creature!”

“How cold it has turned,” said Lady Hobson. “That’s the worst of this kind of breezy day. One can’t really sit out in any comfort.”

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She got up. A passing cloud had drifted between their world and the sun; the whole face of the garden was changed. Under the shadow of her winged hat she had, to his excited fancy, the air of one ready to fly from him in a wild dismay.

He had thought this another *l'Heure Exquise*, and it was all broken up; blurred, darkened in a moment, as was the sky over their heads. He followed her in silence to the gate. As she pulled the key out of the lock, she said, without looking at him:—

“You would like to go to the first Mass. I will order my own car for you at half-past seven.”

Question sprang to his lips; some instinct refused it utterance. First Mass—how did she have it all so pat? She was the perfect hostess, Val Blythe's boast had not been vain. Was this gracious forethought for a guest only an instance of her hospitality?

“I'm afraid it will be a power of trouble. I'd think nothing of walking it.”

“Ten miles?” She gave him a fugitive smile.

“That same.”

“And get lost—no, no, what nonsense! If you want to go you must have the car.”

“I'm very thankful to you. I would have thought nothing of the walk, though. Isn't the Irish mile half as long again as the English? And you should see the way the poor people in Clare come over the mountains, barefoot every step of the way, until they get in sight of the chapel, when they'll draw on their boots.”

“How touching!” said Venetia.

Shane closed his lips abruptly. And after that it was in silence that they went back to the terrace. A some-

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thing intangible had come between them, and snapped, for the moment, the link that had seemed so subtly strong.

On the terrace they found Val Blythe, who lifted his eyebrows as he stood up.

“So soon back?”

“It was cold in the garden.” Lady Hobson gave a slight shiver.

“Was it?” Val glanced from one to the other, and laughed.

Shane could not have said why, but the laugh stung him. He glowered at Val, and this gentleman edged away with a flapping of hands and a cabriole pantomimic of alarm.

“Do try not to be silly!” said Venetia.

Even a dove will peck.

That night Venetia had no song for any one. Shane had no moment apart with her. She talked, indeed, most of the time to Mr. Joscelyn Browne. They sat apart, and Shane could not hear what their low-pitched voices were saying, but she seemed interested, that was all. Only from Mr. Browne's gestures, indicating invisible curves, measuring invisible proportions, now and again even outlining invisible flowers with one finger, he guessed that the discussion was restricted to China.

For the rest it was a very uproarious night. Lady Thurso was induced to give a selection of her popular songs and dances to the accompaniment of the gramophone.

Shane, in his wildest nightmare, had never dreamed of such sounds or sights. There was no way of escape for him, as on the previous evening, though, indeed, “if she

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can stand it," he said to himself more than once, gazing unhappily at Venetia, "it would be strange if I couldn't." How could she stand it? Yet what could she do? "God help her!" His eyes shifted from her half-averted face to Sir Timothy's great grin. Good Lord, what a conjunction!

Sir Timothy had returned, very patchy as to complexion and temper, from a fruitless day on his hill lake; and Lady Kenneth's unsparing gibes had not tended to improve matters. But the mollifying effect of dinner, and Lady Thurso's kicks and squeals, her audacious eye, her apt gesture, had restored him to good-humor.

"'Pon my word," he cried, removing his big cigar at the end of a particularly lively turn, "this is what I call perfection! To sit here in your own house, your own arm-chair with your own peg beside you, and have the best star of the Frivolity shining—eh—what? That's good, ain't it? The best star shining just for yourself, you know! I say, Lady Thurso, give us that again! Eh, what, Darcy? Encore! Don't know when I've enjoyed anything so much. This is what I call having a jolly hour. Turn it on again, Blythe, there's a good chap."

The gramophone orchestra started its frantic lilt once more.

Shane flung a despairing look at Venetia. Would she not look back at him, were it even with the gaze of suffering unbearable? Anything rather than to remain shut out from the night of her tragedy as well as from the moonlike radiance of her amenity. But, wrapped in white gossamer draperies, she still sat, her countenance

THE HOUR DIABOLIC

turned upon Joscelyn Browne. Once or twice she cast a vague, forced smile upon the outrageous circle. For him there was nothing.

The gramophone brayed on. It was for Shane the hour diabolical.

VII

THE WHITE SHRINE

“Do you really like it?”

“I like it fine. It’s——” Shane hesitated, “it’s like walking into a hawthorne tree in the Maytime.”

“I had a fancy,” said Lady Hobson, “for white this year. Last year I had all the colors of old enamels. But I got to hate that.”

Thus spoke the wife of the millionaire. Shane was too ignorant, too much obsessed by his own thoughts, moreover, either to notice the fantastic costliness of everything about him, or to reflect upon the caprice revealed by these words. The purity of the white room—all tones of white from the gray-whites of plaster work ceiling and frieze, the ivory of paneled walls, the pearl of shimmering satins, to the amber whites of the bearskins on the enameled floor—struck him with a kind of awe. He felt it, poignantly, to be the fitting refuge for his pure lady, prisoner, through no fault of hers, in some palace of hell. At the same time, his heart was torn upon the thought that, on a Whitsunday morning, here she sat, while even those others had gone to try and sanctify it, albeit after their blind heretic fashion. Was there never a prayer on her lips, and she so unhappy, the creature? And was not that the worst sorrow of all?

“He brought you to the church all right?”

Shane started slightly.

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“Ay, he brought me to the chapel. Thanking you kindly.”

“It must have been,” said Venetia in a slow voice, “rather lovely going off in the morning to kneel in that simple place.”

He did not reply. He had brought his soul to the altar of his faith as the seaman takes his craft into the harbor from the storm. Now he was out on the tossing waters again. He thought back on that place of security and peace always at hand for him, no matter how far he seemed to stray; and the vials of pity broke within him, pity welled uncontrollably to his lips.

“How can you get on at all, if you never pray?”

She stared at him a moment, lips parted, her eyes—yes, he was sure of it now—terrified. Then she moved that hunted gaze away from him, to look at something behind him; it remained fixed, its terror deepening. Shane involuntarily turned to look, too. A small silver crucifix mounted on crystal hung on the panel.

“Why should you say I do not pray?” Her voice strove for calmness, but failed. She covered her face with her hands, and broke into wild weeping. He sat helpless, paralyzed; then he asked her, in God’s name what ailed her; then he told her she was tearing his heart out; then at last he fell on his knees beside her and laid his cold, trembling touch upon her drenched fingers. She caught at him, and for one minute, agony and bliss to him, they clasped hands, and he saw her piteous face quivering, beaten by her tears as the flower by the rain—never in his eyes more lovely. He could find no words for his grief, nor for his love! In a passion of compassion

he bent his head and kissed, one after the other, the hands he held.

At that she drew them from him, pushed her chair back, and sprang to her feet. Staring down at him as he knelt, she asked, in a whisper, if he guessed——

“Guessed?” Still kneeling, he lifted his blue eyes, bewildered, candid, ardent.

“Ah!” she cried sharply, “you’re like a knight, kneeling there! You’re not of this age, while I——” She did not finish the sentence, but moving swiftly, took the crucifix from the wall. “I have no right to keep it! It was given to my mother by an old Italian cardinal. She gave it to me when I made my first communion——”

Shane struck his hands together with the wild gesture of the peasant of the west.

“God be good to me, it’s the Catholic you are yourself!” The flash of joy on his face was succeeded by an overwhelming dismay. He got up, stepped back, and exclaimed, contemplating her as if she had suddenly become altogether strange: “But then, it’s the bad Catholic you are!”

“That’s your conclusion?” She was not crying now; her self-control had returned. She stood, delicately holding the wonderful crucifix and glancing from it to him and back again, with just the faintest quiver as of a smile at the corner of her lips.

“What would any one be thinking, and you not going to Mass?”

“Oh, that!” Her lip lifted; it was a smile, but the sight of it gave him an inward shudder. “Perhaps that’s the best of me. Here,” she said suddenly, “I will give

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you the crucifix; it was the last thing left of it all. I ought not to keep it. Take it, I give it to you."

She advanced two or three steps, holding it out to him; but he went back before her.

"Don't tell me"—there was horror in his voice, and in his refusing hands—"that you are an apostate!"

"Only an outcast—I cast myself out, when I married—my husband!"

If she had said "my jailer, my tormentor, the being I abhor most upon earth," she could not have expressed contemptuous loathing more utterly than by the emphasis she laid on the two words.

"You were not married in the Catholic Church, I take it," said Shane.

His chest heaved with a long breath. The question of the *ne temer* decree is a burning one in all Catholic communities; even so remote a spot as Clenane had had its grapple with it. She gave him a sudden curious, scrutinizing look.

"Is it possible you don't know anything about me?—you, Val Blythe's friend!"

Here was almost the same phrase that Lady Kenneth had used and he winced at the coincidence. The intense scrutiny of her eyes relaxed; she closed her lids and sighed. Then, with a gesture which to him seemed very pathetic, she lifted the crucifix to her lips.

"It is not as the emblem of my salvation that I dare kiss it, but for the memory of my mother. She was a saint. Ah, if my mother had lived!"

This time the fresh parallel did not strike him. "If my little boy had lived!" had said Lady Kenneth—but

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the word mother had found a chord which vibrated in his already ringing heart.

“My own mother,” he exclaimed, “was lost on me, and I only a child!”

“Oh, my life would have been so different,” went on Venetia, as if she had not heard, “had my sweet mother lived.” Sinking into a chair she laid the crucifix on a table beside her. “Sit down, Lord Kilmore.” She had recovered her astonishing power over herself. Her voice had its usual sweetness; her countenance save for a slight blurring of the clear features, showed no trace of discomfiture. “I do not know how there has come to be such strange confidence between us; but, since it is so, let it be complete. You used a cruel word to me just now—apostate! No, I am not an apostate. But it is true that I married Sir Timothy against the law of the Church—that new law which will not recognize any marriage except under pledges which some men, faithful to their own creed, will not give. I see in your eyes what you think: why was I unfaithful to mine? Why? ah, why?” Tears again rose into her voice, tears which would not be shed. She turned her slow gaze, with its unuttered anguish, upon him. “I was very unhappy, very—friendless, I may say; left, in a way, desolate. In poverty, too! I had no good friend to help me, no strong hand to cling to. And Timothy—well, he seemed different then. He was different. He did love me, I think. I believed in him, in his promises. I thought I could trust him. Afterwards—when I found out—it was too late.”

“Why should it be too late?”

Shane, sitting on a low chair, his hands clasped loosely between his knees, had not moved his ardent, troubled

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gaze from her face since the beginning of her elliptic talk. She gave a little shrug.

"After seven years' bondage!"

"What matter?"

The agonized pleading in her eyes became softened. A smile hovered. Her whole being seemed to waver exquisitely between laughter and tears.

"Dear friend—I ought to say, dear child—how little you know the world!"

"I know the difference between right and wrong."

"Ah, no, it is impossible! No one can retrace life's steps." Gravity fell upon her like a black mantle, extinguishing the flicker of light. "There is no turning back, I must go on. I have cut the old ties, the new ones are all I have. There is not a door that would open to me. There is not a single human being in the world who would stretch out a hand——"

"There is."

He rose and stood towering over her. She glanced up and shrank from the flame in his blue eyes.

"You can come to me," said Shane. His voice was perfectly steady, but passion spoke in it, as when some new stop in the organ adds a strange quality to the peal. "In the eyes of God you are a free woman, you are bound by no ties." His Irish delicacy would not phrase to her ears the thoughts uppermost in his mind. "*You are not married at all—you are living in sin!*"

"Glory be to God!" cried Shane, flinging his arms wide, "you're free. You can come to me and back to your faith at one step. You can leave the past behind altogether. Isn't it what I've been sent here for, to take you away from misery—and black misery, too? Isn't that

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what your eyes were asking me out of the picture? Weren't you crying for help? Maybe you did not know it yourself, but you were. Well, here I am. I can give you my name. I can give you a home. I'll give you all the love of my heart. I'll give you better than that. I'll give you back the peace of God."

Those outstretched arms would have been folded about her, but she slipped from him like a blown mist.

"No, no—no, you don't know what you're asking! It is madness—it is impossible!" She was shaken with a laugh, so faint, so mirthless, that she might have been a thing of no substance, but altogether spirit—and that lost. "Oh, you don't know," she repeated, waving frantic hands of repulsion, though he stood still, rooted. "You don't know what you're asking. Were it possible for me, it would be, oh, so impossible for you! How could I, how could I ruin your young life?"

Shane, who had been swift of thought and tongue in his old existence, had become a man of few words in this new sphere of his; partly because, in his soul, he was among strangers; partly because of the sensitive pride which kept him conscious of his own disadvantages in the social give and take. With her, with Venetia, he was, even on this wave of high feeling, more cautious of speech, more fearful of solecism than with any one else. He was still twisting upon his untaught tongue the ardors that sought expression, when from the far distance came the note of a motor horn.

"They're coming back!" she cried, took two or three steps towards the door, then halted. "No, don't stop me! Don't speak a word! This must never be spoken again between us. It is the only thing—it is the best. Oh,

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if you knew, this is the best thing I've ever done in my life! I can hang that crucifix on the wall again and look at it, and feel, and feel——”

Her voice gave on a sob. The next instant she had closed the door between them with a movement that was almost violent.

The motor-horn hooted again, under the window—to Shane's fancy it sounded like the cry of a triumphant devil. When he came out of the room, the great corridor was empty. From the hall below Lady Kenneth's strident voice was already eddying up. On entering that room, he had not noticed the two bronze monsters posted one on each side of the door. He saw them now and, with a shudder, was again struck by the resemblance to Sir Timothy in the grotesque half-human countenances turned sideways on bull necks to grin upwards. They were to be a reminder to her, she had said. Shane set his teeth: what though all the powers of evil were against him, he would fight them!

“Did you ever see such a fellow?” murmured Valentine to Mr. Joscelyn Browne, indicating Shane with a slight jerk of his head. “He'll sit like that, apparently thinking, for an hour at a time, and never move. What do you imagine goes on inside that black head? I've known him nearly a year; and I vow I have not the faintest notion.”

Mr. Browne gave a cold stare across the room. Shane was sitting by the hearth of the smoking-room, where smoldering logs crumbled gray in the streaming sunshine. A short pipe was between his lips and not a muscle of his

face moved, save when, at long intervals, he drew sufficient breath to keep the tobacco alive.

"He is probably just sitting and hating us all, after his Irish fashion," said Joscelyn Browne.

He had from the first disliked Mr. Blythe's barbarian: there was no more room for such pure, unspoilt virility in his peculiar scheme of culture than there would have been place among his fantastic Chinese treasures for a Greek statue.

"Dear Joss Sticks," burred Mr. Blythe, "I think you're wrong. What's the matter with my cub is that he is loving somebody too much."

The curio collector grinned; and it did not add to the attractiveness of his countenance.

"I can't help wondering, my good Blythe, what on earth you find in this cub of yours? Your own word, and very apt."

"I'm licking him into shape," Mr. Blythe smiled back. "Getting on very nicely, thank you. You must admit I've turned him out well. Did you ever see a more perfect suit for a Whitsunday morning in the country? And, Lord, what a fit—and what a figure to fit!"

"Granted the clothes and the figure, you haven't found it so easy to mold the inner savage, it would seem. And really, why should you inflict your peasant-boy on such a special creature as our hostess—a soul rich from the past, if ever there was one, a soul that, among other Karmas, has certainly tasted love and power and art and beauty in medieval Florence? What can she have in common with this raw stuff straight from the potato field?"

"Dear old Joss-Sticks! Church has disagreed with you. You're soured. . . . It is a pity that dear Venetia

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could not send you tootling off to a Buddhist temple in the vicinity, as she did my young papist there to his Mass. And, by the way—his service does not appear to have agreed with him so very well either, judging by that darkling brow. I must inquire into this.”

Mr. Blythe got up, cast his half-smoked cigarette into the ash tray as he passed, and strolled up to the hearth.

“‘Why so pale, gentle Shepherd, why so pale?’ In other words, why so pensive, dear Shane? It was rather sad, I take it—going off to pray by your lonesome, all in the cold gray dawn.” He drew a light chair near his friend as he spoke, and sat down astride to grin at him across its back. “Or was it the service in the little white shrine upstairs that produced your lordship’s air of compunction? Take care, dear boy, there may be danger to the uninitiated in its enchanting ritual.”

Shane, who had been content to glower over his pipe in reply to the first remark, now got up, very slowly but with no uncertain threat in his whole air.

“It will be well for you to take care.”

He dropped the words and strolled away. Blythe wilted beneath the menace. Though he could not refrain from taunting Shane, he had, nevertheless, a profound respect for his swift angers. He had rarely come so near to the lightning flash.

“Cub growling?” mocked the Chinaman from his corner.

“Very nearly bit,” admitted Valentine, with his titter.

When they all met again, Venetia, with a flush on the ivory of her cheek, a curious light in her shadowed eyes, displayed an unwonted gayety. She laughed, she even joked. Colonel Darcy who, two or three times, had put

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up his monocle, as if to examine a new interesting personality, edged away from Dorrie Thurso, whose *gamine* charm seemed suddenly mean—like a candle-flame in a moony radiance—to attach himself to his hostess.

In the somnolent hour after lunch, Venetia took up a guitar from the wall and sang two or three Havanese songs. Rhythm, defiance, languor, and fire blended; all in the perfection of taste within the measure of perfect art, it was an exquisite performance: it thrust back Dorrie Thurso's "turn" of the night before into the trivial regions to which it belonged. Even Sir Timothy roused himself from lethargy to call out "bravo," and roll appraising eyes in which admiration struggled with cynical amusement.

Shane, troubled, goaded, puzzled, listened and was dumb. The passionate pity of the morning, the high and knightly resolve to rescue his forlorn lady in the teeth of all difficulty, even in spite of herself, gave place to whirling jealousy, to an all human turmoil. But his resolution had merely sunk its foundations to greater depth.

He had not one word with her during the rest of the day. That evening Lady Thurso was allotted to him, while the hostess chose Colonel Darcy, who had certainly changed allegiance with the most open candor.

Mr. Blythe was wont to keep an ever watchful eye upon his neophyte; to-night there was uneasiness and doubt in his observation. It is all very well to take amusement in the education of a savage, but disconcerting to find the said savage inclined to make use of his new opportunities for some quite uncivilized purpose of his own. Mr. Blythe did not like the expression with which Shane re-

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garded Venetia, nor did he find reassurance in that lady's sudden expansion, her delicate efflorescence of coquetry; above all, in her deliberate avoidance of all notice of the young man. His shrewd wits made a big leap: "By Jove, he's asked her to bolt with him, the madcap boy! And she's awfully pleased—and as virtuous as you like!" He chuckled secretly in the midst of his disturbing conjectures. . . . It was just dear Venetia's ineradicable clinging to virtue that made her so interesting. Lady Ken went thumping about her with her lost rectitude, like the medieval fool with his rattling bladder; but Venetia wrapped herself in veils of mysterious illusion.

Dorrie Thurso had set herself out to make the best of the exchange of swains. At first Shane met her sallies with silence, or the monosyllabic reply which is almost its equivalent. But there are questions upon which an Irishman is easily stirred, and Lady Thurso, with her urchin acuteness, was quick to find them. How did he like England?—Not at all!—How polite! Why did he live there, then?

"I have my reasons."

She pealed with laughter.

"Bad as England is, it ain't so bad as Ireland. Ah, you don't answer? Because you can't."

"Begging your pardon, I can."

She cast her bright glance round the table, inviting general attention.

"Lord Kilmore is going to give us the Irish reason for thinking his country the best in the world—to live out of."

"My country," Shane's brooding blue eyes shot red fire, "is what England has made it."

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"The honorable member," mocked Dorrie Thurso, "is straying from the point."

"I am not."

His Hibernian turn of phrase afforded matter for an explosion of mirth.

"I am not," said Shane, "I'm only declining to discuss it."

"Don't you know, Lady Thurso," Blythe piped across the table, "that no one can get the better of Ireland in the debates?"

"Who wants to get the better of Ireland?" put in Sir Timothy suddenly. "It seems to me the boot's on the other leg—eh, what, Kilmore?"

He thrust his great chin forward with a quite amiable grin. Shane averted his eyes from it. Then he turned squarely upon Lady Thurso.

"You're wanting to know what ails me to live over here when I can live in Ireland. Many is the time I've been asking myself the same question. Perhaps you've never done anything you've wondered at yourself? But I know now what keeps me, and I know where I'll go when I get it."

He turned his eyes back to his plate, and there was a little silence round the table. This cryptic remark had produced a decided sensation. Blythe flung a furtive look from Venetia to Shane and back again; with a mixture of anxiety and pleasurable curiosity he realized that things had gone very rapidly indeed. "'Pon my soul," thought the young cynic, "they've reached the stage of not daring to meet each other's eyes. High time to put a stop to this. It's the deuce and all that to-morrow should be Whit Monday."

"When you get what you want——" Lady Thurso

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had twice repeated Shane's phrase in an ever more provocative key. "Listen to him," she went on, again challenging the audience to attention. "Listen to him. Does ever any one get what he wants?"

"Haven't you?"

"Not by a long chalk!" cried the young lady from the Frivolity, with such comic emphasis that even Joscelyn Browne was moved to a sallow smile.

"When one hasn't what one wants, what does one do, dear lady?" asked Blythe, at his most insinuating.

"One 'loves what one has,' of course!" pouted Lady Thurso.

"No," said Lady Kenneth, with a dark flush, "if you're honest, you cut losses and start fresh."

"If you're wise," said Blythe, with a gentle air, "you quietly hate what you've got—and wait."

"And what do you say, Lord Kilmore?" Lady Thurso returned to the charge.

"I say I'd rather be honest than wise."

"You're not for the waiting game then?"

She felt vaguely on the edge of discovery, tentatively pushing her small probe here and there, eager to note where the prick told. The peasant peer was a handsome fellow and looked at her with dislike—a combination not to be borne; demanding reprisals. And "that cat, Venetia Hobson," not content with turning the wretched boy's head, had now robbed her of her own legitimate spoil. Lady Thurso had still the frank feelings of Miss Dorrie Prince. "I'll pay her out for that," she resolved. Therefore the question, "You're not for the waiting game?" was unmistakably edged with meaning.

"I am not." He suddenly lifted his eyes, looked full

in his tormentor's face and then, with equal deliberation, at Venetia's drooped head. "I'm for doing the right thing as quick as it can be done."

Blythe intervened with a titter.

"The great thing is to be sure that it is the right thing, isn't it? I do admire Kilmore's decision of character. Now, I'm so vacillating. I think ten times before I plunge, if it's even at Christie's and the little treasure I've coveted for years is hanging upon the hammer stroke. Don't you know the feeling, Joss-Sticks? Supposing one were taken in, after all?"

But Mr. Browne was never taken in, and was at some pains to inform Valentine of the fact. He had a grating voice and an emphatic manner, and though he could not interest he could effectually bear down his company.

Blythe congratulated himself on the adroitness of his interposition, still, his inner perturbation was increasing to positive discomfort. For Venetia Hobson had cast upon him a single, fleeting glance; and in it he had read defiance. It was the mischief to have creatures like Dorrie Thurso in society! Little abomination out of the gutter as she was, did she think she could show up Shane, with his pride of race, and his wild simplicity? "I vow I'll get him away to-morrow!" thought the bear-leader. "Five minutes' conversation ought to do the trick, and so you know, dearest Venetia! And yet," Valentine pondered, "if I give her away—one can never tell!—he's got the bit between his teeth. No use trying to check a runaway horse. But one can perhaps divert—turn him aside from the chasm." Mr. Blythe flattered himself that he had an intimate knowledge of human nature. But the

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most subtle may overreach himself; and so he found within the next few minutes.

Deftly he gave the conversation another twist, passed from Joscelyn Browne's last discovery in celadon enamel to hobbies in general, and thence, by a graceful transition, to the difference in tastes between himself and Shane.

"Kilmore, there, is all for sport. Now, I hate sport. It positively revolts me. Tim, turn your ear aside. Though, by the way, no, dear old fellow, you may listen, for, as it happens, you can be useful. Didn't I hear you say that there was a yacht for sale, somewhere in the neighborhood? Now, yachting is the only sport I consider worthy of a civilized being, and I'm rather anxious to encourage my friend there, in that line—because you see," he smiled engagingly, "he can take me about with him."

Sir Timothy, who had sunk into the supine attitude which generally succeeded his first bottle of champagne, raised himself to turn an interested eye.

"Wants a yacht, does he? Good man! But I don't know about Urquhart's. It's a steam yacht—not a bad craft for cruising. But if he wants to race——" His eye caught Shane's. "If you want to race, why not get a vessel built for yourself?"

"Do you want to race, dear boy?"

Shane did not reply. For a moment he sat as if turned to stone, lost in intense cogitation. A dark color was mounting slowly in his countenance.

"Do you want to race, dear boy?" repeated Blythe, sharply peevish.

"I do not," said Shane. "I'll go and see that yacht to-morrow." He now looked straight at his host. "If

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I like her, I'll buy her. I did not want to be buying a steam one, but it will have to do." And, without any attempt to soften the abruptness of the communication, he went on: "I could do the business on my way home, maybe, for I'll have to be gone in the morning."

There was a moment's startled silence. Lady Thurso pursed her lip and rolled a meaning eye at Colonel Darcy, who twisted his mustache and pulled down his waistcoat. Lady Kenneth interchanged an eloquent look with Blythe. Sir Timothy thrust out his jaw and scratched it, and Venetia at last turned her gaze upon her strange young lover. But now it was he who kept his eyes averted.

That night he found a letter laid upon his blotter:—

"You cannot leave me like this, without seeing me again. How can I know what to do—what I ought to do?—V."

He gave her the answer in a snatched moment before breakfast, for Lady Hobson contrived next morning to appear at that meal, even before her guests had assembled.

"Did you think I was running away from you?" Shane took her hand and held it gripped: his whole air was one of strength, as they stood, in the flood of sunshine by the window of the breakfast room. "I know what's right for you to do, what's right for me to do. And I intend that we shall do it. I'll be coming back for you. That's the way out of it. I'll bring that yacht round in the bay one of these fine mornings, and it'll take you away from this house of wickedness, and all your sorrows."

"But, but——"

Her hand was lying in his, her eyes were looking up at him. What her lips said could have no significance when the whole lovely woman gave herself in that gaze.

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"I'm thanking God," cried Shane, "that you've seen the right way out, and I'm thanking Him still more," he bowed his young dark head reverently, and lifted her hand to his lips, "that He's allowed me to be the one to help you, through my love."

"Hush!" She gave an anxious glance over her shoulder and withdrew her fingers from his clasp.

"Why is it hush?"

"I thought I heard Timothy whistle to the dogs, out there on the terrace."

"What matter?"

The look she cast on him now was one of terror. He stood very erect, squaring his shoulders, defiant.

"Why should you be ashamed to do right? I'm not the man to be stealing another man's wife. I'll not be acting as if I were. I'll do the thing straight, and so will you. And we'll do it in the light of day. We'll——"

She interrupted him.

"You're mad, you're mad!" Her voice whispered and fluttered breathlessly. "It's all impossible. You don't know—you don't—you don't understand. You don't know Timothy—how awful he can be. The scandal! No—better give it up. I will give it up!"

Shane had a moment's anger, swallowed up instantly in a rush of intense pity. "You don't know Timothy!" What a tale of suffering lay behind these words: it was not for him to add another chapter to it.

"Have it your own way, then," he said, very gently. But the glow of rapture had left him. "Let it be in secret. Come out of this house as if it was a sin—instead of casting off sin. I'll not blame you—no, my darling." It was the first time he had used a word of endearment to

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her; it fell with a great tenderness, yet without passion, from his lips. "I'd never blame you. And the day will come when you can face the world by my side and never know the fear again. Leave it to me, I'll come for you when all is ready. I'll not be failing or blundering. You'll be hearing from me."

A shout from Sir Timothy and a cavernous bark from one of the bulldogs on the terrace made Venetia start. She moved swiftly away from the window.

"You'll be hearing from me," repeated Shane, disdain-
ing to lower his voice.

"Hallo," said Sir Timothy, entering the room, "we don't often have the treat of your company at breakfast, my lady! What's up?"

"I wanted to say good-by to our guest," said she, with an amazing suavity. "Since he insists on leaving us so unexpectedly. I am trying to persuade him to come back."

Shane's face was dark enough as he sat down to the table. He scorned, hated these subterfuges; but compassion for her woman's weakness again rose paramount. "God help her—it's well I'm taking her out of this, or she'd be lost altogether!" He caught a glimpse of her ethereal head and its nimbus of dusky hair; of the pearl outline of her cheek; and youthful love surged in him. Soul and body he would snatch her to himself.

VIII

THE ARIADNE

SHANE'S chosen day was spread about with mists, and as his new purchase, the *Ariadne*, drew in as near the land as safety would allow, he could scarcely discern the outline of the cliffs.

It was a blurred world—a sea like oil—the very morning for a deed of secrecy, to cover the flight of a woman out of her husband's house, but not at all the morning for Shane's humor.

The white pall seemed to lie as heavy on the inner as on the outer man. It was on such a day of mists that he had been summoned away from Clenane; but, then, great winds had blown in from the sea, and there had been life even in the obliteration that swept across the land. Now all life seemed dead; the pulse of passion that had been beating so fiercely this fortnight of feverish activity dividing him from his desire, had fallen still. The future spread as obscure, as blankly veiled as the land before him. A strange sense of wrongdoing hung about him. Though reason and conscience acclaimed his purpose; though his act of human love became, through its intention, a deed of highest charity, nevertheless some baffling super-sense warned, clamored for pause.

It was perhaps, that out at sea there, with the acrid mist in his nostrils, and the creeping lap of the water in his ears, the memory of old days was too strong upon him;

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perhaps because his heart, vowed to new, stormy, and difficult loyalty, smote him for treachery to the old, easy, simple one. As he leaned over the railing, striving to pierce the baffling whiteness, he for a moment felt Moira's presence so vividly beside him that it was almost startling; the warm, innocent, strong presence of Moira who had loved him with such deep, unselfish ardors. Then he remembered how Venetia also, had been ready to sacrifice; to sacrifice even her soul for what she thought best for him. Her mistaken effort at renunciation—how piteous—to be followed by that trembling capitulation! Moira had held to her sacrifice for his sake; but Venetia had called him back. Ah, it had been all the sweet weakness of love he had seen in her gaze of surrender! It was for him now to make the step, taken in secrecy, and as if in guilt, the first on the road of honor and redemption.

He let himself down into the waiting dinghy; and, unattended, rowed to the shore. Though it was before the hour fixed in her letter, she was already standing within the boathouse by the landing. Even in June, early mornings are chill in the north, and the mist was penetrating. Out of her wrappings Venetia turned a pinched face upon him. She looked like a gray ghost of herself. There was no light in her eyes, no smile upon her lip, no word of greeting. He would have taken her into his arms, but they fell back by his side.

“Are you not wanting to come?” he exclaimed.

“Why do you ask such a question?” her tone was pettish: “I am here.”

She held a little bag such as ladies use for their jewels; he took it from her without further speech, and then put

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his arm round her to guide her along the narrow landing-stage towards the boat.

"Must I get into that?" She looked down at the dinghy, rising and falling on the incoming tide, and shuddered. He descended the stone steps in silence, drew the boat closer alongside; and, as she came hesitating forward, caught her in his arms and lifted her in like a child. As he assisted her to the seat marked by cushion and rug, she glanced at him, and for the first time, smiled.

"How strong you are!"

"It's you that are the butterfly weight," he smiled back, caught up the oars and with a couple of masterly strokes swung the craft clear of the miniature jetty, then out seaward. She watched him, the fretfulness passed from her face, and a color faint as the sunshine now piercing the mists seaward, spread over the pallor of her cheek.

"I cannot see the shore, and I cannot see the yacht," she exclaimed presently. "How strange! Here we are together, on the sea, like creatures lost in space! How strange!"

From Shane, now warmed through by the exercise, exhilarated with the sense of his own strength, despondency slipped like a falling cloak; disillusion relaxed the transient grip on his heart.

"It's not lost you are, but found, my darling love!"

"Call me some sweet Irish name."

"Asthore," he began. The tone was ardent enough, but the radiant moment was of a sudden dimmed. "Asthore, Mavourneen, Alanna!" it was between the kisses he had rained on Moira's innocent lips that these words had first escaped him. "No, those names are not for you!" he

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cried, wrenching himself from the claim of the past with violence. Then he remembered that he had never yet kissed her, and he flung new energy into his oars that the moment might be hastened.

As they came on board, he brought her at once to the state-room—all white enamel and rose brocades. He had acquired the yacht as it stood, and it was luxuriously fitted out. He had added to the luxury things that appealed to his uncultivated yet poetic taste. There were roses in a silver bowl, purple orchids in a cut glass goblet, a sable rug on the couch, piles of cushions.

As soon as they were alone he strained her to him. But she lay so passive in his arms that he let her go quickly. Then her pallor frightened him.

“You’re worn out!” he cried with remorse, “and I’m the stupidest fellow. Lie on the sofa there, my darling, and rest. I’ll not be troubling you at all for a bit. I’ll be sending you in some coffee. I’ll go warrant bite or sup has not passed your lips this morning. Lie there and rest. There’s a nice breeze getting up, and the mist is clearing away. We’ll be safe off in no time.”

In silence, submissive and weary, she sank in the cushions and allowed him to cover her with the fur his lavish love had provided. He did not touch her again or speak, but after standing a moment hesitatingly looking down at her, went out on deck.

She heard his footfall die away; he went slowly, as if in deep thought. Presently the yacht began to move like a creature of life. The throb of the engine vibrated, the rush of the waters whispered against the slender, shapely sides. The *Ariadne* was carrying her new master away on his strange venture.

THE ARIADNE

When Shane returned to the stateroom the sun had fully broken through the haze, the sea spread green and sparkling. The spray and the breath of the element he loved was all about him, his step had recovered its spring. He came in eagerly. She was sitting up, her elbows on the table, a half-finished cup of coffee thrust on one side. She had removed her hat; and out of the shadows of her loosened hair she looked up at him without a smile.

“Where are you taking me?” she asked.

He suppressed a slight start, and sat down opposite her.

“Where would I be taking you to? To my own country, of course, to Ireland.”

He drew the coffee-pot towards him as he spoke, and filled the other cup. As he raised it to his lips, she said, in uninflected accents:

“But I don’t want to go to Ireland.”

He put down the cup untasted.

“You’re not wanting to go to Ireland?”

“No.” Here her whole being altered, softened. “Dearest,” she said, coaxingly, like a child, “I am so cold, so tired! Take me quite away, take me where the sun shines strong, and the skies are blue, blue! Naples, Sicily. I am, somehow,” her voice shook with self-pity, she nestled closer into the furred cloak, “cold to the very bone.”

Staring blankly at her, he said:—

“I’d find it hard to be explaining things to a foreign priest——” He stopped, brushing his hand across his forehead; and, with an effort, rallying himself to tenderness: “It’s the way we’d get married quick, my darling,” he went on, “that I’m bringing you to my own country.”

She opened her lips as if to answer, but no word issued from them. Then, she fretfully asked him to pull the

curtain across the cabin window—did he not see the sun was in her eyes?

When he came back to her, she did not look at him; she was sitting in the same attitude, save that her forehead was pressed against her hands so that he could hardly see her face.

“We have got to talk sense,” she said in a tired way. “We cannot be married like that.”

“We can’t?”

“No, Shane. We have got to wait until Sir Timothy divorces me.”

“You call that talking sense?”

She gave a little shrug. At this, he sat down, rigid, fixing her with scared eyes. Gradually his young face became drained of blood:—

“Then it is the bad Catholic you are, after all!”

“For Heaven’s sake—Shane!”

Stretching out her left hand, she laid it on his arm. He saw that it was ringless; and with a smothered ejaculation he caught it to his lips.

“Ah, wait—listen!” she cried. “Yes, I cast off that ring to come to you, but do not forget that it had a real meaning for me once. I have been married by the law of the land, do not forget that. Oh, think!” She had a tearless sob. “Where do you place me? How should I stand before myself and you, if there was not at least that legal marriage?”

Adroit as the evasion was, Shane was too single-minded to lose sight of the real issue between her and him.

“What’s that law you talk of?” he cried. “What is it to you, what is it to me? Nothing! Less than the snap of my fingers. Ah, I see how it is with you. You’ve got

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confused, you poor creature, with the way you've lost yourself. But sure, that's not how you've the right to be looking at it at all. What is that Protestant law to us Catholics? It's the wrong end of the stick you've got hold of. It's: 'How could I be here with him at all, if I was not free, if there was a shadow of anything binding between me and that other man?' That's what you ought to be saying to yourself." He sprang up, came round to her, and kneeling, enfolded her with all the passion of an honest love. "It's: 'How could he be holding me like this, if I was not free—how could he be kissing me, and I letting him, if that other man had any right to call me wife?' What is that you say?"

Almost inaudibly she breathed in his ear:

"No priest will marry us."

He started back.

"You've no call to be saying that, I tell you, Venetia,—for I happen to know, I happen to know, I say, yours is no marriage, to a Catholic."

"But think for yourself—it is such madness! He would have to—to find out so many things, in the first place—and he will want proofs. It will take weeks and weeks, and then——" The force of her own arguments seemed to renew her self-confidence. Holding him back from her by the shoulder, she went on. "Dearest, I know I can trust you. But what you intend now is folly. Until I am free by law, I do not consider it right to marry you. Let us have patience, it will not be hard to wait. Somewhere together, under lovely skies, we shall learn to know each other, to love each other—ever more deeply, tenderly. Don't you see I am not asking too much? Can you not understand? If I did what you want, even if it could be

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done, to all society, to all my friends, I should be as one who has broken the law of the land. A—a bigamist—or not married at all.”

Her soft arms were round his neck. She had drawn his head into the fragrant warmth of her furs. Her lips sought his. He tore himself away from her.

“You have me that I don’t know what I’d be saying,” he exclaimed incoherently, and dashed out, letting the door swing after him. The sunshine, the breeze, the rumor and the throbbing of their way rushed in upon her. She sat up—intensely waiting, every moment expecting to see the great seascape, the distant view of the coast, shift; to feel the lithe craft respond to an altered helm; to become conscious of a swinging curve instead of the straight set course. She expected the sound of his returning footstep; quickly to hear him cry, that all had been ordered as she wished. But there was no change in the arrow flight of the *Ariadne*. Yet presently she knew something was happening—the beat of the engine was doubled, the rush of the vessel through the waters was gaining speed. She sprang to her feet. At the same moment Shane re-entered.

“In an hour and a half, at this rate,” he said, “we shall touch Larne.”

“Larne!”

“Ay—that’s where we’ll be landing. There will be some grand kind of hotel at Belfast. Ay, and the best of shops. You’ll be wanting to buy things for yourself, and the while I’ll be seeing about the priest. If we’ve got to be waiting a few days before we are married—for maybe you’re right there, maybe he will want proofs—I can settle you somewhere quiet and safe. Or I can be leaving you in the yacht and take train and boat myself. But anyhow it will go

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hard if I don't get those proofs and be back again, with no more loss of time than the traveling will put on me."

There fell a heavy silence. They were standing, facing each other; her glance wavered from his, she bit her lip.

"Had you not better take me back?" she said at last. Her voice was icy.

"Where should I be taking you back to?" He could not bring himself to understand.

"Back to the home you've torn me from, Lord Kilmore."

Again there was a long pause, unbearable in its suggestion to his bewildered mind. At last he said, helplessly:

"I can't for the life of me understand what you're driving at."

"Why should I stay with you?" She gave herself up to anger. "You are cruel. You have no chivalry, no consideration for me. You refuse me my first request. I am in your power, and you humiliate me. You——"

"In the name of God," he interrupted, "in the name of His Holy Mother, what is at the back of this?"

She came closer to him.

"Do you love me?"

"What is it?"

"Do you love me?"

"Are you doubting me? Is that it? Oh, what ails you—you're driving me out of my senses! To see you stand there, looking at me with the same dreadful sorrow in your eyes—I that came all the length of England to take it out of them! There's something between us. Haven't I felt it from the first moment I saw you waiting for me? My God, I felt it before I left the yacht at all! Maybe it's the power of evil that has had hold of you so long; maybe it's striving to keep us apart still. When I was offering

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you my love didn't I be promising you the peace of God at one and the same time? Ah, my darling, you'll not get it till you've laid your sin at the foot of the priest! You that's blaming me for wanting to bring you to the priest. If it were for that alone I couldn't get you soon enough into Ireland. Isn't it the best kindness I can have for you—what's all the rest compared to that? Ah, don't look away, alanna! Drive those hard thoughts from you! What's society—what's all this talk of your friends once you've got God as your friend, and His blessing on our love?"

The tide of impassioned words was suddenly arrested. Venetia had turned and was looking at him, smiling. His blood froze; the intangible horror he had been fighting all the morning took sudden consistency. The old anguish in her eyes that, but the moment before, had tormented him, was replaced by a cold enmity.

"No priest will marry us." She repeated the words; they had a new significance for him.

"You'll be having a reason for saying that." He spoke slowly.

"If you want to marry me, there is only one way you can do it, and that is through the law."

Again he was aware that this reiteration was full of a menace which had before escaped him.

"I'm waiting to hear the rest."

"Ah, but I am waiting to hear from you that you are a man of honor. Shane!" she stretched out her arms.

"The truth now!" he caught her by the wrist and held her from him.

She struggled, crying that he hurt her. Fury, misery, reluctance, swept across her like waves; but he did not

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relax his grip; and his will held her even more than his hands.

“The truth!”

“The truth, then. The truth, you fool! How dare you come to me and tempt me from my home and my husband without even taking the trouble to find out one single thing about me? Is it my fault? You dare not say it is my fault. You sought me, you thrust your love on me. How was I to know that this prate of religion was anything but the cloak for love? How was I to think that you were really—really and truly—the idiot you made yourself out? I cannot let you take me to a priest and marry me—that’s the truth. You can marry me, as Timothy did, when Timothy divorces me—Timothy waited till my first husband divorced me—you can do the same.”

“Your—your first husband. It’s raving mad you are!”

“Ninny!”

His clutching fingers had dropped from her. She glanced down at the red marks on her wrists and back at him.

Then she walked to the couch and sat, moving the coffee cups on one side with deliberate touch, to stretch her arms across the table. Presently she began to play upon it with her fingers as if striking invisible notes.

“What am I to do with you?” Shane roused himself from his stupor at last. He spoke in a voice from which all life had gone.

“Have you any hesitation?” She stopped her dreadful dumb tune to fix him with a devouring look.

“If I bring you back—I bring you back to sin. If I keep you with me, it’s keeping you in sin. Where, in the world, is there a place for a woman like you?”

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“Sin—sin! I admire your delicate conscience, Lord Kilmore. What does love mean to you, then? Is there nothing sacred in it, nothing pure, nothing binding? Oh—Shane!”

He flung her over his shoulder a glance haunted as with fear, and moved towards the door. With a swift rush she forestalled him.

“Ah, no—no, you cannot leave me. Do you not see I am lost if you cast me away? If you’re a man of honor, if you have a heart, if you love me, if you love me—oh, Shane, hold me, keep me! Never let me go. What is sin? There is only one sin, one you could not commit, one that God would not forgive, if there is a God, that you should be false to me now. I trusted you, you cannot ruin me! One word, Shane! Ah! I might have known! You are no gentleman! How could I have been so mad! You are no gentleman. You are nothing but an Irish peasant!”

Her voice trailed off into a long wail. He stood rigid as the rock stands under the drenching and beating of the bitter waters. That was all he could do: to hold himself in strength upon the foundations of his life’s teachings.

She cast herself upon the couch and broke into sobs. There she lay, like a lily struck down by the storm—she whom he had worshiped for her purity, for her starry aloofness, her high and delicate disdain!

IX

HONOR AMONG THIEVES

AN hour before noon, the gay south wind blowing, the sea laughing and lapping against the jagged coast line, russet rocks all overtopped with stately woods, here and there blurred with the carmines and purples of the rhododendrons: such a different world from the realm of white mystery he had traversed only that morning—it seemed years since, to Shane—bent on his high, fantastic quest! The radiant bubble of his knightly love and folly had burst. There was nothing left between his hands but bitter scum, not an illusion, not a regret, not even a pity.

“What in the world is to be done with such a woman as you?”

The woman had decided. Turned upon her course, the *Ariadne* was sent speeding back to the bay. From the moment when she saw that she had failed, Venetia’s mind was made up. What other possible solution could Shane offer her? None, that she would even discuss, save the solution which his soul rebelled against with all its integrity.

“You must take me back—back to the house of sin, as you call it,” she sneered. And sneering again: “Unless you are afraid,” she added.

Afraid?—it was that word decided hm.

“Ay, I’ll bring you back, and whatever Sir Timothy has to say, he can say to me. I am altogether at your orders.”

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She gave a slight shrug.

“You will be good enough, Lord Kilmore, to let me make what explanations I consider fitting to my husband. Now, if you please, give the necessary orders. I wish to be alone until it is time to leave the yacht.”

While she spoke, she lifted her jewel bag on to the table. He stood watching her for a moment yet, while she sought for and picked out of some inner pocket the heavy circlet which was Sir Timothy's wedding-ring. She cynically put it back on her finger. He caught the milky glint of great pearls within, and, remembering the portrait as he flung himself out of the cabin, felt certain, with an acrid inner laugh for vanished glamour, that the high lady of his dreams had not forgotten to carry away the best of her spoils with her.

She came out of the state-room as soon as the engines stopped, and stood silently beside him, watching the lowering and the manning of the gig.

Since she meant to bluff the situation, Shane's instinct told him that the more circumstance surrounded their landing, the more plausible it would seem. That she meant to bluff he could have no doubt. Looking at her he was amazed to see her air of assurance, her conscious dignity. There was hardly a trace of those anguished, desperate tears; the pearly texture of her cheek, the calm sweetness of her folded lips, the exquisite self-containment of movement and attitude were all as he had once worshiped them. The goddess had rearranged her draperies and stepped back upon her pedestal, but he knew the clay of which she was made, and his heart turned with a sickening qualm against the memory of his own mad illusion.

They did not exchange a single word. It was the sailor

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standing in the balancing gig who caught her in his arms, and guided her to her place. Shane laid the jewel-case at her feet and himself took the rudder lines. The crew of the gig smartly gave way. The tide was high and the landing on the pier easy. They went up from the shore by the path leading to the rhododendron glade, Shane bearing the little purple leather bag as well as the sable cloak. When they had reached level ground, she said to him:

“Do you mind coming as far as the house? I should prefer my husband to see you with me.”

His eyes questioned. She was moving by his side with an even step; her manner, her tone, her whole appearance were so completely what he had first known in her, that it seemed as if he must have just awakened from a ridiculous and fatiguing nightmare. Yet here he was, carrying her jewel-case, her furs over his arm!

“It is just possible no one has missed me yet,” she went on. “But I am not going to take that possibility into consideration. I prefer to return in a perfectly open manner.”

Shane had it in him to cast himself on the ground, like a child, and bemoan the hideous tangle, out of which there was for her only this horrible road. *Back to the house of sin!* He had madly offered her money—money to any amount. Still more madly, out of his guilelessness, spoken of the temporary haven of a convent. She had not deigned to answer either suggestion but by the smile that withered speech.

“Didn’t I tell you I’m here at your orders?” he said now, hoarsely.

“Thank you.”

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The scents of all the breaking blossoms were in the air; indefinable essences of green leaf and sticky bud, mingled with the hot incense of the pines in the sunshine, subtly permeated with the wholesome salt of the sea.

“Are not those the bulldogs on the terrace?” she said. “Yes, and there is Isobel.”

“Isobel?”

“I suppose you would not know her by that name. Lady Kenneth.”

Shane frowned, struck by a shaft of strange memory. That painted woman had once spoken to him with the voice of his guardian angel, and he had turned a deaf ear.

“What, still here?” he exclaimed angrily. “It’s the long visit she’s paying.”

“She amuses Sir Timothy.” There was not an inflection in the silken accents. “Your friend Mr. Blythe is here too. He asked to come back.”

Shane’s frown deepened. Blythe was the last person he desired to meet in the circumstances. She explained, into his fierce silence:

“He said he was anxious about you. He told me he was sure that you were up to something with that yacht. He had lost sight of you at Glasgow, but heard you were in these waters. He thinks it his duty to look after you, Lord Kilmore. He will be delighted to have you handed over to him—and you can gratify him by indulging him in a cruise.”

She did not even glance at him to see how her thrusts struck home.

“If it’s counting on a cruise with me——” Shane began, with boyish heat. But she interrupted.

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"It is Timothy. Timothy with Lady Kenneth. Will you shout, if you please, to attract their attention?"

Shane hesitated. But it was only for a second. She had the courage of the devil; he would be the poor thing if he were behindhand. He raised his lusty voice in a ringing call, such as that which had many a time echoed over the stony fields of Clare when he rounded in the wild colts.

Sir Timothy was clad in white flannels, and his Henry VIII outline was very conspicuous beside Lady Kenneth's green jumper, in the broad sunshine of the terrace. Shane could see how the two started, turned, and stared. And, once again, this time with a certain exhilaration in his Irish fighting blood, he defiantly flung out his strange cry.

"Hallo!—hallo!" Lady Kenneth answered shrilly. From Sir Timothy came no answer at all. The huge white form could be seen descending the terrace steps—not quickly, yet with an air of such marked purpose that it invested with omen his silence. The bulldogs preceded him, full of slobbering recognition. There was no bulldog amiability on Sir Timothy's countenance. His great jaw was set with a grimness that gave him altogether a new aspect. Shane braced himself: he recognized menace in the very breath that, bull-like, the man blew down his nostrils.

Lady Kenneth began to rattle out inconsequent remarks the moment they came within speaking distance.

"Hallo, hallo—dear Vee, you have stolen a march on us—what have you been up to? Fancy you slipping off in the dawn! Your maids nearly had fits. And, oh, Lord Kilmore, your little keeper is nearly out of his mind about you! Fancy you both turning up together! This is a

surprise—isn't it, Tim? Tim got a fright, too, poor old Tiny! You know you did. Thought you were drowned, Vee, or something, I dare say. I knew you'd be all right. I said so. Didn't I, Tiny?"

"I am all right," said Lady Hobson. "Lord Kilmore took very good care of me. Would you mind taking my cloak and bag from him, Timothy? Lord Kilmore, I understand, wishes to get back to his yacht."

Eye to eye, the two men stood, and with a growl that issued from the deepest corner of his chest: "The devil he does," said Timothy.

"Not at all," cried Shane promptly, "if you might be wanting a word with me."

"Please, Timothy," said Venetia, "do relieve Lord Kilmore of my things. Yes, Isobel, I've had the first cruise on Lord Kilmore's yacht. Yes, I have stolen a march on you all, as you say, but you know I always said yachting was an overrated pleasure. I think so more than ever now. Lord Kilmore wanted me to stay for lunch, but I made him bring me back."

"You went quite far enough, it seems to me, my lady," her husband turned on her with a snarl.

She fixed him steadily, then said, in a voice of sweetest emphasis:—

"Not so far, Timothy, as you went with Isobel in the launch the other day."

The big man rolled his eyes, grew purple, spluttered. Then he stretched out his hairy hand and snatched his wife's belongings from Shane. Lady Kenneth was laughing uproariously.

"Vee, you are priceless! She had you there, Tiny. But

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we did not go off on the sly, you know—without telling any one.”

“Why should I have told any one—any of you?”

“Why?” Sir Timothy and Lady Kenneth exchanged a look.

“You’re not given to paying much attention to me, either of you, are you?” She was standing on firm ground now, and knew it. Her smile spread from ironic lips to half-closed eyes.

“Did you take your jewel-case on board with you, Vee, darling?” Lady Kenneth’s temper, never very well under control, was escaping her.

“Yes.”

“How odd!”

“Do you think so?”

To attempt to explain what obviously cannot bear explanation was a mistake into which Venetia Hobson was not likely to fall. She turned her slow, beautiful eyes from Lady Kenneth’s face, and held out her hand to Shane.

“Good-by. Thank you so much, Lord Kilmore. It has been quite a little experience. But do not think me ungrateful if I say that I didn’t enjoy it. I assure you I am not ungrateful.”

Shane could hardly bear the touch of the frail gloved hand. Sir Timothy gave an unexpected guffaw. His prominent eyes were fixed on his consort, full of the reluctant admiration with which he would now and again contemplate her.

“I’ll be hanged if you’re not as clever as they make ’em, my lady!” he remarked. His tone was not devoid of sarcasm, yet there was resignation in it too. Then he

shifted his glance to Shane, and laughed again. "When I come to think of it, it strikes me you're the cleverest of the lot, young man. But you don't expect me to shake hands with you and say I'm grateful, do you?"

With which cryptic words he turned his great shoulders upon his whilom guest and began to tramp towards the house, looking neither to the right nor left, nor seeming to perceive that, with a swift movement, Venetia had placed herself by his side. Lady Kenneth and Shane, gazing after the two, saw her slip her hand within his arm as they went.

"Touching sight!" cried the lady; there was harsh discomfiture in her laugh. She wheeled on Shane. "Venetia'd buy and sell you and me. We haven't a chance with her. Though, by the way, how in the name of all that's fantastic did you get her to come back? You didn't contrive a wireless informing you you had lost all your money, did you? Short of that—I say, you know, you look pretty bad. I warned you, didn't I? What happened? You might as well unburden yourself. It'll do you good."

Shane remained with locked lips. He hardly thought Lady Kenneth's babble more worth notice at that moment than the buzzing of the flies that circled about his head. His gaze still followed Venetia. There she went, taking with her how much of his honor, his manhood, his soul's integrity, his youth's illusions: such irrecoverable things! And there he was left, the meanest object the world held, this glorious June day; the lover who had plucked a woman away from the side of her lawful owner, pluming himself of his virtue—to restore her promptly, on the plea of the same virtue! Here he stood, spared by

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the man he had robbed, because that man at heart was a thief too. No one could think him more of a fool than he thought himself. In no eyes could he cut a sorrier figure than in his own.

With the freshening wind the sea voices roared on the beach. It was little more than a year ago that he had kissed Moira up there, in the cranny of the cliff, with the first kisses of love. Moira, who had trusted him, who would have gone with him into poverty and served him as his loving wife with all her youth and strength and beauty, after the fashion of the faithful Irish woman, so long as life lasted. Moira, to whom he had been unfaithful with the meanest of all treacheries—tacit acceptance of her renunciation, hypocritical shifting of the responsibility from his guilty shoulders to her strong, innocent ones! Whatever had come upon him now, he had deserved it. The worst was the thought that he was not fit to go back to Moira.

“Here’s Val!” Lady Kenneth broke off her string of fruitless questions, to shriek and wave her stick. “Val! Val Blythe, come here, you’ll have the surprise of your life!”

Valentine Blythe came running up from the beach. He looked extraordinarily boyish and fresh in his suit of light flannel, his hair rumped from the sea-water, his shirt open at the throat.

“Surprised? Not at all! I saw you from my little tent, dearest Shane—saw you land, you know, from that smart gig. Her ladyship never was a sailor, I could have told you that if you’d consulted me. But oh, my dear boy, what a day for a cruise! I could hardly dry myself properly, thinking you’d be off and away. Such

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a relief to see the gig still at the landing-stage. Your *Ariadne* looks too exquisite out yonder on the blue. You'll take me on board, won't you? I'll not be more than a second getting my little rags together."

"You are civil!" interrupted Lady Kenneth. The sparkle of mischievous curiosity which had enlivened her face at Blythe's approach, went out. He was going to be as stupid as Sir Timothy, and "play the village idiot" to the scandal. But Shane stepped back. He cast a single glance at him who had constituted himself the pioneer of his new life—it was one of intense repudiation. At Lady Kenneth he did not look at all; but he included her in the words which leaped from his mouth:—

"I'll have no more to do with any one of you. I'm sick to death of you all! If yours are the ways of gentry, it's the Irish peasant I'd choose to be all my life."

Blythe whistled softly, as Shane wheeled and strode away.

"You can't say you made much of your clay, genius as you are!" jeered Lady Kenneth. She was in a towering rage.

For once Mr. Blythe was nonplussed. He shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands. At last he said, with a forced revival of sprightliness:—

"Dear Venetia ought to have a funny little tale to tell us."

"She'll never tell it then." Lady Kenneth viciously dug her stick into the soft earth.

X

“HAVE YOU NO DUTIES?”

NOT so had Shane pictured his return to Clenane. Even when the new interests had laid their utmost hold upon him; even when he believed that he had met, over there in England, the destined love and pity of his life, there had always been at the back of his mind the certainty that he would one day find his way home. Clenane remained home through everything, and there had been through everything the yearnings as of the exile for his own. He had first seen himself in fancy the very fine fellow, the rich and powerful young nobleman, kind comrade to his old friends; he had seen himself the restorer of the glories of Kilmore; the benefactor, the wise, the enlightened, the popular landlord of those whose forebears had been his ancestors' own people—Kilmore come back to the land of his sires! It was a picture full of generous colors that did not exclude the roses of joy in Moira's face when she found her lover true to her after all.

Then the scene had shifted, as when a child shakes the kaleidoscope. The pattern, the tints, all were changed. The design caught moonlit hues. Visions, intangible, poetic, took the place of the crude, childlike plans; he saw the old walls of the castle rising strong and gray over the sea, fit habitation for the wonderful new Lady Kilmore, for Venetia—poem come true—trailing her delicate draperies

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through his halls, angel of mercy to his poor, sweet, reconciliated sinner, praying before his restored altar.

In these ethereal imaginings there had been no place for Moira. But it was Moira who now held the whole of his mind during long days when, desultorily cruising off the coast of his own country, he hesitated upon the thought of landing. Where was he to go, what was he to do if he did not go back to Clenane?

Clenane was like a milestone on a dark, unknown road, it shone out of the gloom at him, that was all. In the end, like the weary traveler, he made for the glimmer, not knowing whither it might point, or whether even he could rest beside it.

The dusk of the mid-June evening was gathering close when he rowed himself from the yacht to the shore. He knew every inlet, projection, and curve of the cliff-guarded coast; he knew just where to draw in the dinghy, where he would drag her up on the shingle under the shadow of the cliff.

It was a mild night, and the western sky, still faintly glowing, showed stretches of lambent green. A single star shone primrose. Above his head the twilight depths were gray-blue, as yet unpierced. The waves washed gently on the beach behind him, he heard the old melancholy draw of the backwash, the well-remembered sudden boom and slap of the mounting tide in the hidden caves. The airs that smote his forehead and met his nostrils were infinitely soft and full of the tang of the seaweed, with now and then, as he mounted and the land breeze blew, a whiff of turf-smoke.

He heard the voices of children down in the village, and the sudden cry of a startled sea-bird, as a loose stone

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fell clattering beneath his tread. Far away, somewhere from Galway side, came faintly the melancholy hoot of a steamer calling out across the waste of waters. Here was the cleft in the rock, where Moira and he had come together; where they had kissed farewell. He stared back upon the great Atlantic. There were phosphorescent gleams and odd radiances where the rollers raced in and, foaming, broke; there was a wonderful streak of reflected green far out; for the rest, sea and sky seemed to look upon each other with the same face of gray mystery.

Shane inhaled the spirit of his childhood's home with a long breath and a sense as of inner tears. A few more steps brought him to the landward slope; and before him rose the gray walls of his own ruin. No smoke from the housheen to show that the old place yet had life; no glimmer of light from the window to beckon him through the broken archway. He had known it must be so; but to see it hurt him. He had been very happy there; now the hearth was cold. No smoke either from Bidley M'Gaw's hovel. He could see the shapeless excrescence black against the pale flank of the rock, with a jagged bit where the thatch had fallen away from the roof. Dead—or gone to the poor-house—what had happened to old Bidley?

The melancholy which possessed him had had, up to this, something of the gentle, sad placidity of the summer night. But now apprehension began to stir. Who else was dead? What else had changed? What other hearths were cold where he remembered fires? Much might have happened in Clenane these months and months of absence which he had never even thought of bridging by a letter.

Here was the gap; and the square of the priest's house,

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cut like cardboard against the sky-line. Thank God there was smoke from that chimney! Yet Shane bethought himself, as he jumped the low, loose wall into the potato-patch, that the house of the priest could never be empty in Ireland. If he were to find a stranger here, then the light of his first hope in homecoming would have been blown out like the flame of a candle in a sudden blast.

The gate was tied up with string, just where it used to be, and it swung back with the old creak on its broken hinge. The bell had not been mended either. He knocked—those three taps with which he had, from the time that he could walk at all, demanded entrance to his guardian's house. A shuffling step in the passage, the beat of a stick, a bent figure, large and black in the doorway, and a crest of white hair, caught in silver by the light of the small paraffin lamp, smelling triumphantly as of old, from its bracket on the discolored wall. Fate was benign; it was his old friend in person.

“Father—it's I, Father Blake. It's Shane!”

The old man peered as if to ascertain for himself. Then repeating the name, “Shane!” in surprise, but with no sign of pleasure, he bade the visitor come in.

Before Shane could obey, before he had time to grapple with his sense of a sharp disappointment, something came hurtling along the narrow passage and flung itself against his breast, crying with an almost human voice. It was Leprechaun.

Shane staggered, shouted, laughed; but the next moment disquietude seized him. Leprechaun—Moira had promised that the dog should never leave her! Then from the first thought sprang another, disquieting too, yet shot as with trembling tints of gold: Moira, was she within?

"HAVE YOU NO DUTIES?"

Did this explain the priest's strange, cold look at him, and the hesitation in his voice?

"You'd best be coming in," said Father Blake. "Down, Leprechaun, down, sir—ah, it's the faithful heart the beasts have! You'd best be coming in, whatever brings you." He paused, almost his lips formed the words, "Lord Kilmore." But, with a faint smile, he changed them for the once familiar name. "My old tongue," he said, "cannot be bringing itself to it. You'll forgive me, if it's Shane you are still to me."

"I'd not forgive, if it was the other way."

Shane strove to speak cheerily, but he felt bewildered, numbed; and his heart beat in his throat at the thought that perhaps, in there, in the shabby parlor, Moira might be standing, listening, waiting. What if she, too, were to turn and look at him with alien eyes?

With whines of passionate joy Leprechaun mumbled and licked and fawned upon the hand unconsciously stretched out to him, as his master, obeying the gesture of Father Blake's stick, pushed against the half-open door and entered the priest's parlor.

The room was empty. It seemed unusually forlorn by the light of a solitary candle.

Father Blake shuffled in and closed the door behind him. He stood, leaning on his blackthorn, staring at Shane with piercing scrutiny from under the bushy eyebrows; the singular luminosity of his gaze was undimmed, but the countenance was greatly aged. He looked sad and ill. Shane sought in vain for a word; so many months of silence, so much unpardonable thanklessness, such emancipation from old ties, reared themselves between him and his childhood's friends. After a pause

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which weighed like a stone upon his soul, he heard Father Blake say, in accents of frigid courtesy:—

“Will you take a seat?” The priest came forward slowly. “Me foot’s troublesome. You’ll maybe remember the way I used to be. I’ll not be likely to get stronger.” Again there was the faint, cold smile. “Mary’s had to go to nurse her niece, the creature, up at Kilcurran. She took bad on Saturday—so I’m alone, though Nellie Dooley does be looking in on me, whenever she can, the good child. Could I be offering you anything?”

“Nothing, nothing at all—it was only to see you. I had dinner on the yacht—thank you kindly.”

“The yacht.” Father Blake let himself sink into the cushions of the wooden arm-chair, stretching out his foot with a suppressed groan. Shane could almost have believed himself back in the days before fortune had come to him, bringing such piercing shafts of misfortune—everything about him was so familiar.

“The yacht—ay, I saw the fine yacht in the sunshine, cruising about the bay, this afternoon. And so it’ll be yours?”

“Ay,” said Shane in his turn, and flushed. He bent over Leprechaun, hugging him. They were sitting each side of the cold hearth. The remains of a very frugal meal—the corner of a loaf, an empty eggshell, and a black tea-pot—stood on the table. Where, in the name of God, was Moira?

“So you’ve come back to Clenane—in your grand yacht. And what brings you?”

Shane straightened himself.

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"Ah, father," he cried boyishly, "you're wondering why I did not come before."

"I'm wondering why you've come at all."

"That's a strange question." Shane still tried to rally the old man from his stern aloofness. "Why wouldn't I be wanting to come back to my friends?"

Father Blake did not answer. He was still fixing his visitor with searching eyes; melancholy had not lifted from his countenance, his mouth with its jutting chin worked.

"How is it with you all?" pursued the young man.

"It was always a poor place here," answered the priest distantly, "and the winter that's gone by has been hard. But there's some that have done with the struggle."

"Is Bidly M'Gaw gone?" put in Shane. "I saw the thatch down on her little house as I went by."

"The doctor got her out of that the long while since; but sure it was the end of her; she died in the infirmary next day. May the Lord have mercy on her!"

"Oh, poor old Bidly!"

Father Blake passed over the ejaculation of pity in silence. "Honor is out of the road, too," he went on relentlessly.

"Honor M'Keown—my own good Honor! Not dead?"

"And indeed it's dead she wished herself, many a time, with the cruelty of the world, driving her and her children! Sold up she was, the creature. It's the hard man that Conran always was."

"Conran, the grocer?"

"Who else? And him encouraging them to run up the long bills, and the poor creatures not knowing which way they stand with him at all. Och, it's the rich man he's

growing on the hearts of the mothers and the hunger of the children! Honor, with her nice little place and a beautiful pig, and all her grand little hens, didn't he choose the right moment to sell her up, and sure what could she do, the creature? Thirty-seven pounds nine shillings he made up against her, and how could she tell whether it was owing or not, the way he'd have her and all the rest running in with a pound note here and a pound note there at odd times, and they drawing the tea and the sugar and the bacon and the jam, every day, you may say, without as much as asking the price. The moment you were out of the road, he had her marked. But he bided his time till the pig was fat on her."

Shane's color had changed more than once during this recital. He fixed Father Blake with widening gaze, like that of a frightened child.

"And not one of you would have the charity to let me know."

The priest flung him a swift look, and cast down his eyes. Then Shane, remembering the unopened letters, felt a cold sweat break upon his forehead. Had they contained poor Honor's appeals, those envelopes scrawled to "Master Shane, the Lord Earl of Kilmore," that he had flung from him into the holocaust?

"I never knew," he stammered, "how could I know? You might have written yourself."

And still Father Blake said nothing, and his silence condemned, with a sternness beyond speech.

"Where is she now? What became of them? I'll buy back her little place for her—where is she now?" he repeated irritably.

"Mrs. Dinny Doyle took in one of the little boys—

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it's the good heart she has, when all is said and done. She took him in place of her own little fellow that died of the croup before Christmas. And Honor has got work at Captain Joyce's, minding chickens. The doctor got her the job—and he and myself, we put the other gosssoon at the Christian Brothers. It's heartbroken she is to be parted from them, her that has always kept them so decent."

"I'll give them back to her. I'll see that she has a house of her own again."

"She wrote and asked you for the loan of the stone cottage up in the ruins. Twice she wrote."

It was Shane's turn to keep silence—a silence acrid with self-reproach and mortification. After a while Father Blake pursued; a certain rueful whimsicality playing over the wrinkled face.

"The widow Dooley's made a match of it with Tom Clancy."

Shane gave a forlorn laugh.

"I'm glad to hear of something cheerful."

"Cheerful is it? It's the worst thing she ever did in her life. It's drinking her out of house and home he is. And, sure she daren't trust him with the car at all. I'm looking out for a place for Nellie this moment. Dooley's not fit for her now."

Shane, pulling Leprechaun's ear, to the ecstatic content of the dog, abandoned himself to the dreary sense of disillusion which, like creeping waters, was invading his soul. How he had been yearning for Clenane, and the old, clean, wholesome, simple life! Was there nothing but sordidness everywhere?"

"I'd be missing Nellie Dooley," the priest was saying.

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Here the thought that was uppermost in the visitor's mind found expression at last.

"Where's Moira?"

Father Blake frowned. "You'll not find her in Cle-nane."

"Not find her!—where is she?"

"Shane," said Father Blake, "if it's for Moira you've come back here, you may as well take it from me she wouldn't want to see you."

"Where is she?"

"She's with the nuns."

"With the nuns!" The young man repeated the words in such a tone of anguish and horror, that once again a smile hovered on Father Blake's lips.

"I'm not saying she's going to be a nun—and I'm not saying she won't end by being a nun. She is at the convent; and she is happy there, and doing good work teaching in the infant school. It's better that way. She couldn't settle here at all, the poor child, what with Dan Blake and the way he was about you and her; and Clery after her, and the talk about you both."

Shane was still drawing one of Leprechaun's tangled silken ears through his fingers.

"And that's why she got rid of this poor fellow!" he exclaimed bitterly, "she that said she'd not let him go from her."

Father Blake's eyes were fixed on the moving hand; there was a grand seal ring on it, such as gentlemen wear.

"It would be queer for you to be blaming Moira for breaking a promise," he began. And then, dropping querulous heat for the former coldly measured accents, "It would have been hard for the child to be able to keep

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him," he went on. "Didn't she take him with her, and didn't he run away on her every while, and we to be finding him time and again outside your little old place up in the ruins. Ah, it's the beasts that have the faithful hearts! Though other than beasts have them too—for their sorrow—sometimes. What could I do but take him in myself, the poor fellow, and him the livelong day listening and waiting for you? 'Pon my word," said Father Blake, warming in his theme, "I believe he knew you were on the road here this evening, he was that uneasy. You'll have to take him away with you now, or he'll never settle."

"What makes you think I want to be going away?"

"What would you be doing here?"

"It would be a poor thing if it was only the dog that's glad to see me back. Perhaps my other old friends won't be feeling like yourself!" Shane broke out petulantly at last from his sore heart. "I've a good mind to go round to the doctor this minute."

"Doctor? You won't find him. He's set off in his trap to see what he could do for poor Mary's niece at Kilcurran. May the Lord reward him! It's little opinion Doctor Molloy has of you this moment, and you may as well know it, for I'm doubting whether a meeting with him would be altogether agreeable to you. And anyhow you can't be staying in Clenane, with the two Blake boys wild to have the beating of you—let alone Dan——"

Shane interrupted with an ejaculation; but the priest lifted his hand.

"Whisht—you're a match for the two of them, I dare say, and the old man as well, but you couldn't be fighting him that was once as good as your own Da, and them

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as were as your brothers, the sons of Mammy Blake, as you used to call her—and breaking Moira’s heart out and out.”

“Father——”

The tears rushed to Shane’s eyes. His voice broke in the cry of appeal. The old priest’s severity broke too:—

“My poor child——”

“Where, in the world, am I to go to, and what, in the world, is to become of me?”

“You, in all your grandeur! With your grand friends——”

“My grand friends—it doesn’t seem as if I had a friend in the world now!”

“And what has made you think of us again, all in a hurry?”

“Father, I was near losing my soul among them.”

Father Blake shot a startled look; then he folded the old hands that had fondled Shane in childhood; had blessed, absolved, and ministered to him through so many years of life. “Thanks be to God,” he murmured, “but you’ve kept the faith!”

“I’ve been”—Shane stammered—“it’s out of hell I’ve come. And where could I turn to, but here?”

Father Blake sat for a while as if communing with himself. The coarse candle, burning down with a lengthening wick, flung playing lights upon his face and on Shane’s. It drew each strong countenance with deep shadows and high relief; and it cast, too, fantastic black silhouettes against the wall; the priest’s, his falling jaw out-thrust and cockatoo wisp of hair, and Shane’s, as he

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sat clutching the arms of his high-backed chair, with an outline almost Egyptian in its rigidity.

At last Father Blake sighed; leaning his elbow on the table and his white head upon his hand, he said compassionately:—

“Tell me all about it, my poor boy.”

The attitude, the words, the accent with which they were spoken, were, perhaps unconsciously, those of the priest in the confessional to his penitent. And it was as if he were actually unburdening his conscience that Shane burst into speech.

It was a strange, confused story. He was not, at the best of times, good at expressing himself, and he knew as little of introspection as any thinking man may. Nevertheless, it was impossible for him to open his heart without also laying bare motives; without explaining how, from the first moment that he had seen the picture in the Academy, he had been attracted; how he had known that she whom it portrayed was unhappy. And the unconscious emotion with which he spoke of the cry for help that seemed to come to him that day; the few broken words in which he tried and failed, to limn the beauty of the appealing face. “I thought I’d never seen any one so lovely—I thought she looked—oh, I can’t tell you—like a kind of flower in the wind”—these betrayed more, perhaps, of Shane than Shane himself knew.

Father Blake groaned slightly, and stretched out his foot as if it pained him. “Go on, me dear—go on.”

How many a time in childish days, when Shane, his natural audacity dashed by the solemnity of the occasion, had halted over some especially outrageous peccadillo,

had he not heard that encouragement dropped in the self-same resigned tone?

The listener's attention deepened as the narrative proceeded. Shane entangled himself, harked back, leaped forward, came now and again to an abrupt standstill; fell, too, into silences that were perhaps more pregnant of meaning than his most fervent utterance. Sometimes he paused, expecting comment, some show of surprise, as when—and every Irishman is unconsciously dramatic—he came to the discovery of Venetia's religion.

“I had set her so high. It was the star she was to me. And to find out—God help me! It was then I knew what love meant! My heart was wrung over her.”

But the priest never moved from his intent attitude; and Shane waited in vain for a word or even a sign. Passion dropped away from his accents, as he took up the thread again with an effort. In short sentences the romance of rescue that had ended in such sordid tragedy, such an infinitely mean anticlimax, was somehow put into words. And then, living back his own hour of shame and fierce revulsion of feeling, Shane uttered the innermost yearning of his heart in a cry:—

“Moir—to see Moira, it would be to believe in a woman again—in woman's goodness!”

“Moir——” Father Blake started, and supporting himself with both hands on the table, turned a leonine countenance of majestic wrath. “Is it out of all your sin and misery you think you can be laying hold of the good girl that—that wasn't good enough for you? Is it shadowing her pure, innocent mind you want to be with the black trouble that's on your own? I haven't had cause to think well of you, my poor child”—the voice of

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indignation sank to tremulous pity—“but I think better of you than that.”

“Why, father?” Shane stared, first affronted, then in his turn compassionate. “The poor old man,” he thought, “it’s getting too old he is altogether. His brain’s wandering. Sin, father?” he repeated, “my sin!”

The priest’s eyes were fixing him with a mystic flame. There was no senility in that gaze: it searched and revealed.

“Sin, child! Isn’t it sin in a good Catholic young man to be giving himself to thoughts of love for a married woman? To be seeking her out—whisht!” Up went the trembling hand authoritatively. “You thought she was married. How could you believe that God was in it with you when you went on, from the beginning, with that in your heart? And when you planned to be carrying her off—the poor lost soul!—wasn’t it just the easy solution for you—for you both, in your own mind? The condoning of feelings that were wrong to start with? The cloak of a good deed that you were flinging over a bad one? Wait a bit, let me finish! It’s little you thought of her, the way you carried it through. You had a right anyhow to make sure if you could marry her, and how. For there’s the law of the land against the law of the Church, and you’d have been asking the priest to break the law of the land. Ah, that’s no way to be saving a soul. It wasn’t saving a soul you were after, Shane, my unfortunate boy, it was gratifying your passion. And, praise be to God, thanks be to his Holy Mother, through the prayers of your own sweet mother who loved the faith, you were snatched from the pit. It’s a fine scorching your poor soul got, but if the fire had once laid hold of

you! Oh, many is the mass I have offered for you, and many is the night I've prayed for you and Moira, is there ever a prayer she makes, the creature, that isn't for you!"

Father Blake groaned, struck his breast, and wept. Shane dropped his head into his hands; and Leprechaun whimpered as he licked them.

There was a whirlwind in the young man's soul; and, for the moment, nothing but bitter devastation. He had come back to Clenane, it is true, in the spirit of the prodigal to his father's house, but nevertheless conscious that he was the prodigal in power, clothed already in purple and fine linen, returning with both hands full of gold, to a house poor in all save peace. But Clenane would have none of him, and he was rejected of all, but the dog. It did not take long, however, for the storm to subside. He had not outlearned the lessons of his faith; he felt himself, with humility, not that fine young man, Lord Kilmore, in the presence of an inferior, but a sinner before one who had power and knowledge to deal with his soul.

"You're very hard on me, father," he exclaimed at last, looking up.

Father Blake stretched out his hand and laid a quivering touch on him.

"Don't say that, poor child. It's for your own sake."

"But am I never to see Moira again? Father, have you forgotten it was you wouldn't let me marry her—when I was good and innocent?" sighed poor Shane.

"I thought it was no marriage for you; but maybe I was wrong, maybe—but I did not forbid it out and out. I bid you test yourself then. And now I bid you test yourself again. You were mighty unsettled, that time;

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how do you know what you'll be feeling in another month or so? If you make yourself worthy of her, show yourself worthy of her, I'll say, in the name of God. But as things are now—Shane,” said the priest very solemnly, “that's the good child. I'll not have the trouble brought on her again, and destroy her peace altogether.”

“What am I to do?”

“Do? What'll you do? Have you no duties?”

“Duties?”

“Haven't you properties to look after, haven't you got poor people dependent on you, haven't you got responsibilities to fulfill, with all this wealth and power? It's not yachting or keeping bad company that shall save your soul, or make a man of yourself—or”—a smile here suddenly mitigated the severity of Father Blake's accents—“make you fit to come back, and ask Moira to forgive you.”

They talked long together. And it was a very sad and chastened Shane who sought his boat again in the tranquil June night, and rowed himself back to the *Ariadne*. After all, he was taking some comfort away from Clenane, for Leprechaun had jumped into the dinghy after him. He was not again to be separated from his master if he could help it. Shane thought he might find matter for a letter to Moira on the subject.

He remained on deck watching till dawn, in earnest self-communion, forming, boyishly enough, a hundred stern resolves against himself, a hundred excellent resolutions for the future. One thing was certain, and that would be a pleasant and easy task: he must show Clenane he was not the ungrateful fellow this last year of heedless self-indulgence had made him out. Father Blake

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would be his treasurer. No old friend should have cause to curse him for a black heart.

To look after his own people, those people over there in England, who were not of his race, to make himself respected and loved by them would prove an altogether more arduous business. It was an austere time of probation he traced for himself. A new conception of existence had been set before him: and he saw with a naïve surprise that it was a right and manly one: he must do his duty. Messrs. Somerset, Parker & Co. would certainly be uncommonly pleased. Of course it would be more difficult now than at the beginning; so much the better, he was in the mood for meeting difficulties. He would show them all, Father Blake first, that there was stuff in him. He would show Moira—and with the thought of her, across the gloom of the immediate future, even as now over the wide, shadowy world about him and the unseen restlessness of the sea, the radiance of a dawning day came stealing.

BOOK III

*If I take my wings early in the morning: and dwell in the
uttermost parts of the sea,
Even then also shall thy hand lead me.*

—PSALMS

I

“STARS” AND “PADDY”

IF Shane had been the kind of young man that takes pleasure in the picture phrase, he might have headed his letter to Clenane: “From an Apple-Orchard in France;” but, as it was—digging his indelible pencil with scarcely legible results into the ruled block—according to an apparently unbreakable convention—he contented himself with the abbreviated date: 16.v.18.

An apple orchard in France on the sixteenth of May, set about with tents, it is true, and with the lush green grass trampled, but nevertheless a delectable place; one fluttering sheet of blossom in which a concourse of intensely preoccupied bees kept up an unrelenting hum! Other sounds there were here, not congruous to May-time in an orchard-close; a never-ceasing rattle and boom, varied by an occasional nearer combination of noises; hiss, crash, and explosion. Hummings too, louder than any number of honeysuckers could produce, even in the excited hour of swarming—great musical hummings, rising, tone after tone, to form, as it were, one huge chord, which seemed to envelop the earth, and then, like some magic cloud, endowed with song, pass swiftly, chanting as it went. Grave and beautiful, it was always a song of heroism; and, one way or another, nearly always a song of death.

But Shane, sitting on an empty store-box, absorbed

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in his letter—writing being, as ever, a matter of some labor to him—heeded neither the rattle and boom of the guns nor the myriad murmur of the bees. He was very far away from his surroundings, with the amazing single-minded power of detachment peculiar to the British soldier in the World-War. His thoughts were altogether fixed upon the things of home—the trivial, everyday beloved things which make the sum of ordinary life, which, in ordinary life, slip by unnoticed, but which to the man at the front were as so many precious sanities snatched out of chaos.

“You have not told me if you have got the bottle of Benbow for Leprechaun, it is the grandest stuff for the dogs that ever was. It is a pity I could not be having the old fellow out here; but, then, you would not have the keeping of him once again, and that would be a worse pity; for maybe you would not be wanting to write to me at all.”

Here Shane paused, and a complacent smile appeared on his face, hardened, thinned, and bronzed by nearly four years' varied campaigning. He sucked his pencil thoughtfully, and a bright violet patch appeared on his lips. Vivid violet, too, were the next words on the flimsy sheet.

“Moira, dear, I am only joking.”

A shadow fell across the sunshine of the trampled grass, and he glanced up. His tent companion stood beside him.

“Hallo, Stars!”

“Hallo, Paddy!”

In spite of the limited number of his years—he was even now not yet twenty-three—Antony Lee Saltash had

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joined the British air service early in the war. He was already Captain, Pilot, and in a fair way to become Squadron Commander. An American by birth, educated in Paris, he was something of an anomaly in other things besides. No one quite knew his history; for, though he was given to eloquence on abstract subjects, he was extremely reticent about personal matters. An excellent comrade to all, he had made no close friends, until Shane appeared on his scene.

A small, delicate-looking, serious-faced youth himself, cultivated to the tips of his artistic fingers, he was the antithesis of the Irishman. On some points they must have met, however; for, except when in the air (Shane was observer to another pilot) they were inseparable. In a community given to simple jests, his nationality promptly obtained for him the nickname of “Stars and Stripes,” which, by a natural process, was abbreviated to “Stars,” a title of peculiar appropriateness in view of a remarkable record for “star turns.” An Irishman came by the Paddy as inevitably as a Scotchman by Jock, though, as Shane was by no means singular in the gallant company which formed this particular squadron, he was sometimes distinguished by the affectionate appellation of Paddywhacks, in compliment to the energy with which he dealt with the Boche.

Captain Saltash stepped round to the opposite side of the tent door, dragged a camp-stool out for his own use, and began to light a cigarette without further speech. Shane scribbled on with energy, dug his pencil into the paper with a final dash, folded the sheet and addressed it. Not till this operation was completed did his companion break the silence.

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"I and Mike are the only ones back."

Shane flung him a swift, questioning glance.

"Don't be a croaker, they'll turn up."

Saltash paused; blew a little series of interlinked smoke-rings, and then said, dropping the words slowly:—

"Vandeleur's gone, and Bulkeley, sure enough. Dud pressure, wings crumpled in dive. Side-slipped away from Archie. Went down in flames, right into the Hun."

Shane's blue eyes remained fixed for a moment or two. Then he said, philosophically: "Good men!" and proceeded to light a pipe.

"God rest their souls," he added to himself. Though he had learned a tremendous amount in four crowded years, though he had picked up a good deal of slang and as much carelessness of manner, as much certainty of doing or saying the right kind of thing as any of his comrades, he had not unlearned the simplicity of his adherence to his old faith, nor gathered any superior conceptions concerning the conduct of either God or man.

"Maybe the others will turn up."

"Maybe. Three out of four busloads would make a big gap."

"Hark at that!" cried Shane. The drone of a machine up in the clouds came drivingly across to them out of the confused clamor to which their ears were so much accustomed that they scarce noticed it. "Hark at that!" he repeated. "What did I say? Here's one anyhow. Engine's missing, too, badly."

The great machine appeared with what seemed startling suddenness over the orchard trees; swooped, hesitated, swerved.

"It's the Blighter and the Pup!" yelled Shane, vio-

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lently excited. “What d’you bet, Stars, they’ll be doing a crash upon us? Be jabbers, that’s not the way I’d like to be getting out of the war! No. Good old Blighter! He’ll have his bus to the drome as pretty as if he wasn’t winged at all.”

He had jumped up, and stood gazing after the plane; and while he looked, Saltash looked at him.

He was never tired of contemplating Shane. The splendor of his youthful virility, his classic handsomeness of looks and his unconsciousness of them; the healthy zest he brought to all things, even in war; his sane poise of spirit, untouched by morbidness on one side or brutality on the other; his simplicity, his cleanmindedness, his boyish ways and his superb fighting qualities made of him a point of rest to Saltash’s sensitive soul.

The American seldom smiled, except, faintly, with his eyes. They smiled now. “What a fellow!” he was thinking. “What a model for a sculptor! Mercury for a Gian Bologna, St. George for a Donatello.” Shadowing thought swiftly drove the smile from his eyes—the strained, haunted eyes of nearly every fighting man in the great ranks that spread from the hills of Jura to the Dunes of Dunkirk! How, many a time, had he not himself helped to extricate from the wreckage of his wings the broken body of some poor Icarus, youthful as Shane, as gallant, as joyously fearless! How many gaps might there not even be to-day in their small mess!

He heaved a sigh, then gave himself a mental shake. At least the hour was theirs still. If there is one philosophy of all others learnt in the field, it is this one: the present is all you have—make the most of it. Saltash sighed again, but with pleasure, as he contemplated the

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exquisite effect of the apple-tree in front of him against the blue of the afternoon sky. He was an artist, in his way would now and then dash off a water-color, sketches that had something Japanese in their suggestive reticence. He was inclined to look for his block now, but refrained, partly from fatigue, partly because, as he presently explained to Shane, who was contentedly puffing at his pipe in silence, there was never anything more impossible to paint.

“Oh, my, whenever I see an orchard picture I just turn away! Blobs of paint, or woolly cocoons, to represent what is at once so definite and so ethereal! There’s only one man who ever painted a true picture of spring blossom; that was Meredith, and his a word picture.”

Shane shifted his pipe. He had not been paying much attention to his comrade’s discourse. The poor chap was fond of rambling on that way and he himself had no objection; he liked the sound of the voice, so long as he was not expected to understand, but he had caught a name.

“Meredith—the fellow with the broken nose in *C Flight*?”

Saltash’s eyes had their smile. Paddy’s depths of ignorance were a perpetual source of affectionate amusement to him.

“I might have guessed,” he said, “you wouldn’t even have a nodding acquaintance with Meredith. He was a writer, my boy—a great one—though not for the multitude; takes some reading. Well, now, wait a moment, I’ll put a little Meredith into you, that you won’t forget—not with that tree before you, though it isn’t double cherry.”

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He got up, slipped into the tent; Shane looking after him, shrugged his shoulders and tapped his forehead with a grin.

As his friend came out, holding a little book, the Irishman replaced his pipe, nodded, and between clenched teeth, bade him fire away. Saltash turned over the pages with a knowing hand, and then began to read. Long residence in France had given a certain precision to his speech, perhaps also a shade of accent, which made it something very different from the usual soft slurring drawl of the Southern American. But he had the pleasant voice as well as the gentle distinction of his race.

“The load of virginal blossoms, whiter than summer cloud on the sky, showered and drooped, and clustered so thick as to claim color, and seem, like higher Alpine snows in noon-sunlight, a flush of white. From deep to deeper heavens of white, her eyes perched and soared.’”

Shane removed his pipe.

“Who is her?”

“You Goth,” Saltash good-humoredly expounded, “the lady who was looking at the cherry-tree.”

“Oh, there’s a lady in it, is there?”

Shane’s face unaccountably clouded over. But, his melancholy eyes back on the page, the reader proceeded, skipping to the phrases with which he wished to impress the listener:—

“ . . . wonder so divine, so unbounded, was like soaring into homes of angel-crowded space, sweeping through folded and on to folded white fountain-bow of wings, in innumerable columns.’”

“I can’t stand that tosh!” exclaimed Shane roughly. “I must put my letter in the post anyhow. Meet you at tea.”

Saltash stared thoughtfully after the striding figure. "What did I come up against there?" he wondered. He was to receive the answer to his question unexpectedly that night from Shane's own lips.

It had been an unusually quiet evening, for not only had the second missing machine failed to return, but orders had gone forth that the Flight was to put in some particularly risky work in the dawn.

"Hardly seems worth while turning in," said Shane. He was seated on the edge of his narrow bed. "Phew! how that lamp stinks! Brings me back to the days of my youth. You know I was riz on the west coast of Ireland, and it's not electric light we'd be having there." He dropped unconsciously into the old phraseology. But though he spoke jocularly, the unwonted gloom on his face did not lift. He returned to the present abruptly.

"Sorry I interrupted your recitation this afternoon, Stars. Fact is——" he paused, kicked the leg of the bed, "fact is, it put me in mind of something." Once again he stopped, and began to whistle.

From where he sat, regulating the lamp with neat touches of slender hands, Saltash glanced not so much inquiringly as sympathetically at his tent companion. Shane answered the look by a halting confidence.

"It was that stuff you read me. There was somebody once who reminded me—at least, it wasn't she who reminded me, but her room—herself and her room, the whole thing, rather, if you can understand what I mean——?"

"Quite so."

"When she brought me into it the first time—it was her own sitting-room—it was all white, and she herself

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in white—and I thought—what a fool I was!—that nothing could be so white as her soul. And I thought—I said to her: ‘It’s like walking into a hawthorn-tree in flower.’ You know the white blossom and the pure, clean smell. And, oh, it was all rottenness!”

Saltash gave a faint start.

“Rottenness, that was all that was in it,” repeated Shane with energy. “And if I were to die to-morrow it’s all I would have got out of life.”

“You mean, in the way of woman’s love?”

“I do not,” cried Shane, suddenly and unexpectedly. “Thank God, there’s been better than that for me, and I’m humbly grateful! But I mean—well——” He got up, and sat down again. “I’d not like to be keeping secrets from you, Stars. We haven’t been in each other very long—not more than three or four months, have we?—but, you’re about the only real friend I ever made, though it’s many a good chum I left behind in Gallipoli. But friends as we are, neither of us are fellows to be talking much about ourselves. Some things can’t be hidden, though. You’ve seen me writing, and you must have guessed I was writing to a girl.”

“Quite so.”

“It’s the girl I want to marry.”

“Is that so?”

“The girl I mean to marry.”

“Sure.”

“Ah, but I’d have married her long ago, if it hadn’t been for that—the creature that seemed like an angel in the blossom—that’s what put me in mind of her, when you read me your fine phrases all about the whiteness and the angels’ wings. ‘Pon my soul,” cried Shane, “it

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came all back to me with such a rush, it turned my heart on me! My curse——”

Saltash flung up one hand.

“Don’t, Paddy, don’t!”

“Don’t what?”

“Don’t curse her.”

Shane stared.

“I tell you——” he began hotly.

A faint color rose in the American’s olive cheek.

“If you loved her once.”

“Love? I was her tool, her dupe. You don’t know the story, Stars; and how could I tell it to you?”

“No, you couldn’t.” Saltash spoke quickly. His kind face that looked at once so young and so worn with life, was the mirror of pained thought. “You ought,” he said, weighing his words, “at least it seems to me, Paddy, old man—to remember that you did love her, and that she is a woman.” And, as Shane still stared with an angry, uncomprehending gaze, like that of some wild stag at the intruder on his ground, he went on, patiently. “I don’t think any man ought to think hardly of a woman. I don’t know anything about women myself, except my mother—nor anything about love, except what a boy feels for his mother. I reckon I’m too young, though I don’t know about that either. I have a sort of feeling sometimes that I wasn’t made for that kind of thing or meant to know it ever.”

“What do you think you were made for, then?” Shane put the question curiously.

Saltash pondered a moment and then, with smiling eyes went on without direct reply: “I dare say you’ll laugh a time, but I was brought up that way; to respect

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all women. That was the lesson my mother—yes, she’s dead, Paddy—yes, before the war, I’m glad to say—the great lesson she was never tired of teaching me: chivalry. ‘Be a knight in your heart, my little son,’ she used to say to me. Somehow, whenever I think of a woman, I think of her. And it hurts me when any one—like you, just now——”

He paused. Shane’s look of anger was replaced by an air at once abashed and softened. The memory of his own mother, child as he was when he had lost her, had remained a haunting tenderness to him. He knew that his comrade’s mother had been a Virginian like his own. It had been a link between them from the beginning, and they had amused themselves by striving to find a blood connection, though Shane’s complete ignorance of his own genealogy had frustrated the attempt.

“There’s all the difference in the world, and don’t I know it myself,” he said at last, doggedly though the fierceness had gone out of his tone, “between the good woman and the—and the bad one.”

“Sure. But I look at it this way. As far as I know the world—I’ve not lived very long, but I’ve seen a lot these last years—it’s pretty easy to call a woman bad. But that badness of hers, poor soul, it could not have done the man who’s speaking of her any harm, unless he had had a badness in himself to meet it.”

Shane gripped the bed, and stared as if his gentle friend had struck him.

“I’m sorry, Paddy,” said the American youth quietly into the silence.

“You must not think,” said poor Shane at last, “that I was—oh, dash it!—that I’ve got anything really on my

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conscience with regard to her. Not really," he repeated with a firmer tone. "She got no harm from me."

"I was pretty sure of that."

"But she wants to make out she's got a claim on me. She keeps writing. Of course I don't answer her" (he flushed), "and if I was able to—I'd go over to Ireland to-morrow and get my wife."

There was a silence. On Shane's side the pause was simmering with unspoken clamors, on that of Saltash's it had the understanding patience which awaits yet invites confidence.

"If it hadn't been for her," Shane went on passionately, "we'd have been married long ago: and if I'm done for to-morrow I'll have missed the best in life."

"Somehow, I don't think you'll be done for to-morrow; but, whatever happens, you cannot say that."

"And why not—if it's my way of thinking?"

There was the gleam in the other's eyes which betokened his amusement. Yet he answered, in accents that had a certain solemnity.

"Because you'd die doing your duty."

"Oh, that——!"

Four years of war service do not make a man callous to the ever present danger, and the huge issues before his soul; but they make him, as a rule, shy of reference to the subject. Shane, like his comrades, had learned to clothe himself with an inner armor against emotionalism in others, lest the fatal thing should penetrate to his own spirit.

"I reckon that's the best death a man can have," said Saltash serenely. There was no emotionalism here.

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Shane contemplated his companion, and his gaze grew uneasy as an unwelcome thought protruded itself.

“Hallo, Stars!”

“Hallo, Paddy?”

“You had a way of saying that as if—you’d be glad—I say, don’t you want to come through?”

“The oil’s come right out, over the lamp socket—that’s what is making it smell, I guess. Tomson’s a good lad, but he will fill it too full.”

The American, with the deliberation which characterized all his movements, produced, from a box under his bed, an oily cloth with which he carefully wiped the lamp. As, one by one, he next wiped his fingers on its cleanest corner, he remarked, much in the same indifferent tone:—

“Well, if you come to put it so, I couldn’t rightly tell you, Paddy. Sometimes I think I’d like to find—well—a place where there’d be peace. I reckon I’d find that. And sometimes, when I look at you and see the other jolly fellows, I feel I couldn’t bear to leave you, till you were all through with it. You see, I joined the fight long before my country thought of coming in, because——” he paused, then the tired, dreaming eyes lighted up and smiled with a gentle humorous contraction of the lids that made his young countenance altogether charming to look on. “Well, life can be a considerable muddle sometimes. And when a man sees the right, clear in front of him, and can go for it—that, I take it, is—some satisfaction.”

Shane sat, turning over these remarks in his mind without conviction.

“You’re such a queer little chap,” he murmured at last. “I suppose it’s possible really to feel like that.

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Priests do, I know, but you—why, Stars, I don't know that you've got any religion at all."

"I've never thought very much of religion, and I've studied the question deeply." The American voice had its usual pleasant quiet flow while it made these, to Shane, astounding statements. "I was brought up at a French Lycée. You don't see much to stimulate you in the way of religion there. And my dear little mother was very Puritan. And somehow I didn't seem to cotton to the American churchman when I met him. And Buddhism——" he paused, smiled with his eyes, and went on: "The great religion of the East I mean, it's very alluring, but, after all, it ends in negation; with obliteration; I could not hold with that at all, so I just made a religion in myself; and I've gone by it as straight as I can. And I've had great peace of conscience. I reckon that's a good sign?"

"You made a religion in yourself!"

The listener, Catholic and Irish, repeated the words in shocked amazement.

"Have I scared you, Paddy? I reckon it's not so very different from yours, after all, only it's considerably simplified. I've got what you may call a main principle. I believe that you're created by a good God, to do good, to be good, to think good. And that, if you don't, you get hit back, sure as fate, by the very evil you've done. That's justice. It's not punishment, it's logic. You remember the copybook text that virtue is its own reward. You bet that's true, just as evil is its own retribution. The evil you do, every evil, as I take it, is a fact in the spiritual and the temporal life that sets certain consequences going, as inevitably as that shell that's explod-

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ing yonder this moment will produce vibrations forever into space. Look at the Germans, my!—the world will see evil fulfilled of itself in them, one day, mark my words! Perhaps you will see it, Paddy; that will be a chastisement such as never has been since the fall of Jerusalem.”

Shane’s ideas about the fall of Jerusalem were rather vague, but Saltash’s theory struck his conscience at the point where it was most vulnerable.

“Do you mean,” he said, “that you’ve got to be punished all the time for every wrong? That nothing can be undone ever? I’m not a good hand at expressing myself like you, Stars; but it’s an awful thought, if I’m understanding you right. If a fellow is sorry and all that, in the name of God, can’t it all be wiped out? That’s what my faith teaches, anyhow.”

“Pardon me,” replied the youthful philosopher, with his air of antique wisdom, “your faith, on the contrary, inculcates that even when sin is forgiven, it has yet to be atoned for—to the uttermost farthing, I believe is the Biblical expression. Your religion is essentially the religion of atonement, and I confess I have an admiration for the logical manner in which the doctrine is inculcated and applied. Without feeling that I could ever myself become a member of it, I have been much struck with the practical results of its working among the men. It gives them strength and peace of mind—whether justified or not. ‘A religion to die in,’ as poor Carmichael, who became what you call a convert shortly before he went West, said to me the very last night we were at mess together. And besides,” here his eyes smiled at Shane, “repentance is atonement. It puts you right with your own soul, anyhow. And you can bear up against the

other results, the consequences—the vibrations. After all, that's life. It's what we are all doing."

Shane thrust his hand through his hair, with a boyish gesture of distress; then he yawned, showing all his white teeth like a young dog.

"I'll turn in," he said.

As he cast his clothes from him he said suddenly: "Glory be to God, that's the uncomfortable talk we've been having—and we with that devil's stunt before us to-morrow!"

He rolled into bed, and pulled his pillow over his black head: a strong hint that he had had enough of discussion. Nevertheless, long after Saltash was himself asleep, Shane lay awake, revolving in a troubled mind the problems which had been set before it. His natural instinct was to take life, the good and the bad, with the high-spirited carelessness of the healthy animal. But certain things had gone deep with him: his first pure boyish love for Moira; his mad, brief passion for an unworthy woman; the discovery, the revulsion, the humiliation, the return to old attachments.

He had not revisited Clenane since the June night when Father Blake had sent him forth with a counsel which matched the views of the agnostic young American. The outbreak of war, however, had found him barely established on his English property, still bewildered by, only beginning to feel interested in, the multifarious obligations his position entailed. He had promptly joined the Yeomanry of his county, and in due course departed for Egypt, taking part later in the heroic and harassing struggles in Gallipoli.

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Wounded pride, a boyish desire through some splendid record of valor to rehabilitate himself in the eyes of those whom he had dismally disappointed, had kept him from attempting to see them before his departure. There had been another reason, too; the disquieting manner in which Venetia Hobson, now and again, tried to reopen communication with him. He had been glad to get away overseas at first, from all possibility of this; but, after a mistaken attempt at self-justification, he had determined to cast the whole matter from him and had ceased to reply to her letters. Nevertheless, at certain long, and irregular intervals, these continued to come. Strange, mysterious documents, some of them couched as if he and she were acknowledged lovers, parted only through the cruel necessities of the times; others in a tone of pure friendliness, discursive, poetic, picturesque, such as a young soldier at the front would be flattered and stimulated to receive from a cultivated woman of the world who was young enough to charm and old enough delicately to mother him. Others, again, appealed, reproached, accused.

Shane hardly glanced at any of them now. He would crumple them in his hand and fling them from him. He was not one to allow himself to be hampered in life by a chain which he had deliberately broken. As for Moira, he was only biding his time. The excitement and possibilities of the air warfare had tempted him keenly; but it was above all the thought of her that had inspired him to seek distinction in the most brilliant branch of the service. He had succeeded without too much difficulty in being transferred to it. Indeed, Shane was cut out, so to speak, by Nature, for the glories of flying.

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He fully intended, the moment official recognition should place him in a sufficiently favorable light, to go over to Clenane and rush Moira into a "war marriage." Though he corresponded with her he had not attempted to reëstablish the broken engagement. He could not bring himself to do this by letter; he felt the sensitiveness of her wounded spirit all through those simple epistles of hers, breathing anxiety and prayerful hopes for his safety only in deliberately sisterly terms. With every day that went by the realization of his betrayal and of her magnanimity became increasingly poignant in him. From his own lips only she must hear the story of his folly and his repentance; from her lips only would he take sweet forgiveness. Of her he felt absolutely sure: she would never think of another man. He must somehow always have been confident of this; for, though he had been haunted by the thought of her becoming a nun, he had never once had the least fear of her marrying.

She was back at the farm now, helping to nurse her father, whose health had broken down. Her letters were chronicles of Clenane: of Father Blake, still a pastor to his people, though "God help him, it's the miracle he's alive at all"; of Leprechaun, gray about the muzzle; of Honor, prosperous again, and of her succession of "lovely pigs and grand little hens"; of the doctor's sister "dying on him," and the talk there was of his now getting a wife. And every letter would end with some such words as these: "Take care of yourself, dear Shane, I do be praying that you may come home safe."

But, as he had complained, his conversation with Saltash had disquieted Shane. What a terrible theory for any one to entertain, that the consequences of wrong-

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doing should be irrevocable! What if, by his own fault, he were to be forever separated from Moira! What if he should be killed without having been able to put himself straight with her; without a single word of love having once more passed between them! Had he been true to her, as she to him, he would have had a year of happiness at least, before the war broke out. Such memories of young wedded love to think on, in those long marches, those evenings in the desert, those arid, windswept, dreadful trenches in Gallipoli! He would have had a wife to go back to on his brief leaves, a home, children to hold in his arms, like other men; an heir, perhaps, to follow after him, were he to crash to-morrow.

Saltash's regular breathing had long testified to slumber when Shane lay still awake—a very unusual occurrence. He thought perhaps, more about his soul that night, about the problems of existence, the responsibilities of man's actions and the possibilities of the future, than he had ever done in his life. It seemed strange to him that he and Saltash should have become tent companions: both were without homes, without close ties; as far as he knew, without a single being of their blood to mourn them if they fell. It ought to make death easy, but Shane knew that, for him, it made the thought of it unbearable.

Then, it was his own fault, whereas Saltash had always gone “straight for the right.”

II

“MORITURI TE SALUTANT”

HALF-PAST three, even on a May morning, is an uninviting hour at which to rise. And the mingled excitement and apprehension of the task that lay before them made the comrades somewhat silent as they suppressed their yawns and huddled themselves in their flying kit.

When each had swallowed his steaming bowl of cocoa, they stepped out of the tent together, and stood a moment, looking upon the scene and upon each other. The grayness of dawn was beginning to be transfused with the pale glimmers of a good sunrise. There was ground mist, but not much. It hung about the apple-trees, swathing their pearly blossom shapes with mystery. A few lights gleamed yellow through raised tent doors: there was movement in the camp—the orderly subdued bustle that preceded the departure of a flight.

The year was approaching that favored period when there is little darkness a fine night through. But in this strange twilight, men and things, the whole familiar view, had a magic aspect. To the American's dreamily romantic humor, his friend with his flying cap drawn round his chiseled face, with his tallness, his strength and leanness, in his close-fitting garb, looked like a knight in armor. He gazed on him, then round about the orchard, and back again. It was the look of a man taking farewell; but Shane only saw that the tired eyes were smiling.

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“It’s going to be a good day, old chap. Hope your observer will do you credit. Shall we get along?”

“We are full early,” said Saltash, looking at his wrist-watch.

“So much the better. I rather thought of looking up the padre——” He broke off. “Good man, there he comes!”

Two figures were crossing the orchard; one, a little behind the other, was carrying a case. Shane darted forward.

The American stood still, watching. The R.C. chaplain with his batman—he knew that they were taking the short cut to the barn at the further end of the orchard where the priest would celebrate mass for such of his own men who were about to take their turn in the trenches. They were wonderful fellows, those R.C. chaplains, thought Saltash, they seemed to feel by instinct the very moment when their ministrations might be wanted. And their care for the men as “souls” appealed to one who, like himself, cultivated a deliberate and quiet consciousness of the fact that any moment his own body and soul might be rent asunder. He had a slight acquaintance with the young Oxford-bred cleric, who, scarcely older than Shane, was so cold in social intercourse, and so ardent in spiritual matters. Shane and the padre, however, had never got on particularly well together: faithful as he was to his creed, the Irishman had been accustomed to a kind of priest very different from this reserved, cultivated personality. But now he sped towards him.

Saltash saw how the padre stopping, dismissed his batman with a gesture; how he and Shane then began to

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pace side by side, up and down between the apple-trees. He understood what it meant. Shane was confessing his sins. His sins! A tenderness misted the eyes of the looker-on; in spite of those half confidences overnight, "Stars" did not believe that "Paddy" had anything very grievous on his conscience.

Presently Shane pushed back his cap and went down on one knee. The absolution! Saltash turned his head away, to gaze no more. He was aware of the mystic significance these rites had for the initiate; and his delicate spirit revolted from the thought of—unbelieving—seeming to pry upon them. Yet it was no unusual spectacle in the camp. Shamefaced as the average Briton might be in peace times, where intimate and sacred things are in question, the soldier in this war attended as openly and simply to the concerns of his soul as he did to his allotted work.

In a very little while Shane came running by. As he passed, Saltash had a glimpse of his face illuminated by the first sunshaft. It was radiant.

The Hun was beginning to wake up all along the lines. Saltash started running in his turn, caught up his comrade and side by side they made for the aerodrome.

A long line of machines showed in the faint light, gray, bony, like unimaginably monstrous grasshoppers. The two friends, in silence, joined a group gathered round the patrol leader, who, in business-like, everyday manner, gave them their instructions. Then the knot of splendid youth divided, making off in pairs for their machines. One or two waved hands and shouted at "Stars" as they went.

"*Morituri te salutant!*" murmured Saltash.

“*MORITURI TE SALUTANT*”

“Say something a fellow can understand,” cried Shane. He seized his own pilot by the arm. “Come along, Cubby.”

“Get into your machines!” called the squadron commander. A few moments later the order, “Start up,” ran along the line. From the flight commander’s engine issued a vast roar. His machine slid forward, racing into the wind; and then, without effort, rose superbly, with a musical drone, into the exquisite purity of the air. The rest followed in their turn. B Flight had taken wing on its gallant and desperate errand.

For a strangely brief span the world seemed possessed with the sustained giant song of giant birds, then high skies and far horizons swallowed both vision and sound, and the boom of the guns, the acrid hiss of the shells took their daily hold of it.

A troop of battered men passed along the road from the trenches, mud-stained, exhausted, tramping with tired feet, but keeping something of the swing of their pride, with tin hats still set at a rakish angle over countenances strained, weary, and unshorn. Another day of battle had begun.

By noon so much young life had paid its toll to high ideals and inhuman ambitions; so much springing, pulsing manhood had been crushed, maimed, mutilated; so many machines had failed to return, had crashed, gone down in flames; a certain bombing party had achieved the desired result; a small raid had been repulsed; part of our trenches had been bombarded and retaliation had been given, full measure; by noon, in fine, another step, strangely short as far as progress could be recorded, had

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been taken in the great war, at huge cost of blood and treasure.

Among those who paid was Captain Lee Saltash. No one, not even his own observer, knew that he was hit; never had he negotiated a more perfect landing. As he made no movement to alight, they at first thought he had fainted. It was Shane who discovered the spreading patch on the leather coat as they laid him on the grass.

Great things had "Stars" accomplished that day; stammering between shock, grief, and admiration, his observer poured forth the tale into Shane's ears, fighting against tears as he spoke; he was nothing but a boy and the tension had been fierce, to culminate in tragedy.

"He ought to have the V.C. They ought to give him the V.C.," he kept repeating.

Shane was hardly aware that any one was speaking to him. He knelt beside the dead, gazing as if turned to stone. All the youthfulness that had been somehow lost, disguised in Saltash's prematurely thoughtful personality, had reappeared. He looked the merest stripling, lying there so peacefully. His mechanic had reverently closed the glazing eyes, with toilworn fingers tender as a woman's: those eyes that had so often smiled on Shane out of the gentle, serious face were forever closed, but the smile was now on the lips. Shane would always think of his friend as he thus saw him, smiling in a serenity infinitely remote, as if wise with knowledge secret but transcendently sweet.

He felt a touch on his shoulder:—

"Here's the doctor," said the mechanic. "Not that he can be of any use."

Shane drew the glove from the dead hand and held it

“MORITURI TE SALUTANT”

tightly grasped for a moment. It was still warm. So he said farewell to his only friend; and there was another grave in the long row; another cross added to the many, many that stood in such dreary and pathetic ranks.

“One of the best!” It was the universal verdict of all who had known “Stars.” In a company of men where every day brings the gap or gaps to be instantly filled; when each man knows that his turn may come the next hour, nay, the next moment, there can be little room for sentiment. There was no more expended over the death of the American than over that of the scores of other good fellows who had gone the same gallant way no less gallantly. But in Shane’s heart there was locked fast a sad and holy memory. When he had clasped that poor insentient hand he had made a promise in his soul: “Stars, old man, I’ll never forget you, and I’ll mind what you said all my life long. I’ll try and go right like you.”

III

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SHANE fingered uncertainly the texture under his hand—a sheet, fine and smooth—a linen sheet! Was he still dreaming? He had been living in a singularly confused world of dreams lately. It seemed to him that he had passed a whole lifetime in the air, pursuing or pursued; soaring to breathless heights, dropping to unfathomable deeps, sometimes with the blasting light, the crack and roar of flame about him, sometimes all in the gloom of an abysmal night, out of which there was no issue. If this was a dream, it was a very nice one. He lay in a quiet place, at rest; and the sense of peace enfolded him as soothingly as the cool smooth linen.

“Glory be to God, if it’s not Heaven, it must be Limbo,” thought Irish Shane. Stretching himself, he sighed, and went to sleep.

When he awoke and turned languid yet curious eyes about him, he saw that he was in a pleasant, spacious, shaded room, in bed like any Christian. There were three other beds against the wall; in each of them a figure lay, propped up or quite recumbent. He shifted his head slightly—that was extraordinarily difficult—and got another aspect of the room. Two big windows, wide open, with outside shutters closed through the slats of which long, mellow, golden rays were piercing, reflected in amber bars on the painted floor.

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By one of these windows was a table, and on the table a huge bunch of long-stalked crimson roses in a glass vase. The scent of them came to Shane's nostrils; there was another smell in the fresh room, too, very familiar but less pleasant. And while he was searching to find a name for it, he dozed off once more.

He was much surprised to discover presently that he was being held under the shoulder by a very determined hand, while, hardly an inch from his nose, another hand was no less firmly proffering a steaming cup of milk. The moment he opened his eyes, the rim of the said cup was deftly inserted between his lips. Shane understood he was to drink. And, though he was not quite sure that he liked having his mind made up for him in this manner, he found himself drinking, before he could examine the point, and very much enjoying the process.

"There!" a voice spoke contentedly over his head. He was miraculously laid flat on a comfortable arrangement of pillows, and the next thing that happened was that his mouth was wiped as if he had been a baby. But the napkin rasped against a stubbly growth of beard that certainly was not infantile.

He put up his hand and wondered still more. Finally, raising his eyelids—why in the world should he feel as if he were altogether made of lead?—he stared into a pair of motherly eyes set in a pale, elderly countenance, which was framed in a floating white veil.

"I know now," Shane said to himself seriously. "This is a hospital, and it's the carbolic soap I'm smelling."

And the face, smiling down at him, belonged to a nurse. She looked so kind and comforting that he felt inclined to ask her to let him hold her hand till he went to sleep

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again, as he used to hold his mother's hand when he was a little boy. But it was too much trouble to speak; so he closed his eyes and let the whole universe slide. He did not dream, he did not even have a sensation; healing slumber took him and folded him right away into her profoundest mystery of oblivion.

That night he spoke for the first time for three weeks.

"This is a lovely place. Where am I?"

The nurse bent to catch the words. He had expected her to be less stupid. Then she answered him, speaking very slowly and distinctly, as if she thought him stupid.

"You are in the Venetia Hospital."

"Oh, no!" cried Shane.

Venetia! The word had started something vibrating in his head with a dreadful pain. He was not clear why, but he knew that it was wrong, out of all reason, somehow desperately bad and dangerous for him to be in a place that was called Venetia. "Not that, not that!" he cried.

"What is the matter?" A hand swiftly went from his head to his wrist. "Try and be calm. There's nothing to upset you. Don't you like being in hospital? It is to make you well. You are getting well. You said just now yourself it was a lovely place."

"But not Venetia!" His blue eyes blazed out of his drawn face.

"No, no, not Venetia!" The voice was soothing. "That was a mistake. Now, please, let me just put the thermometer here, under your tongue. There, don't bite it; lie quite still."

He lay and sucked obediently.

She looked so really good, Shane thought, she would

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never tell a lie. This was, after all, a lovely place—so long as it was not Venetia. And the cup of stuff they had just given him made him feel singularly satisfied. He was hardly conscious of the thermometer's removal, but presently heard, as in a dream, a man's voice and a woman's, talking.

"No temperature. But dreadfully excited. Very disappointing," the pleasant tones he already knew were saying. A masculine growl answered: "Concussion: shock; only to be expected—nothing to worry about. The sedative if he continues restless."

Shane was hunting for the meaning of the word sedative when he dropped again like a stone into the well of oblivion.

The next morning the process of restoration had so far advanced that he found himself not only able to think consecutively, to piece out a sequence of events with some success, but also to bring the wandering thought and unexplained apprehension under some control of will.

He could not recall how he had met with disaster. He must have crashed. Yes, that was it, he had crashed, come on his head, been knocked silly, picked up and brought to hospital. Quite a fairly long time ago too, it was evident; for, the outside shutters being flung back this morning, he could see orange and yellow of turning leaves flutter against the blue sky. The last thing he remembered was full summer, and here was autumn. But, though he had no recollection even of the flight that had preceded catastrophe, he had a vivid impression that last night some one (the long-faced sister over there who had just relieved the night nurse) had told him that he was in the Venetia Hospital. It disquieted him with a recurrent sense of

painful speculation. Tacitly, however, he came to an agreement with himself not to pursue the question till he was strong enough to deal with it. Just now he was too utterly weak.

The sister, as she came round to his cot, professed herself highly gratified with his condition, and suggested that he might like an orderly to shave him. "Make you feel more like yourself," she opined. Shane was ready to agree. It annoyed his feebleness to hear and feel the unwanted rasping of cheek and chin against the linen.

Sister Marley surveyed him with admiration, when the operation had been completed.

"Well, you do look nice, Lord Kilmore! I am pleased to think we've got you so well, just to-day, when Commandant has come back—yes, she came back last night. Captain Vesey."

She turned to the occupant of the next bed, who had made an eager exclamation. Shane had not been able to muster any interest in his room companions yet; but now, propped up by additional pillows, he could fling a glance at his neighbor without too much exertion. He saw a flushed, very boyish face, tossed yellow hair. "The poor fellow's gone on Commandant, whoever she is!" The humorous thought came to him. His eyelids drooped; it was a nice clean feeling to be smooth-shaven again, but the process had confoundedly tired him. The next moment he started, every nerve alive.

"Yes, Captain Vesey," the sister was saying. "Lady Hobson is sure to come in presently. She is looking splendid after her rest, I am glad to say."

Shane clasped his emaciated hands tightly together, and pressed his lips to keep the fierce words back. It was

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a trap, an infernal trap! But he must face it now as best he could.

A flash of searing memory brought back the words with which she had dismissed him from her life, the very tone, the twist of her lip: "I thought you were a gentleman; you are nothing but an Irish peasant."

He would show her how an Irish peasant could behave, even when he was but half alive and practically at her mercy. He must be polite—oh, yes! he would be polite as to the merest acquaintance; but any attempt on her part to reproach, or appeal, even to allude to bygone folly, he would meet with silence. A man can always be silent, Shane knew that; at any rate, he could.

He heard the soft modulation of her voice, before she came into his line of vision; and, in spite of his resolution, it started a pulse of anger. How had she beguiled and misled him with those accents of music! It was singular, but characteristic of his race, that the moment of disillusion should have been, with him, the moment of entire repudiation.

There was no echo in him of past tenderness; it was the resentment that woke afresh. He lay listening. They were going round the beds in a little group—doctor, nurse, and Commandant. Now she had reached his neighbor, the boy with the rough, fair hair; but he would not turn his eyes. He stared through the window opposite at the wine-stained leaves that flickered and trembled against the blue of the sky. With contempt he heard the stammered greeting of the youth whom the sister had addressed as Captain Vesey. He had himself been, once, even such a fool as this! He heard, too, the eager deference with which both Sister Marley and the doctor, who

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was not given (as he had found out in twenty-four hours of lucidity) to soft speech, addressed her. She had bewitched them all, it was the Angel of Light they thought her!

A minute later three faces were looking down at him; the sister's unconsciously softened at sight of his wan looks, but Venetia, incredibly unchanged, gazed upon him with a countenance of marble placidity.

"This is Lord Kilmore, Lady Hobson," began Sister Marley, then in her sprightliest accents, "you may remember how bad we thought him when he was brought here just before you went away so worn out. I always will believe that it was those two nights you insisted on sitting up with him that quite broke you down. You couldn't know anything about it," she went on, addressing Shane. "But we were dreadfully short-handed; and it was a question whether you would pull through. And Commandant never thinks of herself."

"Lord Kilmore and I know each other," said Venetia, smiling.

"Then you'd enjoy a little chat." The sister became very bustling. "I'd be glad to take Dr. Smithson into the next ward. I don't quite like the look of the Colonel's arm this morning."

She pushed a chair forward officiously, and Venetia sat down at the end of the bed. Outlined against the bright window-square, her face was in shadow, between the floating wings of her white veil, nevertheless Shane knew, grudgingly, that she had never been more lovely. The nurse's garb is becoming to most women. It suited Venetia Hobson's personality with a kind of fantastic appropriateness; so exquisitely did she seem the ministering

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angel, so all-womanly, pure, tender, quiet, and composed, that it was little wonder the fair-haired boy should glower on Shane with miserable eyes of envy.

There was silence for a while; Shane set his teeth, he was not going to be the one to break it. Then she spoke.

"It is quite true that I sat beside you—two whole nights. Oh, there is nothing to thank me for!" But Shane had not spoken. "I could not do anything for you. No one could. If you had died"—she clasped her hands; her measured tones so pitched that none but he could hear, suddenly broke on passion—"I should have——" She stopped and bent towards him to whisper, "Oh, how I prayed you should not die without having forgiven me!"

This was so unexpected that Shane's tight-folded lips parted in amazement. He stared at the downcast face, pearl-like in the shadow, and could find no word. She went on, raising her eyes; their expression seemed to him altered; deeply melancholy, but no longer haunted.

"You thought I was one that could not pray, but you taught me. You—the thought of you——" she hesitated, picking her words with a timidity that in her was exquisite. "Don't think that I am going back on the past—no, indeed, that is not the way of atonement! I have been leading a different life. Oh, what I have seen, what I have felt since I took up my work here! . . . But one thing I must tell you, I am now reconciled to the Church—to God——"

She paused again. Still Shane did not utter a word. She sighed, leaned closer to him, and speaking still lower:—

"I know what wrong I did." There were tears in her voice. "I know how nearly I dragged you down to wrong

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too. I deceived you—forgive me. I want to be good now. I want to do right. Say only those three words—Shane—Lord Kilmore, you have been very near death, it must make you less hard, less angry—say: ‘I forgive you.’ Oh! listen to me, believe me—I will never talk of this again, so long as you are here, and, when you leave, we are not likely ever to meet again in this world. I only want to be able to go on my lonely road in peace.”

He could not altogether follow her, for his head spun with weakness; but of one or two phrases he caught the surprising meaning. She had come back to God; she wanted to do right. And she was craving forgiveness—of him!

To do right, “to go for the right.” One whom he had loved, he remembered now, it was Saltash—dear old “Stars”—had told him that nothing else mattered. Stars had always done right and that was why there had been so wonderful a smile on his dead face.

“I must forgive,” he said loudly, more to himself than to her.

She rose and bent over him with a soft flutter of veil.

“Hush!” Her finger was on her lip, it was the old mysterious gesture. Something in Shane shuddered from her.

“You promised,” he cried, “you wouldn’t be going back on the past!” The spasm of aversion which seized his soul was written on his white face. She straightened herself.

“I must beg you, Lord Kilmore, not to distress yourself. All we want is that you should get well as quickly as possible. And you will soon be well—very soon!” She nodded at him with the smile of the nurse upon the patient. She looked quite different from anything he ever remem-

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bered of her. The next moment she moved away, and he heard her murmur as she stood by the neighboring bed:—

“Wandering just a little, still, poor fellow. But we must have patience.”

He turned his head irritably to the wall. A slow tear of weakness trickled down his cheek. He longed for Moira.

She came back to the ward again that afternoon, and sat in turn beside every patient. He was surprised, relieved, and at the same time, perhaps, a little discomfited to find how unfounded was the dread with which he had seen her approach. Not only did she obey his demand that the past should be buried; but, with an art of which she was consummate mistress, adopted a perfect tone of kindly acquaintanceship which set them further apart.

With ethereal hands folded on her lap, her delicate pale face seeming almost to bring a light of its own into the shadowed room, where the green shutters were again drawn, she sat, very still, and pleasantly discoursed.

She told him he was in an old French château, the use of which she had had the good fortune to obtain for her hospital. She had not been able to rest till she had done some work for her country and the splendid soldiers. Her voice trembled when she spoke of the suffering, the heroism, the patience of the wounded; but she was reticent; only, as it were, skimming across depths of feeling with fugitive wings.

Did he know that Val Blythe had been killed? Yes, poor Val! He had joined at once, but not liking trench-work, had managed to get on the staff. Unfortunately his General's headquarters had been blown to pieces and poor old Val with them.

Shane, who had turned his eyes away from the spectacle of her serene loveliness, with an inarticulate sense that even to acknowledge it was renewed treachery, cast a startled look at her. Val, that fritter! the creature who played through life as if there were no such considerations as souls at all, to be hurled before the judgment seat, without an instant in which to cry for mercy!

“Good God!” he exclaimed; and then, to himself, whispered his Irish prayer: “The Lord have mercy on him!”

“Yes, poor Val!” Lady Hobson paid her volatile friend the tribute of a faint sigh. “Who else would you care to hear about? Oh, Colonel Darcy, General now.” She laughed softly. “He did very good work, getting a Kitchener division together; and then they sent him home to make room for a younger man. There never was any one so angry to be alive as General Darcy at this moment. And Lady Kenneth—you remember her? ‘Lady Ken,’ as they called her—she’s running a hut in Belgium. The men love her, she’s so jolly with them. And Mr. Browne—I’m afraid he is rather a pacifist. He says war is the death of art. Of course he is over age, but he has had a splendid time, buying up Chinese treasures. You see nothing can get across to America now. As for Tim”—she paused, as if to let the perfect naturalness of her accents sink in—“as for Tim,” she repeated, “he joined the Naval Reserve, but he was invalided home, poor old boy! And the bulldogs are quite well.” She made a single gesture of both hands: “Now you are *au courant*.”

Then she got up, remarked that the doctor was extremely pleased with his condition, and that they would soon send him to “Blighty”; she dropped him a smile as

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conventional as her soldier-slang. "Good-by for the present, Lord Kilmore," and drifted from him.

Shane remained absolutely puzzled. He was of the type of man who would never understand that the artful woman has as many colors as the chameleon. Perhaps he was too impulsive to realize shades at all: things to him were either black or white; people were good or bad; he trusted with his whole heart, or with his whole heart condemned. What did she mean by telling him, in the morning, that she was reconciled to the Church, and, in the afternoon, speaking of Sir Timothy with all the placid proprietorship of the wife? Then a thought struck his innocence and satisfied the uncomfortable speculation of a still sick brain. Her first husband was dead, she had been able to put herself straight!

He was sustained in this opinion when, on subsequent days, he found that she certainly seemed to be on very friendly terms with the R.C. chaplain, who spoke of her indeed to Shane himself as "one of God's best."

As days went by and he found that her attitude remained unconcernedly friendly; that never by a hint, by a look, by so much as a sigh, did she infringe her promise; that, moreover, she said her rosary at odd times in pensive corners, and otherwise appeared to practice her religion, he began to believe that, whatever way the miracle had been accomplished, there was transformation in her soul.

Nevertheless, he was not at ease in her company; he counted the days and the hours till his release, not only because he intended his leave to bring him to Clenane and Moira, but because it would deliver him from Venetia. To breathe the same air as Venetia must always disquiet him.

When the day of parting came she displayed an admi-

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rable absence of emotion. Sweet, almost maternal as was her farewell, it was markedly detached.

She stood on the steps with a group of nurses and two or three officers more or less patched up, to speed his departure. As the car drove off from the armored stone porch, he caught a last glimpse of her; already she was looking away, as if his existence was forgotten. Drawing a deep breath, he said to himself that it was over and done with at last; and he prayed God he might never lay eyes on her face again.

IV

HOME-COMING

THERE was but one passenger to alight on the little deserted platform; indeed the train would not have stopped at all had he not given notice at the Dublin terminus.

The station was set, solitary, on the edge of the stony fields; for the town, which once had its own importance, lies away, as if bent on keeping itself apart with the pride of the hopelessly ruined. It was a still evening, just on sunset, full of the autumn melancholy which is, somehow, so curiously intensified in Ireland. The sky was pale save for the orange bar in the west. A few thin clouds drifted low, looking almost as if they would be caught by the trees that proclaimed the marches of great demesnes; wisps of mist trailed here and there over cultivated stretches, creeping upwards to join the sisterhood overhead.

The land spread to the vision huge bare spaces, hardly undulating. The river ran, primrose pale, in lazy serpentine loops, catching in its breast for one short span the vivid sunset bar. The road which the traveler was about to take ran very straight and white westward, marked on either side by the glimmering gray of its stone walls, save where the rich man's woods caught it and hid it for that mile which seemed, from where the traveler stood, but the length of inches. Against the sky the Clare mountains were purple black; they and the red sun, its reflec-

tion in the water, and the indigo blue of the band of woods were the only colors in the wide gray landscape.

Shane gazed with a full heart; here was the face of home!

The porter who picked up his suit-case looked surly enough at his khaki and the ribbon on his breast, and did not recognize him. Johnnie Callaghan had always been a bit of a rebel. Anyhow, Shane would have felt no desire to recall himself to memory; it was not the moment, neither was his mood for conversation.

“Can I get an outside car, do you think?”

“A car, is it? You cannot, then, Captain. Them as wants cars has a right to be ordering them beforehand. What would cars be doing waiting for the chance of the train stopping one odd time in a week, maybe?”

“Here, give me that case.” Shane took it from the grimy hand. “I’ll get a car for myself at the town.”

He had acquired a military authority of manner and, though he softened the unconscious insult with half a crown, the patriotic porter looked darkly after him, and began under his breath to curse him and his uniform, and the country who paid for it, and the cause he was serving, with Hibernian fluency and richness of epithet. Suddenly he broke off; something in the poise of the tall figure running down the incline, in the swing of the shoulders, the spring of the gait, struck a chord.

“Begorra!” cried the man, “if it’s not me brave boy the Earl of Kilmore himself—me curse on him all the same for an ungrateful young villain!”

Through the leprous desolation of the town Shane went unrecognized; indeed he was not known even at the Commercial Hotel which supplied the station car where the

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departure of Tomsey Clancy had made room for a stranger. This individual agreed effusively to drive the officer as far as Clenane for only double the current price. On the way he showed himself excessively curious to ascertain the destination for which the traveler might be eventually bound, and suggested, one after the other, the names of all the big places in the district.

"It'll be at Joyce's you'll be expected, Captain? Och, then, sure, it's at Lord Edwards—but Clenane's a trifle out of your honor's way. Maybe I'm not in it, maybe it's at Kilcurris they're expecting you? It's the grand old lady she is, that same old madam? Sure I was hearing now, she had a pair of great nephews in the war——"

Shane cut him short.

"I've engaged you to drive me to Clenane village." Then, fearing to betray his identity to the local gossip, he added, with perfect truth: "The fact is, they're not expecting me where I'm going, and I'll just have to pass the night where I can."

"Glory be to God!" exclaimed the jarvey, pulling his shambling mare so violently to a standstill that her legs flew out in every direction, "it's no entertainment for the likes of you you'll be finding at Clenane! Sure it's but the wan poor place they have, and it Dooley's. And whatever comfort there was in it has gone out of it with the fellow the widow married, and him with the drop taken morning, noon, and night! It's soaked in it he is. He's the rale sponge, is Clancy. 'Pon my word, and I'm telling you no lies, if you were to lay a finger on him, anywheres, it would be wet with the whisky that 'ud come out of him. Why wouldn't your honor now be going back to our little place? She's the decent sober woman, Mrs. Morrissey, and

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her with as good a feather bed, and like as not a pair of clean sheets ready——”

But Shane arrested the one-sided tug on the mare's hard mouth.

“I must make the best of Clenane, for it's Clenane I'm going to.” The tone precluded argument.

With a shrug the driver clacked his whip and chucked his reins, then he remarked philosophically that, maybe, it would “be better than the trenches, anyhow, from all accounts.”

Shane closed his lips, turning a severe profile upon loquacity; and, while his compatriot secretly relegated him to the corner of his mind where the “dirty English” were execrated, this Irishman's heart swelled with the mixed tenderness and melancholy of his homecoming. The beloved land—how poor and waste it opened out before him and how infinitely dear! Ay, every barren field, every mile of rough and ugly wall, was dear! The breath that filled his lungs had a savor half sad, half sweet. The cry of the plover, the long black flight of the crows and their caws, the shifting monotonies of the endless road, the fading sky and gathering mystery of the dusk, all evoked memories of a light-hearted past which were singularly close to sorrow. He had not even told Moira that he was returning to her. Once again he was stealing a march, as it were, upon the old days. He could hardly have explained to himself why he had so strong a desire to surprise his love. Perhaps it was because of the recollection of that other return, when no one was glad to see him but the dog; when Father Blake had warned him off from all he knew of home, the poor cluster of hovels under every thatched roof of which he had played as a child;

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warned him off from the farm, and above all, from Moira. Perhaps the haunting of that cold night made him dread the reawakening of sore feeling, the rebuff which might greet an announced arrival.

He thought, nay, he felt sure, that, at sudden sight of him, Moira's heart would speak, before doubt could intervene. He made a hundred conjectures of how he would find her; but always ended upon a certainty which set his pulses beating: they would not speak at all but only clasp each other. And, after that, nothing would matter again.

Both sky and earth cleared as the night advanced. The mists drew away, and in airs purified by an exquisite touch of frost, a large lovely moon rose with majesty into the heavens.

Every rod of the way was familiar to Shane. When the flinging trot of the mare brought him in view of the fields which his childish feet had scampered over, time and again, he felt so intolerable a longing to be alone and unwatched, that he ordered the astonished driver to stop. Leaping from the car, he handed him the fare agreed upon, plus a substantial tip, and bade him leave the portmanteau at the priest's house.

The man gasped.

"The priest's house, your honor! It is the priest's house—and is it that what's brought you to Clenane?"

There was a dawning understanding in the starting eyeball which glistened white in the moonlight. Shane fled, leaping the loose wall and cutting across the bowlder-strewn field towards a path he could have trod blindfold.

Moonlight poured upon the well-known scene and made everything look strange; he wished there were not this

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magic silver gleam everywhere, casting a spell on the beloved homeliness. At first he went with great strides, but presently slackened speed; a record "crash" and eight weeks' hospital come against a man, even though he be of such tough fiber as Shane, even though he be driven by such indomitable will-power.

He began to have an odd sensation that he was himself a part of the general strangeness. One evening he had gathered wild colts across this very moor, and had known within him beating wings of passionate discontent never before experienced. He had wanted, more than he had ever wanted anything before, to get away out of an existence intolerable in its limitations, from circumstances suddenly recognized as degrading to one of his blood. He had then been amazed at his own striving: "What ails me at all?" he had asked himself. Even with the thought of Moira, he had yearned to get away. Now he was coming back and it was another kind of "strangeness" that was upon him. Again he wondered "what ailed him." He seemed to himself to be a ghost in a place of ghosts; it was as if the solid earth had become unsubstantial, as if all his warm hopes must crumble at a touch, as does the glow of the turf into fitting ashes. Here was the gap through which he had hustled the "mountainy" foals. And yonder, that fairy vision, fine drawn in silver against a moon-flooded sky, was his own castle, the ruins of Kilmore, bewitched into fairyland. He stood still a moment to gaze. Then his heart gave a joyful leap; a wisp of smoke was stirring in faint gleaming spirals, scarcely perceptible against the limpid background; and low down, out of a cavernous dark of the arch that cut the silver walls, shone a tiny orange glow. There was a fire on his hearth;

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there was light in his empty nest. Whatever the omen might portend he was grateful for it.

He could hear a dog bark and rattle his chain in Daly's farm; otherwise the night was so still that the sound of his own footsteps became an intrusion on the silence. Now Clenane lay beneath him, with primrose lights, twinkling so near the ground that any one, looking down on it as he now did, would think it a handful of housheens built for the "good people." There was not a glint from the priest's house; its square outline stood ghostly in the moonlight with slate roof painted as with a brush dipped in silver. The chapel windows, however, glowed. "Sure, it's the late service they're having," thought Shane, and looked at his wrist-watch. He wondered; for Clenane parish had been wont to gather round its hearth at this hour, and, save on some vigil of great holiday, the chapel knew it not after supper.

Irresolute he paused. If he were to go in there and kneel down among them—that would be courting the very situation he most desired to avoid. It was little likely he could get admittance at the priest's house, obviously abandoned, for the moment. And, if praying was going on, Moira would be on her knees, that was certain. He decided to lie in wait for her, as many a time before. What a night for a lovers' meeting!

His heart was beating tumultuously. As he advanced, very cautiously, skirting the low wall of Father Blake's house, there rose upon his ears a long, melancholy howl. He stopped; then almost laughed aloud. A dog baying the moon—old Leprechaun as like as not. He was not going to let Leprechaun be his first welcomer to-night.

Hardly, however, had he taken another dozen steps

when he was brought up again by another cry. This time the blood curdled in his veins. It was no wail of hound, but the most piercing lament that ever issued from human lips. He knew it well, and knew what it meant, as no man from the West could fail to know—for whom, in the name of God, were they keening? Whom!

He never knew how he reached the chapel door, he had no eyes for the couple of squatting women who rocked themselves backwards and forwards in the little porch; he saw only the catafalque with its rusty pall and tarnished silver trappings, the great candles, sinister yellow; he had a confused sense that there were nuns kneeling within, and that there was weeping. He staggered forward and fell on his knees beside the cloaked and hooded figure of a woman. She turned her head and he saw a pale face, tear-stained, flash into rapture. It was Moira. She put out her hand and caught his. Without a word they knelt together, and he felt as if life and strength flowed into him from her strong clasp—the strength and the warmth of her love.

It was some time before he noticed the old biretta on the top of the coffin, and understood who it was that lay there. The riot of joy within him, the relief from the agony of dread, lest at this last moment he might have been robbed, left him scarcely power of regret. He knew that he would wake to it, in a little while, and be sorry that he had missed the old man's blessing; but there was a great sense of peace about the placid dead, in spite of that awful keening out there—and this was Moira's hand he was holding; she was safe, and she was his!

Moira crossed herself and offered him the drenched sprig of yew out of the bowl of holy water in front of the

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catafalque, that he might sprinkle it. Then she looked at him, with a sudden wonder, and led him out by the sacristy. Here old Mary, her face set in sorrow, grim as stone, was stitching at a black cope, by the light of a candle. At sight of him she clapped her hands together.

“Glory be to God—it’s Master Shane! How did you know, how, in the name of God, did you know? And him took sudden on the very altar steps!”

“How did you know?” The wonder increased in Moira’s gaze.

“I didn’t know,” Shane answered vaguely. He could not focus his thoughts upon his old dead friend, they were concentrated on the living.

“You didn’t know, but you were sint!” cried old Mary. “It was the will of the Almighty that you should be at his burying, who had the father’s heart for you. Who, but he, loved you?” she went on, again striking her hands together. “Wasn’t your name the first after that of his Maker’s morning and night? Too much he loved you, blessed saint that he is, this moment, smiling down at you from heaven! ‘It’s too fond I am of him, Mary,’ he’d say to me, and hit his breast on it. Ochone, what’ll we do without him at all!”

The stony fixity of her face broke up; she waved them from the sight of her grief with knotted hands and bent again over the torn cope.

Moira drew Shane out into the churchyard. All was very still in the placid radiance. Two or three slanting tombstones and, here and there, a stone cross shone white, casting black shadows. The grass spread pearly gray and spangled over the mounds of the quiet sleepers. Between the new dead within the chapel and the long dead

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without, Shane clasped the love of his life. It was a strange place and a strange meeting, but to him all was suddenly natural, beautifully home-like. He was no longer as one fey under an uncanny spell; he had fallen back into his own place, and that was Moira's love.

"It's the will of God," said he, repeating Mary's words, as he kissed her.

She took him presently to Honor, who fell upon his neck in a rapture, and then nearly curtseyed herself through her mud floor in apologies. She wept with joy to see him, and wept with sorrow for the occasion; she, too, had no other idea than that it was to bury his reverence that he had returned.

When he told her that he had come back to marry Moira, there was a great clapping of hands and a mingling of laughter and tears, and blessing, all over again. Little did she think when she saw the darling girl go by so bowed with sorrow, wrapped in her mother's cloak—many was the day she had seen Bidy Daly wearing that same cloak, and it her own mother's again, when she was not as old as Moira!—little did she think when she went by in that same cloak that her mourning was to be turned into joy!

"And is it up to your Da's you're bringing Master Shane—his lordship, I should be saying? Or is it to his own place? What's that you're saying, me darlin' boy? It's your own place you'd rather go to. It's quiet you want to be this night and not have all the folk roaring and bawling about you. Glory be to God, then, isn't it the greatest bit of luck that to-day's me day for lighting the fire, up at the castle! It's the care of the world I've been taking of your little housheen, Master Shane—my

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lord. And it's a bit of soda bread I had ready to bring down to old Mary and the half-dozen eggs, and the loveliest piece of streaky you ever saw; but sure she wouldn't be grudging it to your lordship. You can leave it to me, alanna." Honor turned her fine countenance glowing with pride upon Moira: "Sure there isn't any one knows his taste as I do!"

But Shane's taste for the moment was to be with one only. He begged Honor to despatch her eldest urchin to fetch his case at Dooley's; then, leaving her to follow with her provisions, he went out again into the night with Moira.

"I'll go as far as the castle with you," said she.

"Let it be by the short cut, then," he rejoined. "I don't want the people after me."

Their hearts were overcharged for speech. He took her hand, warm from the shelter of her cloak, in his cold grasp, and held it as if he could never let it go. How often had they stepped thus, hand in hand together, in the old childish days! There was no turmoil in this love to-night, but peace, a kind of brimming serenity, of grateful happiness, which filled them both so utterly that silence seemed the only possible communion. Once on the way she spoke, when they stopped at the top of the ascent, both panting a little.

"When I got that post-card to say you were hurt, and then nothing for the long weeks—oh, Shane!"

"I'm here for you now."

Looking at her, he thought her tender face in the moonlight, the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. They went on again more slowly; and when they came to the

broken arch, she left him, blessing him, even as with sweet lips she kissed him.

Leprechaun stepped into the stone cottage after Honor with the bored air of an elderly gentleman forced to leave his comfortable arm-chair of an evening for some frivolous reason. He had lost the exuberance of youth to gain the mistrust of years. Shane he passed without apparent recognition, gazing at him with inscrutable brown eyes; but the room was familiar and he went round it, sniffing. Presently, as Shane sat, watching him, the setter nosed his way to those military boots on his master's legs, which he investigated conscientiously until, some chord of memory touched, he lifted his old head and broke into a sudden cry in which there was as much grief and reproach as joy.

"Yes, it is myself that's back with you, old fellow!" cried Shane, and caught the grizzling head between his hands.

But Leprechaun drew away to lie down, out of reach, with grieving eyes still upon him. "You sent me from you again, last time I got you back," he seemed to say, revolving injury in his canine heart.

"But it's for good this time!" promised Shane, who understood.

It was late before he could get rid of Honor, who, shaken out of all her dignity by the great events in the parish, was moved to unwonted loquacity.

Indeed she seemed to consider it incumbent to dilate with circumstance not only upon all the occurrences in Clenane since his departure, but upon the feelings aroused by them in her own and her neighbors' breasts. The anguish she had felt on being turned out of her little home

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and parted from her children, an anguish only commensurate with that endured when she had seen her lovely pig dragged shrieking from its sty, to satisfy the rapacity of Conran—might the blight of heaven fall upon him, and his black heart, his styes and his fields, his shop and his stores, his children and his children's children, for the wrong he had wrought upon the widow and the orphan! And might every blessing be showered upon him who had come to their rescue!

Mrs. Keown tactfully passed over the interim period during which she had probably come very near to cursing with equal eloquence the black heart of Kilmore, and went on to expound the triumphant raptures of her reinstatement as a woman of property, on the restitution of her two "little byes," her home, her pig, and her hens. Then came the account of the doctor and his changed household, and an unctuous description of the various ladies who thought they might fitly console him for the loss of poor Miss Molloy, "May the Lord have mercy on her soul for a rale ould crab!"

Shane, sitting in his arm-chair, only half listened. She ministered to him with simple fare, which he thought the most delicious he had ever tasted. It was not until Moira's name fell from her lips that his attention became awakened.

If ever there were goodness and beauty on earth, according to Mrs Keown, they were embodied in Moira. It is probable that Shane's return to his intention having been proclaimed to her that night, praise of his choice would not in any case have been lacking, but the warm conviction which rang in her words, found its way to the lover's heart. No wonder that Mr Clery, for as grand as he was, had wanted to have her! Had he not waited for her

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over the four year and only took up with that "yalla haired one out of Dublin" when even Danny Blake himself told him he'd better give it up?

"Sure it isn't for the like of him she is! Wasn't it cut out she was to be the friend of the poor—to shine like a meek lily out of a high place? And what does it matter at all that she is only the daughter of Farmer Blake, and you the grand Earl? Isn't she as good a lady——" Mrs. Keown paused on a sucking breath; her eyes, somber and deep, fixed on the mental vision. "Och!" she went on suddenly, "what am I talking about? Isn't she far beyond that, the creature? Who would be thinking of such a thing at all about Moira? You'd never be asking what she was, oncet you'd looked into her face." These words came back to Shane as he lingered by his hearth dreaming, far into the night. Mrs Keown had piled up a royal fire of turf before departing, and he had too many wonderful and lovely things to think of, to wish for sleep. He had really come back to his own; and this time the return was all sweetness.

There had been no need for explanations between him and Moira. The oft-rehearsed confession need never be spoken now. He would tell her everything, but not for forgiveness, he was already forgiven; not for exculpation himself, she understood him better than he did himself; but for the sake of her sympathy and that there might be no experience of his unshared by her.

It was a curious feeling, to be here again in the poor old room; poor as it was, it was a palace to many a shelter he had known these four years. Not by contrast, however, but in itself, the place was a delight to him. Here he felt at home, as never in the grand rooms of England.

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How much rather had he be waited on by Honor than surrounded with the humiliating pomp of servants who despised him in their flunkey hearts.

The years seemed to slip off him; the agonies, the passions, the battle thrills, his unbelievable experiences lost in the skies, it was all like the grotesque fantasies of a dream.

The wash of the placid sea and the boom of the rising tide in the caves filled the silence with such familiar music that he could scarcely believe his ear had ever lost it. The shadows cast by the candles leaped on the sallow walls. Leprechaun lay snoring, his nose between his paws, on the old sealskin, with now and again the glint of a brown eye upon his master, the quiver of a silken ear to show his watchfulness even in slumber. Yonder stood his gun, in the corner by the dresser, and across the window-seat lay his rods. The touch of Moira's lips was fragrant in his memory; well might he think this span of years was all a dream! But here was Leprechaun gray about the muzzle; he could see rust on the fowling-piece even from where he sat, and the verdigris on the brass of the rods; his outstretched legs were clothed in long brown leather boots, laced to the knee; his head was heavy with the dull ache that scarcely ever left it since his crash. He had passed through great fires: fires of love, fires of war, fires of sorrow. He would never be the same again; never have a boy's heart or a boy's eyes for the things of earth. But he had come home; what did anything else matter?

If ever a man built castles in the air, the dweller in the ruins of Kilmore did that night; but, unlike most dream-builders, he had solid foundations for his edifice—nothing less solid, indeed, than those of the old cliff castle

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itself, welded to the primeval rock. He would buy back the land, and rebuild Kilmore. . . . Yes, they were to rise again, the walls and the towers—and here he would live, among his own, with Moira by his side. And what a blessed life it would be! . . . His first friends, his old friends, would always be his best friends, however pleasant he might find his relations with the fine county folk; however necessary intercourse with them would be. And these last must take him as they found him . . . and Moira too. He had no fear for Moira: Honor had spoken the right word. Who would think of such pettiness as class distinction when they looked on her sweet face? If any there were, so poor-minded, well, Kilmore would have none of them. Four years of warfare had taught Shane, the peasant reared, the lesson it had taught many an aristocrat: when you come down to the root of things it is the man that counts. He himself had counted for what he was—for being Shane and no other: he meant to count still in the world; to count as Kilmore, in his own land.

At length, in the bed on which his mother had died, he fell asleep profoundly, and at first without dreams. As morning drew on, however, his rest became troubled; he had two visions, both startlingly vivid, passing one into the other. The first was of Saltash. He had thought very little on his dead friend that day; the immediate present and his boyhood's past had too completely filled his mind; but now he was back in the tent with his comrade, and Saltash seemed to be trying to say something to him, something of urgent importance, calling his name in well-remembered accents, the soft, rather drawling intonation. "Paddy, old man, I've got to tell you——"

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Shane was aware that he must listen, though for some dream reason it was very difficult to do so. But even as he was taking his friend's hand to draw him closer, "Stars" sank from him and lay with eyes closed, with dead, smiling lips. And Shane knew, in a rending of old grief, that those lips could never utter speech again. He struggled away from the sense of pain, found himself fighting through mists that smothered him, and then, all at once, he was walking along the moonlit Irish road, dreadfully tired, yet obliged to go on and on. Some one came towards him; it was a woman's figure, drawing nearer, ever nearer, very slowly, clad in black. Here the sleeper entered upon full nightmare. He could not fly or avoid this woman in black; his heart turned to water, dread overcame him wholly. He saw that she was robed as a widow, that her face was hidden in a long crêpe veil. He tried to tell himself that it was Moira, mourning for Father Blake—since Father Blake was dead. But she lifted her veil, and it was the face of Venetia.

He woke in a cold sweat, and, rolling round on his pillow, saw the faint yellow of sunrise paint his small window-pane, and heard the great murmur of the sea.

V

THE WATCHER BY THE HEARTH

CLENANE agreed—glory be to God—that it had been the grandest funeral ever was known in the place: what with so many of the gentry coming themselves or sending their carriages, Protestant and Catholic alike, and the churchyard black with priests, while it was out on the road that the rest of them were, for them as had not had even a little ass-car to drive in had walked it. From miles around they had come, mountainy men and town-folk and all. For there had not been one like him and everybody knew it was the burying of a saint!

But the chief jewel in all this crown of melancholy pride had been the presence of their own Master Shane, and him Earl of Kilmore. Had not he come flying all the way from France beyant, when Moira Blake, the creature, had sent him a telegram telling him of his reverence's quinching? Flown over all in the one night, he had: and, signs on it, had not Patsey Dooley seen the great machine in the field behind the castle, and was not Blake's mare near slipping her foal with the fright she got? But sure, what would it have mattered if she had, itself—Danny Blake the proud ould fellow this day with Master Shane coming back to fetch the good little girl off him, at long last!

Shane unconsciously planted a dagger in Clenane's swelling heart by vanishing immediately after the cere-

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mony; he who had been expected to be the ornament of the funeral feast! Indeed, more than Clenane had been disappointed. Doctor Molloy, late at the funeral, through an inconveniently chosen birth-hour, was, in his own words, "wild" to have missed one towards whom, with the recoil of a generous heart, he felt all the more tenderness for old angers. Such of the gentry as were present also felt aggrieved, not realizing till too late that the dark, tall young man in khaki, who kept himself in the background, was the Lord Kilmore of the romantic story, the wild O'Connor boy, he of the ruins, who used to ride the half broken horses to the admiration of the hunt.

Moira had only had a snatched word with her lover at the gate of the churchyard. She would have to run home the minute the last blessing was given, she told him, to set her mother free. Mrs. Blake had not been able to leave the Da; it was the terrible night of coughing the Da had had—but poor Mammy couldn't be out of it altogether, and her own niece by marriage to him that's gone!

"The Da will be looking for you about four in the afternoon," she had added, a lovely shy blush mounting in her tear-stained face. "He bid me tell you that."

"Meet me first in the old place," cried Shane, wringing her hand.

It was to the old place that he went himself, on his escape from the crowd that pressed and jostled and groaned and clapped its hands, and rocked itself all through the solemn drone of the church prayers; now and then interrupting these expressions of pious sorrow with demonstrations of inconveniently affectionate and excited recognition of himself.

He had a craving for solitude, as much physical as mental. The fatigues of his long journey, his evil dreams had left him shaken. His nerves had been painfully affected by the turmoil and confusion of so great a course; the old headache was there in fresh force, and he felt giddy besides. But there was more than physical trouble over him to-day: a weight lay upon his heart. The sky, pure blue as it was, this crystal morning of sunshine and wine-bright airs, seemed to him dark with menace. Yesterday he had not been able to think of death at all, with such promise of life before him. But to-day, it seemed as if death was everywhere; dank in every breath he drew, threatening in each beat of his pulse; the haunting of it in every thought and every hope.

He sat awhile in their old stone shelter in the cliff, and tried to recapture the spring adorers of that April hour when he had first wooed his shy April Moira; strove to bring back the nearer, more sacred comfort of her last night's kiss and murmured blessing. All in vain. He felt chilled to the bone. The western sea, wonderfully, darkly blue at the noon hour, looked to him sinister as a pall. The ceaseless cries of the gulls were to his ears like the voices of sick ghost children complaining in the air.

He felt very solitary; Leprechaun had wandered away from him at the churchyard towards the priest's house in a desultory way, with a probable remembrance of old Mary's bounties and a distinct conviction that funerals were profitless spectacles. Shane would have been glad of the company of his dumb friend.

"I'll go back to the ruins," he said to himself, "and build the turf up the chimney, and try and get warm."

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A fine drift of cloud was rising over the sky with a souging wind as he came out by the rocky climb on to his platform. The ivy over the broken arch shivered against the stone; a few yellow leaves from the self-sown alder bushes, danced and eddied across the bailey yard.

"There'll be rain before morning," he thought. It was only October, but on this height, beaten by the sea winds, there was already a chill prescience of winter. His door was ajar: as he stepped in, a fragrance familiar and once too sweet to him, turned him sick.

It was there, by his hearth, the black figure—the figure of his dream! Before she turned and raised the widow's veil, he knew who it was who sat, like inexorable fate, watching beside his dying fire—waiting for him. Venetia.

"What brings you?"

She rose and came towards him, a floating creature of black mystery, white-faced under her weeds.

"Can you look at me, and ask the question?"

"I see that you are dressed as a widow," said Shane, brutally, out of the agony of his parched throat.

"My husband is dead."

"Which?"

She gave him a strange look and on her lips flickered the faint, ironic smile that he knew so well, horrible to him.

"What a question from you, Shane!"

He was certain then that the doom which his obsessed spirit had been shrinking from since his waking, had come upon him and was not to be avoided. It was the end of joy and love. Venetia claimed him.

He clutched at the edge of the table; everything swam before him.

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"I thought," he said dully, "that he was dead already—that one, since you were—since you told me you had made your peace with the Church."

"You thought that——" Something flashed furiously out of her eyes at him; and then was hooded again, as if a viper peeped. "You could think that then and speak no word, leave me as you did? Ah, no," the old music swelled back into her voice. "I will not believe it. You were ill; you were unable to reason, to think, to judge. If it had not been so, you would have known that the moment freedom was ours, real freedom, nothing could keep us apart. I came to you, as you—as you, oh, as you, my Shane! would have come to me. Are we not pledged?"

With a slow, wonderful gesture she lifted her arms, weighted with draperies; but he forbade the embrace with quickly outflung hands.

"No—don't touch me!"

There was a pause. He heard his own breath come panting like the strokes of a saw, and in a passionate spasm of misery wished himself lying in that coffin upon which he had heard the earth thud only an hour ago. Then he mastered himself.

"I've got to understand, and you've got to understand. Your real husband's dead, the man—the man you married as a Catholic, whom you left for the other." Perfectly collected she bowed her head. "And you think," he went on, "I ought to marry you because you're free. What ails you that you shouldn't be properly married to Sir Timothy?"

"Why should Sir Timothy re-marry me when he believes we are already married?" Again her fugitive smile struck fear into him. "Besides which, Timothy and I have been

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virtually parted ever since——” she paused to give weight to the unspoken, then she went on——“ever since the war, too, we have not been even in the same house. This is why I was able to be reconciled. He keeps asking me to go back to him. I have refused——” Once more she broke off; then her smile became accentuated—Shane thought the exquisite face altogether hideous and cruel——“Refused to come back to the house of sin.”

He spoke no word. She asked, with delicate emphasis:

“Must I make myself clearer? Have you understood?”

“Oh, I’ve understood, right enough.” The reality was worse than the dream; the cold sweat that stood on his forehead was wrung from an anguish that no sleep could hold. “You want me to be marrying you. I don’t want to marry you. I love somebody else. It’s her I mean to marry. Will you be understanding that?”

“I understand one thing better: that you are bound to me.”

“Would you have the unwilling husband?”

“Would you be false to your plighted word? Would you brand yourself no gentleman?”

“You found out long ago that I was only the Irish peasant.”

“Have Irishmen no honor, then? Ah, Shane——what is this talk of promise and pledge and honor? It is not a question of such things, it is a question of a soul. Will you save my soul? You can, you only. Before God, if you will not save my soul, I’ll jump off that cliff there; my battered body shall be flung up upon your beach. Or I’ll go back to Timothy. Whichever way it is, it will be hell sooner or later, it will mean the loss of my soul.”

Shane stood staring past her through the open door,

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at the great sweep of sky, cut by a single jagged rock; he saw the face of his dead friend smiling. Oh, why did Stars smile? He felt again the clasp of that inert, dead hand still faintly warm; heard in his soul the words he had himself spoken: "I will go for the right." Was this the right? No, it was all evil; it was punishment, Stars had said the consequences of sin went on. Here was his sin—the sin of his broken word, of his cruelty to his true Moira—back upon him! Stars knew: he had warned him. That was what he was trying to tell him last night.

Then he became aware that she was speaking; with tears, with long, piteous sobs:—

"If you cast me away there is nothing left for me. Timothy knows I must go back to him or be lost utterly in this world. If I go back to him I am lost in the next. Did you think that such a thing as your taking me away could have been hidden; that people did not know and talk? If you are false to me now, then there is no truth anywhere. How could I believe in God, if you, who talked of God so much, fail? You say you love some one else. I will find her, I will tell her what it will mean to me if you do this treachery. And if she has a conscience, if she has a woman's heart, she will see, she will pity, she will understand——"

Here Shane knew the struggle was done with. The waters had closed over his head. The one thing that was impossible, the one thing that he could never submit to, was that the woman should come into Moira's innocent presence; should pollute those pure ears with her horrible story. The sense of the inevitable filled him with a kind of deadly calm. He had felt just like this when the plane

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began to spin downwards, and he knew that he was helpless, and must yield himself to destiny.

How strange that it should come back to him now! He had not before been able to remember.

"The first thing," he said, "is for you to get away out of this. I'll take you myself. I'll take you straight back to England—and after that I'll marry you before I join up again."

She laughed shrilly.

"When Timothy divorces me, you mean?"

His blue eye took fire. "Is that the way of it?" he thought, "I've got a chance yet, then."

"Shane!" She laid her hand upon him, urging him. "Yes, let us get away. I motored from Dublin. The car is waiting at the foot of the hill—a child showed me the way. Let us go now. They are all at a funeral or something. There is no one about—no one to stop you."

"You will allow me a moment to write a letter," he said, with irony.

He pitched himself upon the table, took his writing pad from his pocket, and wrote:—

"I have got to go away from you, Moira, my heart's darling. I have got to go, and I can never come back. There is only one thing I can tell you, and that you know already. It's not of my own free will I leave you. And there is only one thing I am asking you: When you pray for me, pray that I may be killed soon.—YOUR SHANE."

He addressed the letter to "Miss Moira Blake," and drawing the signet ring from his finger, set it on the folded sheet: no one could miss it, coming into the room, as it lay white on the brown wood of the table, the letter that contained the death-sentence of their love.

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"Now I am ready," he said, turning to Venetia.

"The car is just outside the field," she said.

Mechanically he took up his overcoat, and without a backward look, followed her through the door. The thought uppermost in his mind was that he was glad Leprechaun had strayed away.

VI

OUT OF THE DEEPS

It was the tenth of October and a gusty morning. The crowd pouring out of the train on to the platform of Kingstown harbor was surrounded with all the clamor which characterizes Ireland; the steamer below—puffing smoke, and now and again letting off hoarse cries from a Leviathan throat, to be understood only of the initiate, wearing the odious, smug expression of all passenger boats—seemed ludicrously inadequate to the demands on her accommodation. Stewards and sailors came and went, brisk and businesslike; but most of the intending travelers had to shoulder their own luggage, while round the luggage-vans the porters screamed, gesticulated, and wrestled, exchanging witticisms with each other, commenting freely on the individual prowess and appearance of sundry strugglers in the baffled throng, the present situation in particular and the state of the world in general; thoroughly enjoying the scrimmage, like true sons of Erin.

The handsome, frowning young officer in airman's uniform who dived in and out among them, with such ruthless thrusts of shoulders and elbows; who penetrated to the depths of the van, and extracted a lady's suit-case, was greeted by an encouraging shout: "More power to ye, Captain! It's the grand porter you'd make! Musha! let the gentleman out of that, boys!"

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Shane, the suit-case poised on his shoulder, swept his own way through the mass, with an utter disregard of anything but his purpose. A couple of rough men cursed his uniform, and the airman cursed back with a searing energy and a blaze of blue eyes that obliterated them.

Scenting profit, a sailor already considerably weighted, relieved him of the burden.

“Keep your eye on me, sir, I’ll see that you get on board.”

“I’ve a lady with me,” began Shane, with a vague stare about him. Even as he spoke a slender figure, heavily veiled, in deep mourning, was borne against him on a rush like seaweed on a wave. She caught at him desperately and steadied herself.

He was not vague now: his glance settled on her with loathing.

“I told you to stay in the carriage until I came to you.” His tone was hard, sharp as the cut of a whip.

“I am so afraid we shall miss the boat, there is such a dreadful crowd!” she cried plaintively.

Both had to raise their voices high to be heard above the clamor and a sudden hiss of steam.

Except for such necessary speech as this, no words had passed between them that morning. Indeed, ever since Shane had entered her motor-car, the day before—much as the condemned man may step into the tumbrel—he had scarcely spoken at all. When she had told him, that owing to a recent order, no boat was allowed to leave at night, and they must go back to the hotel, he answered:—

“I’ll take you wherever you wish.”

“But you must come too.” She smiled that awful smile of hers. “It will make things much easier afterwards.”

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It was then, and only then, that his wrath broke forth:—

“I tell you fair—there are things you’ll never get me to do, and that’s one of them! I’ll not go under the same roof with you, not till I can with decency. Make what you will out of that. As for the rest, you may do with me what you like. I’m at your orders altogether.”

She reared herself beside him with a movement full of anger; but after a glance at his fierce face, seemed to bethink herself.

“After all,” she said musingly, in accents low and measured as ever, “one can always arrange things. I have been under your roof; we are traveling together, that and the rest should be sufficient.”

He had spent the night in the first pothouse open to him, a night of absolute wakefulness, staring upon his fate. There was no power for action left in his mind; not even for a revolving of the situation, or for the vaguest plan to escape beyond that single hope of death. A paralyzing sense of doom had been upon him; he was as one frozen.

As he stood beside her now on the platform, mechanically striving to shelter her from the jostling of the crowd, he was conscious only of an inarticulate, unreasoning desire that the vessel yonder, her two great funnels rocking sickeningly below them, her decks already swarming, might never reach the other shore.

A peasant woman, evidently from some remote part of Ireland, for her tall figure was wrapped in the many folded cloaks of the very simple, its pleated hood pulled deep over her face, had been standing still while the stream passed her, watching the approach of the air-

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man and his companion. Now she dived forward and grasped him by the arm. At the same moment a voice rang out.

“Follow me, sir, with the lady, quick.”

The sailor, seeing and taking his opportunity, plunged forward, Venetia in his wake. But Shane turned, arrested, and the crowd seethed between them.

“What is it?” he cried.

The cloaked woman put out her other hand to tighten her hold upon him, then with a magnificent movement of her head, she flung back her hood. He saw Moira, white as death, with hair disheveled; met her deep gaze, and thought he was mad.

“Move on, move on!” ordered an official. “Are you for the boat, sir?”

There was respect in his tone for the uniform, and in his glance curiosity for the strange spectacle of the gentleman and the peasant girl, both so beautiful and so tragic, clinging in what seemed an eternal farewell. But it was not farewell.

“He’s not going.” Moira’s voice proclaimed a supreme certainty, the color began to flow back into her countenance. “You’re not going, Shane. Shane, my darling, you are to come back with me. You are not to be taken from me again, Shane!”

“He’s too late for the boat now, my dear,” said the guard, with exuberant sympathy. “They’re turning them back as it is.”

Shane, his eyes fixed on Moira, as if he could not sufficiently fill his soul with the vision, said slowly, drawing a long breath, like a man returning to consciousness:—

“Yes, Moira—I’m coming back with you.” Then quite

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unaware that he was using well nigh the same words as those in which he had surrendered last night to her who was his tormentor, he went on, his voice breaking: "You can do with me what you like."

The sailors were giving their heaving cry, the gangway grated as it was withdrawn. An immense hoot issued, blasting, from the funnel. Then, with rush and swirl of waters, throb of screws and hiss of steam, the *Leinster* swung about in the harbor, and beat her way out to sea.

The passengers were so thickly crowded on board that there was scarcely standing room. Conspicuous among them because of her slender height and the depth of her widow's weeds, was one who had thrust back a long crape veil to look this way and that out of a stricken face; seeking, seeking amid the throng, with an anguish of fury and fear in her eyes.

The wind was getting up.

"It's the rough passage they'll be having anyways," said a porter consolingly to a disappointed traveler.

Moirá drew Shane as quickly as possible back into the third-class carriage from which she had emerged. She paid for his ticket out of her shabby purse. He let her manage, like a child, with his eyes always upon her. It was not until they sat together in the refreshment room at Kingsbridge station and she had seen him swallow some hot coffee, that a wondering look, a questioning return of vitality in his glance, brought speech from her. She took his hand across the table into her full, strong clasp.

"How did I find you, how did I know—is that what you'd like to be asking me? I couldn't tell you myself, barring that it is by the mercy of God and the prayers of him that is gone. When you failed to come to the

cliff, and I was tired waiting, I went on to the ruins, and I found your letter! I'll never be able to say the pain that took me in the heart. I didn't know what I was doing. I didn't know who to turn to. I went to the grave. Och, and I prayed—and now that I come to think of it, it wasn't a prayer at all—it was just crying on Father Blake I was. 'You're the only one that would have helped me, and you're gone,' that's how I kept calling to him. 'Help me now, help Shane, help my poor boy and me with my broken heart!' ”

Their clasp tightened as they held each other. Shane's lip trembled, he set his teeth against a rising sob. He was altogether worn out.

“Och, and you'll never believe me, maybe, but it's the truth,” she went on. “He answered me. A voice came to me from himself, his own voice out of the grave. I heard him as plain as ever I heard him in life. And he says, ‘Go after him, child. You can save him yet. Go after him.’ That's what he said to me. I got up from my knees with the strength pouring into me. I will go after him, I says to myself, and won't he show me the way, my dear old Soggarth! For where in the world you'd gone to, how was I to be knowing that? And then, if Patsey Dooley didn't come running to me with the tale how he's seen a black lady come in a grand motor-car, and how she'd gone up into your own little place. It was looking for your flying machine he was, the spalpeen, when all the rest of us was at the funeral, with the wild talk there was among them of your having left it in the Da's fields. And sure, when he saw the lady he hid himself to watch and see what she'd be about. And then he tells me how the two of you walked away into the car to-

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gether. And it's Shelbourne Hotel, Dublin, she cried to the man that was sitting on the box."

Shane's fingers twitched in Moira's grasp; the frown of distress gathered again on his face.

"Moira—it was my own bad deeds came back on me with her that was the black one, in truth, to me. I promised to marry her once, God help me, in a whirl of foolishness, before I knew what she was—I thought it was over and done with long ago. And when I saw the black figure of her sitting by the hearth where I had been so happy thinking on you, the night before—I dreamt it, I dreamt it," he went on, rather wildly, "and the dread was on me from the moment I woke—and when I saw her—oh, Alanna, how shall I tell you at all?—it was yourself she threatened to go and see, it was the loss of her soul she wanted to put on me."

"Och, there's nothing that sort wouldn't do or say," said Moira. "Sure, what would it matter at all what they'd be at? What would I have cared if twenty of them had been after us both? I wish she had come to me. I'd have known how to answer her fine." Her lip curved with a soft scorn; her eyes pitied and comforted like a mother's. "Sure, me darling, no man would be a match for her, least of all yourself. Putting her soul on you, was she, the creature? Well, now, to think of that!—no, but it's losing yours she'd have been after!"

Where, in her sheltered innocent life, had she learnt such wisdom and such philosophy?

He could only stare; the frozen misery was being driven out of his veins by the warmth of her vitality, the fixed perverted thought from his brain by her sweet, straightforward sanity.

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“And then you came after me, Moira, my brave girl!”

“And then I came after you, me poor boy. Sure, that was no hardship at all. I left a message for Mammie. Oh, it was very cute I was! I borrowed two pounds off Honor, took across the fields and got out on to the road, and wasn't it the luck of the world that I got the lift on a car, with Clancy—and him near sober—driving a lady back to the station, her having come for the burying, and I caught the tram beautiful. Och, it was helped and protected all the way I was! I slept the night at the sisters' in Mountjoy Square. Sure didn't the Reverend Mother know me out of Kilcurris? And it wasn't much after daybreak before I was watching for you outside the grand big hotel; and I seen you come walking along, the clock striking seven. . . . You didn't see me, me darling, you hadn't a notion but it might not have been some ould woman, wrapped up in her big cloak. But I knew you from the end of the street by the swing of your shoulders, and your head up—troth and I think there isn't anything you would not meet with your head up, Shane! But when I saw your face in the yellow light, och, then I knew for certain it was the will of God I should come after you and take you out of it.”

“It is the will of God,” said Shane.

With those very words Moira had sealed the happy moment of reunion in the moonlit churchyard. Now, as Shane spoke them, they were his life's consecration.

A great peace was on them both; a sense of rest after immense striving.

He was still content to let Moira manage everything; he had not even a thought for the other woman, trapped out there on the seas, cheated of her evil success within

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the very hour of attainment. It had all dropped from him, as a bad dream may slip away, leaving only a vague confusion, an intangible horror.

They went out together into the street. There would not be a train to bring them home for another couple of hours. They walked slowly across the town, skirting the quays. A mighty wind was blowing; it came in fitful gusts swirling down the dirty pavements, ruffling the leaden waters of the Liffey, buffeting them as it scurried by; a bleak wind with an angry sky overhead. The poor, worn town seemed to wilt under it.

Shane drew her closer to him. The menace under which he had awakened the morning before began to grow huge about him again. The degraded houses, the dingy waterside, took a strange aspect as if suddenly steeped in universal black. But it was not until they entered the wide spaces in front of Broadstone station that the news caught them. It came as if on a blast of the great, furious wind. People were running, hunted by it; poor women and little children, rushing out of squalid houses—the unspeakable wretched poor of the incredible unpardonable Dublin slums—barefoot, clad in rags of no color, with wild disheveled heads; little groups stood talking in whispers as if the awful tidings could not be discussed out loud. Others were groaning, gesticulating.

“What, in the name of God, is the truth of it at all?” shouted a voice behind Moira to the driver of an outside car which was rocketing by from the station at the utmost gallop of its old horse. A man was sitting on one side, with a blasted face.

"It's the *Leinster*," the jarvey shouted back. "She's sunk, she's down, she's gone!"

The *Leinster*! Shane and Moira stopped and stared at each other.

"Oh, wirra, wirra!" moaned a woman, as she went by them noiselessly on her bare, blackened feet, wringing her hands out of the flutter of her rags. She looked the figure of misery incarnate, and her cry trailed back to them as if it were the voice of disaster itself.

"They're always bringing in the bodies."

"It's torpedoed she was."

"Not a soul saved out of her!"

The sinister phrases circled about them, echoing each other like the call of gulls wheeling and swooping over the pitiless sea.

"Oh, my God! Oh, Shane!" cried Moira.

He stood as if struck to stone. She flung her arms about him and broke into passionate weeping. Raining tears and kisses upon his cold cheek, she rocked him in her embrace. He clung to her then, like a child.

The hood had once more dropped from her golden head; the bright waves of her hair fell loosened like a glory.

"Och, Uncle Denny, didn't you warn me?"

They were all unconscious of eyes upon them; of anything save the tragedy and themselves.

A woman plucked Moira by the sleeve.

"You'll have lost some one, you poor creature—God help you!"

"Oh, no," cried the girl, turning her face, transfigured through the tears. "It's thanking God I am for him I've got safe!"

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