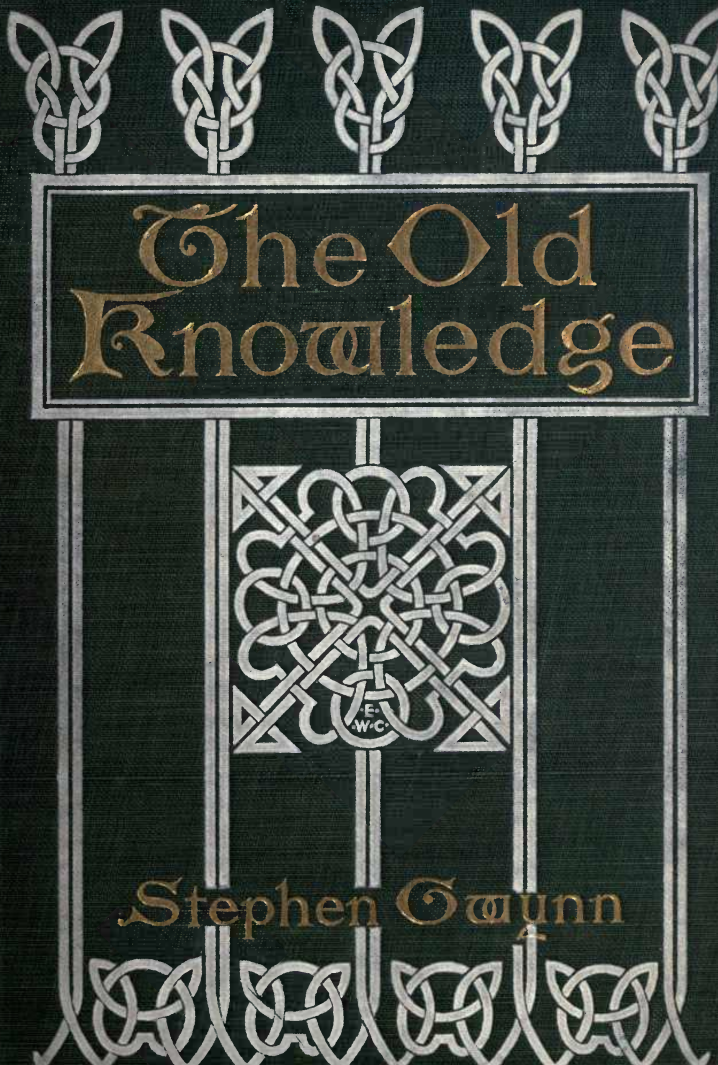
The Old Knowledge

Stephen Gwynn



Krr
Bc

Irene Owen Andrews
March 1923

THE OLD KNOWLEDGE

The MC Co

THE

OLD KNOWLEDGE

BY

STEPHEN GWYNN

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
LONDON: MACMILLAN & CO., Ltd.
1901

All rights reserved

Copyright, 1901,
By THE MACMILLAN COMPANY.

Norwood Press
J. S. Cushing & Co. – Berwick & Smith
Norwood Mass. U.S.A.

TO

MABEL DEARMER

2060733

THE OLD KNOWLEDGE

CHAPTER I

GREY sky, grey hills, grey leaping water, a grey drizzle of rain; it was not a cheerful prospect that Miss Millicent Carteret looked out on, as she sat enveloped in mackintosh on the deck of the little steamer, and stared down the lough rather forlornly, with wide, humorous, enigmatical eyes, while the boat splashed and panted across three miles of choppy sea. "That," she said to herself, "must be the Atlantic" — that grey line a long way off, where the winding walls of rugged mountain, which enclosed the lough, opened, and let the eye out. Now it was lost; the walls closed again. She had seen the Atlantic; she had reached, beyond all manner of doubt, a wild, wind-swept country, singularly unlike the decent squares of Bayswater. She had carried her point; she had embarked on her adventure; she was all but at her journey's end; but now that she approached it, her courage was oozing out at her finger-nails, and decidedly the welcome was not inviting.

When the duckling takes to the water for the first time, it is full of confused and embarrassing emotions, awakened by the hen's lamentable clucking on the bank. Certainly the water is cold; certainly there may be awful things underneath that will drag a swimmer down; certainly its feathers will get into an untidy mess. But nature is strong, self-assertion is native to ducklings, and the first chill of the water is soon forgotten, as the duckling considers how funny the hen looks on the bank.

Millicent's eyes changed their colour, that had been almost as grey as the lough; a warm glow of laughter suffused them.

"Poor dear mother! If she could only see me!"

If there was ever a lady bred up in the best and most refined traditions of the hen-coop, fed at stated seasons, and accustomed only to stately and gentle exercise, to whom providence committed the charge of a vagrant audacious offspring, prone to the most undesirable explorations, and filled full of instincts that would turn cold the blood of any well-regulated hen — that lady, it must be acknowledged, was Mrs. Carteret. Millicent was the whole of her brood, and for several years a very satisfactory brood. She was indeed wilful, but Mrs. Carteret, who had been a delicate, ineffectual wife, found it quite natural to be a delicate, ineffectual mother; and if Millicent was spoiled, at least Millicent took a proper interest in her frocks, and had a number of accomplishments. These Mrs. Carteret, poor lady, thought it only right to encourage, unwitting that she had taken the first step to develop the duckling.

Millicent declined to have accomplishments; she was determined to have an art. Her mother, after a faint struggle to maintain the hours which every nice girl should devote to strumming scales, surrendered at discretion, reflecting in herself upon the awful utterance of her brother-in-law, "She might have wanted to be an actress." Laying that fear to heart, she bore with much; she endured patiently the strange friends — of both sexes — whom Millicent imported from time to time into her decorous drawing-room, and thanked heaven inwardly that her daughter showed no desire to emulate their costumes. The life-class was something of a shock to her feelings, but Millicent explained sternly that it was essential to an artist's career. What on earth Millicent should want with a career, Mrs. Carteret could not imagine, and she nearly lost her patience when the girl injured, and in the very season, her complexion, and a very pretty complexion, by too laborious work for the Slade School studentship. Millicent basely made her profit out of this anxiety to secure her mother's consent to a long-meditated scheme.

She and Kitty Hammond wanted to go off and live in lodgings and work out-of-doors, putting schools and professors far away, and throwing gloves and veils to the winds. Kitty Hammond suggested Cornwall, but Millicent scorned the idea. Everybody went to Cornwall; there were easels in the foreground of every view. She wanted to go somewhere where no one had ever read a book or painted a picture. She wanted to go to Donegal.

Kitty Hammond meekly submitted that nobody went to Donegal, because you could get nothing to eat there, and all the beds had pigs under them. Millicent retorted contemptuously that you caught trout and ate them, and that her cousin Jack Duncombe had stayed in a delightful cottage where they gave you potato cake. Kitty said that six Englishmen had died in one year of eating potato cake, and that there was nobody to catch trout. Millicent retorted that she had stayed for a fortnight on Windermere, and learnt how to throw a fly perfectly; she had caught lots of trout in the beck. Pressed as to the number, she was a trifle vague, but in any case anybody could catch trout on Lough Drummond — Jack Duncombe had told her so; and you went in and had them cooked over a peat fire, and ate them hot and frizzling from the frying-pan, and faintly tasting of the peat. Kitty objected the horrors of the journey;

Millicent retorted with a pæan boldly imaginative in praise of the Irish outside car. Finally, since there was, as Kitty reasonably complained, no use in talking, the matter was settled.

Mrs. Carteret was resignedly reluctant. She had hoped, she said, that Millicent would settle down and enjoy herself and go to parties. Millicent, however, insisted that her health imperatively required a complete change. Late hours would be the ruin of her. " And, at all events, mamma," she added, " in a place like that, you know, Kitty and I could not get into any mischief." Mrs. Carteret gave in. Jack Duncombe was employed to arrange about the rooms, and all was settled.

Then, two days before the date fixed, Kitty Hammond got the measles. It is not a romantic complaint; it provokes no commiseration, and Millicent did not take the trouble to pretend that she was not angry with Kitty. And, at twenty-four hours' notice, nobody else would go. Half-heartedly she asserted that she really would go by herself; and in a rash moment Mrs. Carteret, ruffling her plumes, declared that such a thing was wholly out of the question. Then a pitched battle began. The affair was fought out as a matter of principle, Millicent, severely logical, demanding to be shown why it was wrong that she should go. She was an artist, and up to a certain point she must defy convention. And she cited with great accuracy instance after instance in which she had been allowed to do so, poor Mrs. Carteret pleading in vain that it was scarcely fair that her very concessions should now be used against her. In short, the duckling finally and irretrievably expressed her determination to be a duckling — a perfectly well-conducted duckling, but still a duckling that makes no pretence of chicken-like behaviour. And the hen, as always, found herself left upon the shore.

No doubt, if Mrs. Carteret could have seen her daughter in that moment, her anxieties would have been doubled. But if she could have looked into her daughter's consciousness, they would have been indefinitely multiplied, for Millicent was feeling not a little lonely and embarrassed. A certain number of tourists like herself had come with her in the train, but they had taken the steamer to Rathnew; her little boat went further up the lough to Rathdrum, and all the folk on it were people of the country, conversing to one another in a dialect that was very difficult to Millicent's ear, and entirely unlike the traditional brogue of comic songs. And the grey lough and the grey hills chilled her; there was a possibility of beauty, no doubt, in their shape, but hardly its presence. Still, as the little boat plunged on its way, and the lough parted into two arms, the place began to grow more homely. Now the arm of the sea was plainly transformed into the estuary of a river, and at last, as they rounded a low point of land covered with scrub oak growing down to the high-water line of drift-wrack, and opened a huddle of grey houses, set among trees and reaching up along the river-bank. Millicent felt the welcome sense of arrival. People were friendly and helpful with her luggage, and the carman's shaven face was genial and friendly; but he showed a surprise that was almost incredulous when Millicent declared her destination — Miss Coyle's, at Killydonnell.

"Is it the Killydonnell hotel you want, miss?"

"No," said Millicent, perplexed, "it isn't the hotel. She's a woman who keeps lodgings for anglers."

Then, to her amazement, she found her affairs quite familiar to the bystanders on the quay. Voices chimed in —

"It's Margaret Coyle's, on Lough Drummond. There was two English ladies coming to her, and this lady will be one of them. Isn't that it, miss?"

"Yes," said Millicent, "that's it" — divided between amusement and consternation, as she saw that the English lady coming to stay at Margaret's was an object of general curiosity.

There was enough of the angler in her to rouse her to keen interest when they passed the river at a broad bridge just above the tideway. But not so much the angler as the artist was stirred when, a little further on the drive, the road took them past a long stretch of still, silvery water brimming to a carry, over which the tumbling flood raced in a curving waterfall. Whether for artist or angler, the river was the feature of the drive, in its loops through the country. A mile onwards it met them again, and they crossed a bridge over a wild hurry of racing streams, where Millicent determined that her fly should float before she was many hours older. Then a large, level sweep of road led them through bogland, over which peewits circled and called, and through which the river ran slow and deep — paintable, thought Millicent, but cheerless, a study in sepia. And then the lake came in sight — a grey sheet of water, flat and dead, for the breeze had fallen, but cheerless too in that cold, sunless evening. Millicent shivered instinctively.

Another hundred yards and the driver said, "There's Margaret's;" and he pointed with his whip to a little slated cottage, standing fifty yards back from the road. A lane, well kept, led up to it between two trim hedges, and the face of the whitewashed wall in front was trellised with a straggling rose. As the car drew up, a couple of black-and-tan collies rushed out, barking vociferously, with an air of assumed ferocity that would not deceive an infant.

A lad of about twenty came round the corner of the house to the horse's head, and a short, square-set, middle-aged woman, with a quaint, good-humoured face, emerged from the low door of the cottage.

"Down, Toby! down, Fly!" she said to the dogs. "Aren't you ashamed?"

Millicent jumped off the car. "Are you Miss Coyle? I'm Miss Carteret."

"You're welcome, miss. That's a terrible day you had. But where's the other young lady?"

"She was ill, and I had to come by myself," said Millicent, a little nervously.

"Dear oh! Isn't that too bad, now? And you had to come all that way your lones, and such a day, too! Won't you come in, miss? You must be fair tired out with the travelling."

Millicent followed her in as she spoke. The door gave into the kitchen. A steep wooden stair fronted it, and the room was dark enough; but the clay floor was spotlessly clean, and on the hearth a bright peat fire was blazing. At the sight of the blaze, with the big black pot hanging over it, and the white wooden chair set invitingly in the chimney corner, Millicent felt as if the universe had suddenly grown warm and home-like.

"Come forward to the fire, miss, while John helps Hughie to bring in your box," she said. "Bring it inside, John," she said to a tall, well-set-up lad who rose from a dark corner of the kitchen. "Well, well," she went on as she bustled about, "it's too bad that the other young lady wasn't able to come with you. I had the two beds ready and all. But it's a very rough place for the likes of you, miss. I wouldn't have evened it to myself to be doing for you, but Captain Duncombe, he said you would be willing to make the best of us, and sure I couldn't refuse when Captain Duncombe asked it."

"Oh, Miss Coyle," said Millicent, "I think it's all so nice; and I won't be any trouble to you — I won't indeed!"

"Indeed, then, miss, I'm sure you won't; but if you were itself it'd be little enough to do for you. Will you come in and see your room now?"

Millicent went out and paid her driver, and then inspected her quarters — a little sitting-room with a big window to the front, a little box of a bedroom, with its tiny casement opening on to the yard. It was all clean and cosy, though the horse-hair-padded chairs and the shiny tablecloth of American leather had not the charm of the kitchen; but it had the same air of kindly preparation. And before Millicent had fairly shaken the dust of the journey off her, Margaret assisting — for Margaret insisted that Miss Coyle should be no longer mentioned — and marvelling ingenuously at all the little daintinesses contained in a dressing-bag — the feeling of strangeness had entirely worn off.

There was nothing but content in her mind when she settled down to her dinner, except, indeed, a little surprise that Margaret should ask if one chicken would be enough for her; but the surprise vanished when she saw the tender innocent, not much bigger than a well-sized woodcock, and almost as good to eat. And though she dined alone she was not solitary, for Margaret bustled in and out with "second" potatoes (peeled and crisped on the hearth, for a change, after the first in their jackets), a glass of new milk, and whatever else her invention could think of that was appetizing. And with Margaret there came companionable cats; and, when her back was turned, one of the collies, aggressive no longer, but amiably surreptitious, entered soft-footed, and unostentatiously pressed a warm nose on Millicent's knee, while his fine eyes looked with a gentle suggestion towards her plate. Margaret detected him, and was indignant. "Toby! the whup!" she threatened. But Toby disregarded her, and pressed his nose a little closer, while Millicent shamefully encouraged his rebellion.

And after dinner, when she went into the kitchen to ask Margaret for some trifle, it seemed to her the most natural thing in the world to find herself offered the seat of honour by the fire, and taking her place in the circle with Margaret and the two lads and a neighbour who had dropped in. It seemed natural, she found herself reflecting, for she herself was the only person there in the least embarrassed. There was no constraint accompanying the perfect deference with which these peasants treated their guest; and if Millicent was a new thing in their experience, so were they in hers. In ten minutes she was talking quite easily about the Rathdrum steamer; and when Margaret praised her courage — "Ye must be a brave lady, then" — she was a little at cross purposes till Hughie explained that Margaret's special terror was the sea. Living all her life with boatmen, she had only once ventured on the water, and the experience was dreadful. And Millicent had crossed the sea before, and had been in "foreign parts."

"Dear oh! and you that young!" said Margaret.

"Had any artists been there?" Millicent wanted to know.

Margaret had never heard tell of such a thing. The quality did be dabbling with a wee cup of water, and painting pictures of the lake and the island, but, for a person who made a business of it, she never saw one. And was that what Miss Carteret was going to do? Dear oh! It must take a person to be quare and clever to earn money at the like o' thon.

"Would there be any difficulty in getting models?" Millicent asked. But she had to explain, "Girls or children that would stand to be painted."

An odd touch of confusion came over the group. "There's some of them doesn't think it lucky," said Hughie.

"Oh, nonsense!" said Margaret, rather angrily. "Sure what harm would it do them? There's many a one has their photograph taken."

"There's them that won't, then," retorted Hughie. "Isn't that the truth, James?" he said, turning to the old man who sat very still and silent on the settle in the shadow close to the door.

"Why do they think it unlucky?" asked Millicent.

But Margaret cut the conversation short. "It's just a pack of nonsense they have among themselves, miss. Sure no good Christian would believe the like. Don't be afraid; if you want to paint likenesses of them, I'll get you as many childher as you want."

"Thank you, Margaret," said Millicent; but she determined to have the question out with Hughie, little knowing the reticence of an Irish peasant. "Still," she went on, "I don't want to paint just yet. I want to fish. Is there any chance?"

All she heard was most encouraging. There had been plenty of trout caught; the water was "about the right grist;" and if there was a breeze in the morning, she could try the lake; and, anyhow, the streams or the river could be fished in nearly any weather. Then there was an inspection of her tackle. Admiration was lavished on her beautiful little split-cane rod — for Millicent's friends had supervised her purchases — and the flies chosen for her by Jack Duncombe stood Hughie's criticism. And when Millicent left the corner of the peat fire and withdrew into her own domain, there was not a young lady in Ireland better pleased with herself that evening.

The duckling took kindly to the water.

CHAPTER II

About twenty yards from the river the stone wall that divides Strathmore from the long planting becomes a bank, mightily tunnelled with rabbit-holes and covered with large thorn bushes. From between two of these bushes, where generations of anglers had worn a gap, more or less practicable, there emerged the point of a trout-rod, and following with the rest of the rod came Miss Millicent Carteret. She struggled for a moment or two on the top of the bank in the endeavour to disentangle her fishing-basket, which had seized a last opportunity to stick in the bushes; then she slipped down into the field and stood up, more than a little ruffled in temper and person. There are few things more trying, even to the experienced, than to penetrate an unfamiliar wood, rod in hand. Millicent was not experienced, and the long planting was provided with a tropical undergrowth of brambles and scrub holly. Her efforts to fish at one or two points in the passage along the bank had cost her her most cherished casting-line, half of which hung suspended from a poplar branch at a height some six inches beyond what was accessible even to a lady standing five feet eight; and she had then wisely, though in no philosophic temper, decided to make her way to clearer ground.

What she saw now went a good way to console and compose her. She saw a huge level pasture, so large that you would walk a mile if you followed its boundary; and for two-thirds of the way that boundary was the river. Strathmore is in shape a circle that inclines to be a triangle, or a triangle that inclines to be a circle, as you will; and in all the hilly, undulating country that lies in among the mountains of Donegal there is scarcely its fellow. Millicent, however, did not care for the quality of the pasture; she scarcely noticed the massive beauty of the great herd of shorthorns, flecked red and white, that grazed in it; she was even too keen upon her sport to dwell upon the pleasure afforded to the eye by that great level expanse of grass, green overlaid with fawn colour, which spread itself out among the ups and downs of a tillage country all criss-crossed with walls and ditches. What she saw and rejoiced in was the absence of trees.

From the bridge, a mile up stream, where she had left her bicycle in a cottage, her industry had been engaged in a continual conflict with branches.

It had pleased either nature or man to set the bank on both sides at intervals of some twenty or thirty yards with small ash trees, and between them the rippling broken stream of the river ran like a boulevard. Nothing could be prettier, nothing more embarrassing to the angler, and especially to a novice who liked elbow-room to swing her flies in. But here at last, in Strathmore, the river ran from her south-west, and then turned sharp south-east to meet a line of poplars that shot off at angles from the plantation she had traversed. At the angle of the bend was a clump of trees over which cawing rooks soared and circled, but, save for that, in the whole length and breadth of the field, nothing broke the level except a strange, tall, upright stone, and one more little ash on the bank, perhaps three hundred yards from where she was standing. That, at least, she felt was no encumbrance — little knowing.

As she looked about her, the traces of vexation about her eyes and mouth smoothed themselves away. With a decisive movement she restored order to the short blue serge bicycling skirt, preened herself with a bird's quick touch, and then set to work to repair the wreckage of her tackle. Pulling round the neat little basket that was slung on her shoulder, she opened it to take out her fly-book, and the sight of its other contents wholly restored her equanimity; for there were trout in it, as many trout as Millicent had caught in her whole experience of angling before — three or four brace of them. The soft, grey, windless day had made lake-fishing impossible, but Hughie had been right when he assured her that with the river still high after the flood she would get plenty of trout in the streams down by Tully Bridge. Still, she was a little depressed about the loss of her cast. It had always been impressed upon her that she ought to fish fine, and there was her beautiful drawn gut, with its little midge-sized flies, decorating a poplar tree. However, there was a cast which Hughie had put up for her over-night, about the strength, he said, for the lake, with the flies he fancied — a small claret, a small hare's ear, and on the tail a blue and silver. Her white capable fingers, round and shapely, with joints smoothly finished like the knots on a slender bamboo, went to work unbending what was broken, and quickly unwinding and bending on the new gut; and in a minute she was equipped. Then she stood up, light, quick, erect, yet pliant, as if her figure continually sprang against the weight of her hair, and eagerly she made her way to the sport.

And if ever there was a stretch of fishing-water such as anglers, immured in the sweltering city, picture to themselves when they toss through July nights, she had it now before her. Down along the way she had come the river ran straight, broad and fordable, broken into many channels. But just by the fence she had crossed, Strathmore pushed out a shoulder and barred the way of the current, that narrowed up till you could throw a fly easily across it, and then swung round in a sullen whirling pool, flinging the weight of water to the further side. Here the ground rose sharply in a knoll, divided from Strathmore by a curving arc of river, and towards the stream it offered a cliffy side, covered with dense scrub of oak and hazel bushes that hung over the water, dropping from their tufted boughs a rain of insects. Under the boughs the river, emerging from the turning pool in a wild, broken, hurrying rush, sped on down and down, smoothing and slackening gradually, yet still swift and curled where it raced past the drooping hazels. Millicent's experience was sufficient to tell her that if trout could be caught anywhere, they should be caught there.

She took her stand on the level bank of Strathmore, cast into the stream, and the lissom loops of the gut straightened out rapidly in the strong water. Another cast, and another, while she lengthened her line; then, as the flies swept down, just on the edge of the central rush, there was a splash, her line tightened, and the rod's point bent sharply, with the strength of the stream added to the fighting fish. But the little split cane did its work, and drew the trout across towards the stiller water. Millicent played him delicately and gingerly, enticing him towards a bank of shelving sand — for Millicent, rash young woman, had refused to be hampered with a landing-net, and half a dozen times already that day she had repented bitterly. But fate was kinder to her now, and the pretty, lustrous, brown fish, carmine-spotted, soon lay gasping on the grass. And as she fished down the curve of stream, with the dark bank opposite her, luck was constant, and another brace were added to the basket. The day held good; though the veil of soft grey showed signs of parting, and even through it you could feel the strength of an August sun, it was still dark enough, and not too dark, for the flies.

But the river was now changing in its character. From being a swift, swirling run, it passed into a short pool, though still broken by the rush of the water. The bank on the further side was curving round, and on Millicent's left it came out so far that the dammed-up flood gathered into a heap and rushed out in a stream so heavy that for a yard or two its surface was smooth as glass. And in this pool she became aware that the natural resting-place for fish must be on the farther side, since nearer her was a slope of shingle. She cast heroically towards an overhanging tree, conscious of the fate in store if her flies fouled its branches; and her skill was rewarded. There was a swirl, and she found herself fighting a fish that ran valiantly. He jumped, and her heart was in her mouth when she saw he was at least twice as big as any of those she had landed. But still the little rod controlled him easily, the rushes grew fainter, and at last she drew him in to her feet. The neat little basket was becoming a perceptible weight.

What had been done once could be done again. The overhanging tree covered several yards of deep water, and below it still a branching thorn projected over the very tail of the pool. Plainly that was where glory lay. She straightened her line with a cast or two, let out another yard, and threw to reach the water just above the trailing boughs. Horror! her fly fell fairly among them. A quick jerk and she was clear — she had only touched a leaf. Should she risk it again? She decided that she would.

In just below the hazel was a vacant space before the thorn covered the water, and for that she made her cast. The tail-fly travelled straight, fell softly as a benediction on the water, and was swept by the stream into the dark water under the thorn. Suddenly a great wave surged up from the depths and overwhelmed it. There was no tug, but a heavy pull on the line, which moved quietly out towards the middle of the pool. Something had happened.

Millicent was cold with excitement. She lifted the top of the rod almost automatically, expecting the fish either to come towards her or fight against the strain. Nothing of the sort. The rod bent double, but the line remained motionless as if the hook were fixed in a rock. Only, she was conscious of a heavy motion, and the reel began to pay out slowly as the thing — whatever it was — sailed a few feet away from her up the stream.

CHAPTER III

"How much line have you got?"

The words fell upon her suddenly, and she turned her head with a start. A young man was standing beside her with a rod on his shoulder.

"Oh!" she said with a start. Then she spoke the hope which would have been suggested to her by the angel Gabriel if he had appeared. "Have you got a landing-net? I don't know how I shall ever get this fish in without one."

He laughed quietly. "I've got what will do better. But you won't want it just yet. That's a heavy fish."

"I didn't know there were such big trout in this river," she said.

As she spoke, suddenly the rod bent like a whip; the reel screamed, and with a majestic rush the fish went down the flood of water at the tail of the pool, then, piercing the stream, shot into the slack water on the further side, and flung himself into the air with a mighty leap.

"Oh!" she screamed, "why, that's a salmon!"

But admonitions were being hurled at her, "Drop your point when he jumps. There — well done! He's on still."

The fish was now slowly circling in the lower pool, and showing a disposition to burrow under the bank. Millicent's heart was in a wild flurry.

"Oh, do tell me what I am to do," she said, completely forgetful of her dignity. "Won't the rod break?"

"Not likely," the stranger said. "Hold it strong against him. Keep the butt up — so. That's it."

"It was a salmon, wasn't it?"

"Yes," he said, laughing. "Why not?"

"But I've never caught a salmon."

"Well, you've a chance to begin. And, what's more, that's a salmon, not a grilse."

"Oh," she said vaguely. "I didn't know. But what will happen? How long will this sort of thing go on? Oh!"

She gave an involuntary shriek as the fish made a short rush down the pool.

"Run," he said. "Follow him. Keep as close as you can. There — that's right. Keep the point of your rod well up. That's it. Don't be afraid of it." And, indeed, the little rod was bent alarmingly. "You must hold the butt against him when he runs," her instructor went on. "It's little you can do with it; but still it is keeping a strain on him. Let me look at your reel. How much line?"

"Haven't an idea," she answered. "Does it matter?"

He looked again. "Twenty yards, most likely; perhaps twenty-five. If he stays here, it won't matter, but if he goes down —"

The pool the fish was in now was a deep, narrow water between steepish banks. Into it the stream tore with a heavy race, but gradually spread out, and the whole ran broadening for perhaps a hundred yards. No better place to fight a salmon in could be, but for one fatal circumstance. Fifty yards down stream was the one ash tree; and about its feet grew two or three thick willow bushes. The ash boughs spread thick and low, and the tree grew from the bank itself. To pass it was impossible.

Millicent looked, not comprehending. "Well," she said, "if he goes down, can't I go down too?"

"If it wasn't for that beastly tree you could. I've always said I'd come some morning and cut it down. Still, there it is."

She looked at it blankly. "Do you mean to say he is going all that way?"

"How are you going to stop him? O Lord! this is worse. If he gets in there he's lost, to a moral."

On the bank where they stood grew a bush of stunted alder, with its tangled roots in the water, and for this the salmon was now heading, quietly but firmly.

"Hold him if you can. He must be kept out of that."

Millicent's helper darted to the gravel bank off which she had hooked the salmon, and returned with a handful of stones. The salmon was still relentlessly boring up stream. He was within a yard now of the overhanging branches.

"Look out!" Millicent heard, and a stone dropped into the water right before the fish's nose. What happened next she never quite knew. She saw the thin line cutting the water like a steamer's prow, down, down, always down towards the ash tree; she heard herself urged to run, and she ran, panting, while the reel still shrieked and the rod bent, and the line fled further and further away. It cut the water past the outermost branches of the ash, still heading down, and she heard some one say, "Give me the rod." Whether she gave it or whether it was taken from her she knew not, but she had a vision of a man in knickerbockers floundering down the bank, floundering along in water knee-deep, waist-deep, shoulder-deep, with rod held high, and at the same time there flashed into her mind a ludicrous sense of her position. Vaguely she was aware that he was young, and had dark hair and dark eyes; but there was no time to think, for he was past the tree, staggering towards the bank, and shouting to her to take the rod. Then she had the rod in her hands again, and the fish, ending his race with a desperate flounder on the top of the water, was still on.

"Reel in!" her helper shouted. "Get over him!"

And she reeled as if for dear life, making her way nearer to where the line moved sullenly back and forwards. She heard a splash and a struggle as her helper pulled himself on to the bank; she heard his feet as he came running, and she turned her head for an instant.

"Oh, but you must be frightfully wet."

"What matter? That's a great little rod. Stick to him. You should get him now. These big runs tire them quick."

"Do you really think I shall?" panted Millicent. "If I don't, I believe it will break my heart."

"Of course you will," he said. "I'll get the gaff ready."

And he pulled out of his pocket something like a telescope, drew it out, and showed at the end a shining hook.

"There! What did I tell you?" — as the fish ran across the pool slowly, and for an instant turned on his side. "He's showing the white. Bring him over, if you can. Gently! oh, gently!" — for the salmon, resisting the strain, came to the top and floundered in a flurry on the top of the water. "Is he off? Thank the Lord! Take him very quietly. Easy, easy! Let him come in towards the bank."

He kept far back in the field as he was speaking; then, as the salmon came across, he slipped down on a kind of ledge. Supporting himself by one hand on the top, he warily stole up behind the spent fish, who swam sullenly a foot below the water. Then his left arm shot out with the gaff, shortened with a quick snap, and Millicent, feeling the weight on a sudden off her line, for one awful instant believed that the fish was gone.

But there it hung high in air for a moment before it was swung clear on to the bank and thrown down, bright silver, on the dull grass.

"There," he said, dragging himself up, "let me present you to your first salmon."

But the strong fish, feeling the resistance of the ground, began to leap and struggle for liberty.

"Wait a minute," he said. "You'd better look the other way."

Millicent heard three or four dull blows.

"Now," he said, bringing the beautiful purple-and silver creature, fleckless, except for the little trace left by the gaff in its shoulder, "I congratulate you."

CHAPTER IV

But Millicent was speechless. She laid down her rod, sat down on the grass and contemplated her spoil, while the young man contemplated her. Flushed with excitement, and utterly oblivious of anything else, she was undoubtedly very pleasant to look at, and, he thought, curiously girlish. How on earth did she get there? Who on earth was she? he asked himself.

"It's a great moment, isn't it?" he said sympathetically. "You'll never forget it."

"I should rather think not," said Millicent, with heartfelt conviction.

"There's nothing like it in life. And, let me tell you, you have a right to be proud. That fish must be ten pounds. It isn't one fisherman in forty that has killed a ten-pound fish on tackle like that. If I were you, I'd put that fly and cast in a locket, and wear it next my heart."

She was not so girlish-looking, after all, he was reflecting; there was a range and a variety of expression, a controlled humour in her face, that certainly did not suggest the young girl. For the truth was that, while he talked, Millicent had become alive to the situation. She was shy, she was nervous, but her excitement and her success stimulated her; and if she was embarrassed, she was also amused. And not for the world was she going to let it appear that she was embarrassed, or that it was not the most ordinary thing in her experience to be receiving the congratulations of an unknown man, and of a good-looking young man, and of a young man who apparently was eager to analyze his emotions — and hers; a young man whom she might quite conceivably have met in quite a different incarnation, and whom she might, in that incarnation, quite conceivably have liked. Now she had to make her acknowledgments, to be grateful and not too grateful, and to get clear away so as to avoid possible complications. It was difficult, but she did not feel unequal to it; it amused her a good deal.

"I don't think I'm so proud as I should be if I had done it all myself," she said.

"Why, everybody has a gillie to gaff their fish," he answered. "I turned up just in time to act as your gillie, that's all."

"It was simply angelic of you."

"As to being angelic," he replied, "I was just thinking that you must exercise a very elevating influence — you must radiate unselfishness. This is the first time I ever saw a fellow-creature catch a salmon without wishing I had caught it instead."

"Dear me!" she said. "Isn't that very unchristian? I should like to see you catch a salmon now."

He looked up at the sky. The struggle with the fish had lasted the best part of half an hour; and in that time the cloud-veil had dispersed, and the sun was now broad and blazing.

"Well, you won't — it's too bright; the chance is gone. Besides, you don't know till you try. I believe in my heart you would be jealous. Now, I testify before all the gods that I am glad it was you who got that fish."

"That is only because I couldn't have got it without you to help," she replied, with a challenge of laughter in her eyes.

He laughed back. "Perhaps you are right. But I would not encourage you to think so. If women don't believe in their elevating influence, what are women for?"

"Do you think you had better stay discussing that?" she asked, looking at him with a touch of solicitude. "You're wet."

"Yes; one often is when one walks in a river — and dirty. The contact of dripping clothes with crumbling banks produces mud. Do you mind? It was in a good cause."

"I don't believe a good cause ever saved any one from influenza," she said. "I shall feel I have your death on me if you stay here talking."

"Oh," he said, "you don't know Donegal. Nobody here values a wetting. Besides, I don't think you can dispense with your gillie yet."

"Oh, thanks," she said, stiffening perceptibly, "I'm sure I can." Then, in a less austere tone, she added, "You see, if you aren't able to catch any salmon after this, why should I?"

"All right," he replied philosophically. "I have only to help you to put this fish into your basket, then I will be off."

Again Millicent's composure failed her. Here was an unlooked-for complication.

"The fish!" she gasped. "It won't go in."

"I told you you would want me," he said. "Where do you want to get to? I'll carry him along. The wet doesn't matter in the least when one is walking."

"Oh, but I simply can't allow you. You've been awfully good," said Millicent, looking round in dismay. How on earth was she to get rid of this apparently indispensable creature? Then a ray of triumph lit her face; it was unconcealed when she turned to him. "No, of course you need not — there's a man coming. I'll get him to do it."

Her acquaintance turned and looked round. He looked back at her, and a smile was dancing in his eyes, and drew his lips a little apart. Plainly there was something else in store, and Millicent felt bewildered, and a little angry.

"Do you know," he said, "that you have been breaking the law, and that this is its avenging minister?"

Into what Bedlam comedy had she walked? In spite of herself, she felt his amusement communicate itself.

"What on earth do you mean?" she said. "I'm not trespassing, am I?"

"Have you a salmon license?"

"No, of course not. What's that?"

"Then you'd better leave me to deal with this gentleman," he answered, without vouchsafing further explanation.

The individual they were talking of was a long man with red whiskers, nondescript clothes, and a shambling gait. He came up, and halted, wearing the curiously indirect manner of Irish peasants who have something to say and do not feel equal to saying it.

"Fine day," said Millicent's helper.

"It is that." Then came a pause. "It's a wee thing bright now for fishing."

"Ay, John, the best of the day's over."

John looked with an inquiring air at the stranger, who gave him his name, but made no explicit acknowledgment.

"Thon's a good fish ye got."

"It is, John. What weight would ye give him?"

John hesitated. "Mebbe aught pounds."

"Nonsense, John; he's nearer ten, I should think."

"They aye weigh light when they come to the scales," said John, grimly. Again he hesitated.

Then the young man spoke again, after watching him with amusement.

"Are you wanting to see my license, John?"

John was evidently relieved. "Oh, sure if you have one, what's the use? Still an' all, maybe it would be as well."

"Isn't it a queer thing, John," said the young man, taking a paper from his fly-book, "that you wouldn't know how to ask a man for his license yet? What used the watchers to say to you when they caught you poaching?"

A slow twinkle overspread John's face. "Sure they aye knew I hadn't one," he replied, as he unfolded the piece of paper, and addressed himself to the effort of deciphering it. "Mr. Frank Norman," he read out. Then again he made a heavy pause, and a recollection dawned visibly on his face. "Ye'll not be the wee fellow that used to be stopping with the colonel — the colonel's nevvy out of London?"

"Just that, John. Isn't it a hard case you wouldn't know me?"

"Not a one of yez I knowed then."

"Well, you see, I knew you, John, but I never thought to see you lifting licenses. It wasn't that way with you when I used to be coming to the lough."

"No, troth. But I had to quet the poaching. They were too sharp on me this good while."

"And now you're watching the water?"

Millicent had been following the scene with great interest, but imperfect comprehension. She made out plainly enough that Mr. Frank Norman, since that was his name, had taken upon himself the responsibility of the capture. But to her mind she was already more than sufficiently indebted to this Mr. Norman; and besides, having caught a salmon, she was no way disposed to conceal the fact. Why should she? It was nothing wrong.

"But I don't understand," she put in peremptorily. "They told me the fishing was free. Hasn't every one a right to fish here?"

"Surely, miss, if the colonel doesn't stop them from going on his land."

This was a blow. But Millicent decided that she would much rather face the worst than add to her indebtedness.

"And are you a keeper of the colonel's?"

"No, miss. I'm watching the water for the conservators."

"To see if anybody's catching salmon without a license?" put in the "colonel's nevvy."

"Just that," replied John.

Millicent was not English for nothing, and it appeared to her that unwarrantable liberties were being taken with the rights of Miss Millicent Carteret.

"But so long as they are fishing for trout, they aren't doing anything wrong."

"No, miss."

"And supposing a person caught a salmon when they are fishing for trout, what ought they to do?"

"They be to put it back."

Millicent looked aghast. "Why, what would be the good in catching it, then? Besides, supposing it was killed with the gaff?"

John chuckled. "Naebody goes trout-fishing wi' a gaff."

Millicent was decidedly confounded, and the effect of confusion was to make her angry. Before she had recovered, young Norman spoke again.

"Did you ever catch any of them at it, John?"

"Ah did that — some parties out of England."

"And what did you do?"

"Ah said Ah would give their names to the inspector."

"Was that all, John?"

"Ah took the fush."

"Did you give in the fish to the inspector?"

A slow smile stole over John's face. "Ah took the fish, onyway."

Millicent's anger blazed. "I don't believe you had any right to it. Look here. It was I who caught that fish, and I defy you to take it."

John looked at her with compassion. "Ye'll no ask me to believe thon?"

"You must never contradict a lady, John," said Mr. Norman, whose enjoyment of the situation was rousing Millicent to fury.

"Ah'm not asking to contradict her."

"I tell you," said Millicent, "it was I who caught that fish."

John looked at her with a twinkle. "Mebbe it was you I saw pouthering down thonder through the water among the bushes?"

"Well, if you saw that, you saw me playing the fish," she retorted.

"Surely I seen him reaching you up the rod when he was facing at the bank?"

Millicent grew more and more annoyed. "He only gaffed the fish," she repeated; "it was I who caught it. If he had hooked it, I should have been the one to gaff it."

John looked at her with undisguised contempt, for John was not gallant.

"What man would let a woman gaff a fish for him? But indeed, then, I wondered to see him trustin' you so long with the rod. I would aye like to play my own fish, and gaff them too."

Millicent looked at Norman between anger and amusement.

"It's too bad," she said.

He shook with suppressed laughter, but a gleam of design came into his eye.

"I warn you, John," he said, "you won't be doing your duty if you don't get that lady's name and address."

But John was out of temper. "What do I want with her name? She's only trying to make a fool of me." Then he paused. "She'll be some woman out of England with a big purse till her, that ye're courtin' for yourself."

It was one of Millicent's chief afflictions that she was subject to blushes, and although she did not catch John's words exactly, the sense was obvious enough, and left her exceedingly disconcerted. Her partner in the imputation was not much less embarrassed — perhaps only the more embarrassed because he was entirely unable to control his laughter — and John, after a glance at the couple that confirmed him amply in the estimate of his own sagacity, shambled off, muttering —

"There's not many that'll make a fool of John Gallagher."

Frank Norman recovered his self-possession with an effort, and began to talk rapidly.

"You must pardon John's ways of speech. He's a queer beast, and you touched one of his weaknesses. You see, he has no opinion of what he calls 'the weemen,' and he has a great opinion of the Owenbeg salmon. There was a man fishing with us one day long ago — rather a duffer — and he began talking to John about his aspirations. He wanted to get into a big fish — a real big fish, that would make a real fight of it. John looked at him and looked at his rod, and just said, 'Ye'd like to get intil a big fish, would ye? Troth, then, the divil along you and it wad be thegither.' It cost John half a crown; he knew he was losing his tip, but he couldn't help himself."

Millicent laughed in a perfunctory way.

"I really ought to beg your pardon for my interference," Frank Norman went on, "but, strictly speaking, John was right. You weren't entitled to kill that fish; or, at least, you were bound to take out a license if you did?"

"Do you mean," said Millicent, "that if I had decided to take out a license, and told him so, it would have been all right?"

Frank grew a little uncomfortable. "Oh, I suppose so. But, of course, you are only here for trout-fishing, and I presumed you wouldn't care to trouble about it."

"I wish you had told me," said Millicent. "Of course, I shall take out the license if I am bound to. I wanted to catch the salmon, and I am very much obliged to you for helping me, but I did not want to be afraid of a keeper."

The truth in Millicent's mind was that, as things went, it was certainly impossible for her to recall John and make him carry the fish. She did not see her own way to carrying it; and how to get rid of this young man she knew not. What business had he to make her a partner in a kind of conspiracy without even explaining his design? It was all much too ingenious to be dignified; unless she had had a share in the devising of it — and the end had only added to her embarrassment.

The young man could not follow all this complication of cause and effect; but about the effect he had no chance to be mistaken. She resented what he had done, and the pleasant beginning of half an hour back seemed utterly blotted out. He looked at her ruefully.

"Oh, you English! Did you ever in all your life get over a locked gate? Did you ever disregard a notice-board? I merely thought that I would save you trouble — and perhaps amuse you a little."

When a person is so contrite as that, Millicent reflected, one may relax a little of one's severity.

"When you talk of notice-boards," she said, "perhaps you will tell me if I ought to be prosecuted. They told me at Lough Drummond, where

I am staying, that I could fish anywhere on the river except just near Rathdrum; but that man said I ought to have leave from a colonel, who seems to be your uncle."

"Oh," he said, "things aren't very hard and fast in this country. Colonel Lisle is my uncle, and he owns this place, but most people about here have leave if they care to; he never refuses it."

"All the more reason that I oughtn't to have taken it without asking. Do you think I could write and apologize?"

"I beg you won't. On the contrary, will you accept my assurance that you are only too welcome to fish here whenever you like?" Then an idea crossed his mind. "But you are English. I will make my uncle write and send you a formal permission, if you will allow me. Where are you staying at Lough Drummond?"

"With a woman called Margaret Coyle. I dare say you know her. But I couldn't think of troubling Colonel Lisle."

He began a protestation.

"No, really no. You see, I am supposed to be painting, and I shall be, only I wanted to try the fishing my first day, and it was too calm for the lake, so I started on a voyage of discovery. But you see, down here, even the best of luck has its drawbacks;" and she looked ruefully at the big fish.

"Oh," he said, "don't trouble about that. If you insist that I am not to carry him, I will send down a small boy from the yard, who will take him over to Margaret's for sixpence. But I was going to make a suggestion. What are you going to do with your fish, now you have him?"

Again she looked at her salmon with an air of amused bewilderment.

"Eat him, I suppose. It looks an awful lot, but I suppose Margaret will help."

"Suppose she doesn't?" he retorted, laughing. "Suppose you have to begin at the head, and go steadily on to the tail. No; but seriously, there is an alternative. You might possibly like to let your friends see this trophy."

Millicent's face shone. "Oh, if they only could! They simply scoffed. But they're all in London."

"Well, why not? It's all right. I sent a fish there myself this week." He pulled out his watch. "Half-past four. There's just convenient time. I must go up to the house, anyhow, to change, and I can put the fish up for you, and send it off with a messenger to the post."

"Can you really?" said Millicent; and a glow of joy spread over her as she thought of the astonished faces in Bayswater, and the triumphant refutation of all cavillings. Decidedly, she felt kindly to this Mr. Norman. He really was good-looking, and he really was pleasant and friendly.

"That would be perfectly lovely! But isn't it giving you an awful lot of trouble?"

"Awful!" he said. "Would you like to make it up to me? Of course, if you want to go on fishing, you can just write down the address now, and I will copy it on to a label. But I don't believe fishing will be any use in this glare; and, anyhow, trout would be an anti-climax, wouldn't they?"

"I'm afraid they would. Oh dear, I shall never be contented again."

"That's true," he answered. "You will go out on the lough, and be happily amusing yourself, and then a salmon will jump somewhere near you, and you will be consumed with a divine discontent, and put up big flies and kill nothing. But, look here, can't I persuade you to come up to the house and address the label yourself, and let my cousins give you a cup of tea? And then, afterwards, we could drive you over to Margaret's."

Millicent was rather overwhelmed. Of course, such a thing was out of the question; but still she could not but be pleased by the offer.

"Thanks ever so much," she said; "but really, I had rather not. I will just make my way to where I left my bicycle. I can fish up to there on the way home."

"You really mean it?" he said imploringly.

" Really and truly. Only will you do one more thing? Tell me if I can avoid that awful wood there;" and she pointed to the long planting.

" Of course you can," he said, slightly cheered. " If you don't mind walking with me as far as the gate" — and he pointed across the field — " I can show you a lane that goes round it."

There was nothing for it but to consent, and, in truth, she had no will to refuse. She was as pleased with the world as anybody else who has just caught their first salmon, and added to that was the exhilaration of finding herself successfully surmounting all manner of complications. And the young man who had partly made the complications, and partly helped her over them, was a young man with a pleasant face, a pleasant voice, and a proper sense of his privileges. Millicent had not been an art student for five years without becoming accustomed to the homage of young men, and this young man's method of conveying it pleased her more than a little. He had kind eyes, she decided, in the moment of waiting while he recovered his rod from where it had been laid down when he came to her assistance.

He slung the fish by its gills on the gaff, and they set out in the soft sunshine across the broad meadow.

" And so you are at Margaret's," he said. " She's a very old friend of mine. But isn't it rather too unlike the sort of thing you are accustomed to?"

“ Margaret is a perfect dear,” she answered with enthusiasm, “ and it’s exactly what I hoped it would be — only much nicer.”

“ How on earth did you hear of it? ”

“ A cousin of mine told me about it. He had stayed there a couple of times.”

So there was a cousin, Frank Norman reflected, and he was conscious of a regret. But, after all, the hour was his — till he reached the gate — and he drew her on to discourse painting. Talk sprang up easily and gaily between them, as it does when behind the light words is the unspoken and perhaps the unconscious pleasure of two young people in each other’s presence.

CHAPTER V

THEY had come to the gate leading out of Strathmore, into the fringe of trees — an iron gate with a bolt to it, in theory, but for practical purposes secured by a large stone, which Frank Norman proceeded to remove.

" If you persist in pursuing your anti-climax," he said, " this track to the left will take you to a field, and you can keep along the plantation till you come to the river. But I tell you candidly, I never heard of anything more unreasonable. You don't understand Irish ways."

She made him a laughing little bow. " Irish people have been very nice, but one cannot learn all at once. Be patient with a mere Saxon. I will say good-bye here, and thank you ever so much."

" Very well," he said, " if you must, you must. But you haven't given me the address for your trophy yet. There — will you write it on that? " he said, producing the license which had been brandished in the face of John Gallagher.

Millicent wrote her mother's address.

"Isn't it necessary to put the sender's name?" suggested Frank, mendaciously, scrutinizing it. "I suppose I may add 'from Miss Carteret'?"

"If you like," said Millicent.

"'Westbrook Square,'" he read out reflectively. "I have dined in Westbrook Square. Must you really be going, Miss Carteret? May I call you a hansom?"

They both laughed.

"It *is* a long way off," said Millicent.

But he was still turning over the paper in his hands.

"'Mr. Frank Norman,'" he read out — "'Miss Carteret.' May I take it that this constitutes an introduction?"

"Oh, I suppose so," said Millicent. "At least, I shall know what to call you the next time you come to remonstrate with me for poaching."

And mentally she resolved that never again should any young man find her in a position from which it was so difficult to issue with perfect dignity. If ever she met this young man again, she would teach him a lesson.

"Good-bye — till then," she finished, holding out her hand. "I never was so obliged to any one in my life."

"It is good-bye to your fish," he said. "Think of it — your first salmon!"

"I know. Isn't he beautiful? Oh, I wish I could take him back to show to Margaret! I want spectators."

"You shall have one more, anyhow," said Frank Norman, laughing. "Here's my uncle."

Millicent started and blushed — blushed crimson, and for a second time she was furious with Frank. As it had been, she was triumphantly disengaging herself from quite a confusing situation; but now here with a vengeance was confusion worse confounded. Two minutes — one minute ago — she had been the self-possessed actor in quite a pretty little comedy — a fencer perfectly at home with the foil; now she was, and she knew it, something extremely like an embarrassed schoolgirl.

"Oh!"

That was the most she could bring herself to say; and the worst of it was, she knew that she had said too much.

"My uncle wouldn't hurt a fly," said Frank; "and he doesn't live in Bayswater."

Millicent was furious, and more than furious. It was intolerable. Positively for the third time this detestable young man was openly coming to her rescue. As for the figure coming leisurely down the cart-track that led straight to the gate, she had no eyes for it. "My uncle" was a colonel, a formal military man, who would either be stiff or condescending. She always hated colonels, she reflected to herself, but she had never hated them with a tenth part of this animosity. But as the enemy approached, and she was forced by mere convention to consider him, she was at once aware that no one could accuse this colonel of formality. There was unconstraint in his slow easy walk, in the loose hang of his clothes, but most of all in the gentle lines of his face. She was conscious that he was regarding her with curiosity; but it was very different from the usual English glance, that either blankly ignores a stranger's existence, or challenges his right to exist. It reassured her greatly to be looked at in this friendly way. And his voice, when he spoke, though he made no allusion to her presence, carried a sound — and perhaps also a laughing innuendo — of welcome.

"Well, Frank, you're in luck to-day, I see."

"It isn't my fish, Uncle Fred, I only came up in time to land him. You must congratulate Miss Carteret;" and he went through the formality of introduction.

"Miss Carteret is staying with Margaret Coyle," Frank went on, "and this is her first salmon. She wants to send it to her friends in London, and I said it could go with the bag from the house."

"Surely it can," said the colonel; "and I'm delighted that Miss Carteret should have so good an errand for the post to do."

"Oh, thank you, Colonel Lisle," said Millicent, nervously; "everybody is too kind. I feel so ashamed, for I've only just found out that I ought not to have been fishing in your meadow."

"And how did you find that out, my dear young lady? You don't want me to believe that Frank has been warning you off. If he did, it was only out of jealousy; and, indeed, I wouldn't wonder at it, for, look at you with that little toy rod coming home with a fine fish, and him empty-handed."

Millicent felt a glow of conscious pride that impelled her to be generous.

"Indeed, Colonel Lisle, it was Mr. Norman who caught the fish as much as I. He went through the river after it."

The colonel's eyes rested quizzically on Frank's sodden garments.

"I noticed you were a little wet, Frank," he said; "but I thought maybe you had just slipped in when you were trying to break the ice."

Millicent felt that she was being laughed at: that the pair of them were being laughed at. But, after all, it was not she whose clothes hung limp and muddy; and, after all, but for the episode, her first salmon would not be on its way to Westbrook Square; and the slow lines of laughter about the colonel's eyes set her own muscles copying them. What made it funnier still, was that Frank Norman did not share the merriment. He looked a little annoyed, and vaguely she had a sense that he was annoyed not on his account, but on hers. She began to feel more charitable as she compared their situations.

"I always told you that ash tree below the thorn-hole was a common nuisance, Uncle Fred," he asserted rather angrily, "Miss Carteret nearly lost her fish in it."

"Well, well, Frank. It's well for the poor little bush that she didn't, or it would have a short shrift, I suppose. Still, many's the salmon I saw killed in that hole, in spite of all the ash trees. But if Miss Carteret pronounces sentence —"

"I wouldn't for the world, Colonel Lisle. Besides," Millicent added sweetly, with the base nature of woman, joining the attack upon youth in distress, "I don't think the salmon would have gone there, only that Mr. Norman threw a stone at it."

The colonel heaved up his hands. "Well, well, Frank, some ice takes a terrible deal of breaking. First stone-throwing, and then in you go yourself."

Frank saw his opportunity. "But, Uncle Fred, Miss Carteret won't admit the ice is broken."

Millicent perceived the snare into which she had fallen; but, after all, decidedly Ireland was very unlike Bayswater.

"I don't think there is any ice in this country at all, Colonel Lisle," she said, "and I am quite glad that I trespassed, since I had the chance of making my apologies to you."

"Listen to that, Frank," said the colonel. "When will a pretty young lady say the like of that to you? It's a great thing to be old: it saves you trampling through rivers and cutting down ash trees, and I don't know what not. Well, now, Miss Carteret, you've confessed very honourably, and I'm a Justice of the Peace for this county. I'll not keep you waiting for your punishment. You shall be taken up to the house and delivered over to the people there are there, and detained at discretion, and Frank shall give them instructions to put you on the diet of the place."

The colonel's slow, soft voice came out of his large chest with such a curious inflection that all sorts of reserves and formalities seemed as if they never existed. It was like the south-west wind blowing, or the noise of a river running, with an undertone of deep gentle laughter.

"But, Colonel Lisle," Millicent pleaded, "if I am to be put into prison, won't you put me in yourself?"

The colonel looked at his watch. "Those girls will be wanting me to insult my dinner, if I go up with you," he said, "with their teas and cakes and things. It's a hard world. Very well, then, Miss Carteret, I'll be judge and executioner, and the whole of it. Hurry on, you, Frank, with that fish, and get it sweeled up in straw, and put some other clothes on you, the way you'll be a little decent to meet Miss Carteret, when she gets the length of the house. And I wonder to see you letting her carry her own basket. I suppose she won't be parted from the rod, now she's killed a salmon on it."

Millicent gave up her encumbrances at this exhortation, and Frank, laden with them, sped away to the house, leaving her to follow with his uncle.

CHAPTER VI

It is not a long way from Strathmore to Ballinderry House; but the colonel's walk was slow and easy as his speech, and before Millicent had reached the end of the wide lane between its lines of trees, and passed through the large untidy yards, about which it seemed to her there were buildings enough to quarter a regiment, she was talking to her companion of all manner of remote and unexpected things; now comparing notes over pictures in Dresden — and Millicent marvelled at the memory that was fresher for things seen half a century ago, than hers of two summers back; now opening up eagerly modern controversies.

"They're always talking now about this impressionism, and Frank here tells me it means painting just what a man sees. Well, now, Miss Carteret, I'll tell you: it's painting what a man sees when he doesn't know what he's looking at. A fellow sits down to paint a cow that wouldn't know a shorthorn from a galloway, and he makes a kind of a blotch. But these old Dutchmen painted what a man would see that knew enough to buy and sell in any market. Or look at their trees. Where's there one of them now can paint like Turner, so that you'd know the wind the tree grows under, and the kind of soil it's growing in?"

"Turner would have liked your trees, Colonel Lisle," said Millicent, who was half following the talk, and half drinking in the unfamiliar surroundings.

They were approaching the house now, a big, square-built mass of grey stone, with slated roof, strong and plain; but the lawn made more than enough of beauty. Trees everywhere; a belt of them along the river, where it ran on its downward way from the Strathmore bend; trees growing singly or in noble clumps of two or three in the rich pasture with lengthening shadows stretching over it; near the house a gigantic copper beech made a mass of contrasting colour.

The colonel shook his head. "If you'd seen the place before the big storm two years ago! but look there, and there, and there" — he pointed to great stumps levelled with the grass — "I could hardly bear to look out of the door for a long time. When a tree goes that you've known all your life, it's like a death; and, indeed, the trees are living creatures."

It was hard for Millicent to imagine how the grouping of all that timber could be bettered — all these trees set with long prevision, in their mingling beauties, to make a harmony, like flowers in a garden. Living creatures, surely; there was a caress and a salutation in the air; it was full of the breath of trees. And the people who owned them, who had planted them and loved them, from generation to generation, were part of the place, no less than the rooted growth. She had stayed in English country houses where folk came and went for seasons, but never seen or known a life like this, so perfectly centred in one atmosphere. The colonel, for all his interest in the outside world, his tales of German student ways and the rest, was nevertheless indigenous to the soil in his big house, as Margaret in her cottage.

And the house, when she entered, was to her eyes hardly less strange than Margaret's dwelling. A large well-proportioned hall was roughly furnished with a table or two, and an oak settle; dim family portraits hung on the wall. But the floor of plain deal boarding was uncarpeted, and flaws in the boarding were patched over with lead. A swing door leading from it was covered with mouldy green baize. Millicent thought in a flash of her mother, and almost laughed aloud. She thought of trim entrances in Bayswater, neatly provided with carpet of the most recent date, and furnished for dignity with a stuffed bird or two, because there should be such things in a hall. Here a huge pair of elk's branching antlers spread above the empty fireplace, gaunt, spacious, and suggestive. Frank's salmon rods stretched on pegs along part of one wall.

In the drawing-room, when the colonel opened the door for her, Millicent was conscious of the same sense of elbow room. And certainly it was not overcrowded by the two little old ladies who rose up to greet her with the same natural impulse to welcome that the newcomer felt wherever she turned. Two little small old ladies, quaint and dainty as Chelsea figures, old-fashioned and faded as the early Victorian furniture of their room.

All the way up from the river, a fear had lurked in Millicent's mind. The colonel was very friendly, Mr. Norman was very friendly, but would the ladies greet her with a stony disapprobation? At the sight of their faces the fear was forgotten. They had not particularly clever or characteristic faces, Millicent thought, but about the corners of their eyes were the same quiet lines of mirth that deepened and doubled around the colonel's. Only Millicent was a little puzzled. The colonel had spoken of "the girls."

He was introducing her now.

"Here's a young lady for you that has just been catching her first salmon."

"Frank came in and told us," they said. "But, Miss Carteret, you must be tired out with all that walking. Will you not take a glass of wine and a biscuit?"

Millicent protested that she was not in the least fatigued, and that tea was ample for her.

"What are you talking about, girls?" said the colonel. ("So these are the girls," thought Millicent.) "Don't you know that ladies nowadays don't get tired. It's only the men want looking after. Indeed, Miss Carteret, I don't know if I did right in bringing you here, for you'll be unsettling their minds and they'll want to be stravaging off over the Continent, or to the North Pole, or who knows where? They've taken to the bicycle already, and there'll soon be no holding them."

"Now, Uncle Fred," said the smallest of the two little ladies, "you needn't be giving us such a bad character to Miss Carteret. I'm sure she rides a bicycle herself."

"Indeed I do," said Millicent, and her eyes lit up with an inward laughter, as she thought of the terrible possibilities that might reside in this charming and dainty piece of early Victorian porcelain, who feared that the recital of her audacities might shock the stranger.

"Listen to that, now, Miss Carteret. What did I tell you? It'll be, 'Miss Carteret does this, and why wouldn't I do it?' and 'Miss Carteret does that, and why wouldn't I do it?' I wouldn't be a bit surprised to see Cassy there away out with

Frank's salmon-rod to-morrow morning, and Selina putting up my old easel and off with her to the painting, and the cook coming to me for orders for the dinner."

It was as good as a play, Millicent thought, to see the two little ladies ruffle their plumes like angry wrens against this laughing attack. Miss Selina's retort was practical.

"Martha would never be so left to herself as to come to you for that, Uncle Fred. She has more sense."

(Millicent inferred that Miss Selina did the housekeeping.)

But Miss Cassy was a bolder combatant.

"Well, and why not, I should like to know? I think Miss Carteret is quite right. I don't see why the men should have all the amusement and leave us to do the work."

"But, Miss Lisle, I did not come here for amusement," answered Millicent; "I came here to do work, only I don't begin to-day."

"It's all very well," the colonel struck in; "but you won't persuade anybody in this country that painting pictures is doing work. There was a fellow here by the name of Hayes last summer doing water-colours, back and forward; and one day he was doing one down there by Ballyhernan bridge, where the carry is — you would see the place when you were driving out to Margaret's."

"I saw it," said Millicent; "it was lovely."

"Well, maybe you noticed two big walls there by the wood. There was an old mason, Micky Doherty they called him, and a right bad mason he was, and when Hayes was painting down below at the bottom of the fall, Micky was mending a stile in one of the walls that was broken down with people working at the carry. Well, it wasn't long before Micky thought he would like a rest, and down he came to look over Hayes's shoulder. He watched there a good while, and then he asked Hayes, 'Do ye follow that regular?' And Hayes said he did. Then Micky watched another while, thinking hard. 'I suppose now, it would take as long to learn that as to learn a trade.' Hayes told him it was a trade. 'And do ye tell me now?' says Micky; but for all that Hayes said, you could see he thought that was plain nonsense, anyway. Then he watched another while before he asked the next question. 'Would ye be aiming to sell thon?' Hayes said he would. 'And would ye be looking much money for it?' Hayes said, 'Maybe ten pounds.' And when he said ten pounds, Micky lifted up his hands and said, 'Lord, help us!' and away with him back to the building. But Hayes said, whenever he looked at Micky the rest of the day, Micky was not doing a hand's turn, but sitting on the wall and meditating why he hadn't learnt how to make ten pounds by dabbling a paint brush."

Millicent laughed. "Well, Colonel Lisle, I won't ask them to believe anything as hard as that. But shall I be able to get them to believe that sitting to be painted is a proper kind of work? Do you know if Mr. Hayes had any trouble in getting models?"

"I don't think he tried; but why would he?"

"I don't know. But one of the boys at Margaret's seemed to think the people might not like it."

"Ah, that's all nonsense. Of course I've heard of it. But they're willing enough to do nothing for money, so far as I've found them, and that's all you want."

Millicent laughed again; but, as the colonel spoke, Frank Norman entered the room, and she felt a trace of her confusion return. It was a relief to hear the colonel attack him at once.

"Is that you, Frank? Are you decent again? Here's Miss Carteret afraid she won't be able to get models for all the gold in the Bank of England. Did you ever hear of people that wouldn't be paid to have their portraits painted, and painted by Miss Carteret. I'll engage now, Miss Carteret, if all fails, you'll be able to fall back on Frank."

"I'm afraid Mr. Norman hasn't quite the local colour," put in Millicent, hastily.

"Not even in Donegal homespun," said the young man as he took his tea — "not even in muddy dripping homespun. No, but Uncle Fred, I have heard of the notion. A man I know couldn't get sitters in Connemara by hook or by crook, except a few sophisticated gillies and such like; and they had been demoralized by English tourists to such an extent that they wanted prohibitive prices. But the others wouldn't sit, not even when he got the priest to speak to them."

"Well, now, do you hear that, Miss Carteret? And these same fellows most likely will be crying out about a famine the next time they don't want to pay their rent."

"It's too bad of you, Uncle Fred," said Miss Cassy. "Why must you be giving the people a bad name? Don't mind him, Miss Carteret. I can remember the time when he was working day and night to keep the people fed up in the mountains near here."

"That doesn't surprise me very much, Miss Lisle," said Millicent. "But isn't it a queer superstition that keeps poor people from taking money when it is offered them for a service."

"I believe, myself," said Frank, "it's nothing but the fear of ridicule. Irish people have a terror of being laughed at; and if they sat they would be afraid the others would 'have a name out on them,' as they say; and so they would, most likely. But if you want to know about superstitions, you ought to see Conroy. Is he here still, Cousin Cassy?"

"Who is Mr. Conroy?" asked Millicent.

"He's a bee-expert, and a mystic, and a great friend of mine."

"Of course he is," said the colonel. "Frank is hand in glove with all the Nationalist blackguards in the county, Miss Carteret. Not that I say a word against Conroy; he's a decent fellow, and very honest for a Papish."

Millicent looked blankly at the colonel. "Miss Carteret is shocked at your bigotry, Uncle Fred," said Frank. "You're quite right, Miss Carteret; it's shameful."

"I'm not shocked — I'm only puzzled. What has a person's religion to do with honesty? And what is a bee-expert? And why is he a mystic?"

"Really, Miss Carteret," said Frank, getting up; "I think you had better come and find out answers to all these questions. Conroy is paid to know about bees, and he knows a lot of queer things about them; and he is in the garden at this moment, most likely, with his hands in the middle of a swarm."

"And a bigger swarm in his bonnet," said the colonel. "But he understands bees. You should make Frank take you out to see him, Miss Carteret."

"And Frank," said Miss Selina; "if you go through the far strawberry-bed, you might find a few yet for Miss Carteret."

"Strawberries in August," said Millicent. "Why, I haven't seen a strawberry for months!"

"Ah, Miss Carteret," said the colonel; "that's the advantage of travel. I knew a man once who was never without strawberries. He used to work up from the Channel Islands in the early spring, and coming by way of Scotland he would be here about the middle of July; and he fairly lived on strawberries; but the best of them all, he said, were the ones he got in Iceland, before he turned back south for the little wild strawberries that you eat with claret and sugar for a salad in the vintage time."

"Yes, Miss Carteret," said Frank, "and the end of him was that he accompanied one of the Arctic expeditions, and died of disappointment because there were no strawberries at the North Pole."

"Is that the way you treat your elders, Miss Carteret? I give you my word, I'm the most credible man in this country, and I can tell you this: any little story I ever told is milk-and-water compared to the lies that fellow Conroy will tell you, and believe them himself, mind you, and that's worse."

"Come along, Miss Carteret," said Frank; "my cousin is gone for a basket, and she'll be after us; but I tell you in confidence the strawberries are a delusion. You must fall back on plums."

CHAPTER VII

As they came out of the house and walked down the drive Millicent was silent, and, it seemed to Frank, her face changed curiously as it wore the look of rather puzzled thought. It was the kind of face that might hold many surprises in reserve, he thought. Silence that pursued its own ideas, regardless of the companion, was a mark of good comradeship anyhow; and he waited for her to speak.

"Isn't it queer — isn't it all queer?" she broke out in a moment. Then she checked herself. "You don't mind my saying it."

"Of course I don't. I knew how it would strike you, I say it to myself ten times a day. But you don't dislike it, I hope?"

"Dislike it!" she answered energetically. "Your uncle is the most perfectly delightful person I ever met, and your cousins are simply sweet. But it is queer — I mean — they're your people, of course, but still you don't belong here."

"I wonder," he said meditatively.

"Oh no, you don't," she retorted. "You're just — well, like the other people one meets. But you must be able to explain. Why do they talk like that? Your uncle was really quite serious when he said that people who went to one kind of church were more honest than people who went to another."

"Protestant nature isn't Catholic nature," he answered, "at least, not in Ireland."

She looked at him in astonishment. "Do you believe that too? Why, people are what they are, surely — not what they believe."

"That's just it. Protestants are the people who rule in Ireland, Catholics are the people who are ruled. That makes a lot of difference in a couple of centuries. You don't know yet how far away from London you are."

"How do you mean? Of course it's old-fashioned in a way. But your uncle, now, he seems to me so charming, and so perfectly abreast of things, and so tolerant; and yet, in a way, he talks as if he was more intolerant than the most ignorant person I ever met."

He laughed. "Shall I expound? It's at your peril."

"Yes, yes, I want to know."

"The colonel is the most perfectly just and humane man to every individual that he comes across. He knows an honest man, and he knows a rogue, no matter about their religion. But, in the abstract, he's perfectly unjust and hardly humane. All the things that have been done in this country, which you would think the most elementary justice, seem to him black injustice and robbery. They upset the order that he was bred in. He has been used to governing, and the only justification for that was that other people who had no say in governing were not fit to be trusted. And so, theoretically, he distrusts them. He is convinced that all Catholics and all Nationalists would rob him of his last penny if they had the power, although he knows in private life that they are decent people like any one else. He belongs to the feudal times, or something very like them."

"I didn't know there were people like that," said Millicent. "But it must be frightfully hard to feel things crumbling all about you. Still, I don't understand. I thought all Irish people were enthusiastic about Ireland, but he says hard things about the Irish."

"If you go and tell the colonel that the Irish are a mean, servile, ignorant race, perfectly unfit for the institutions that exist in a civilized country like England — well, of course, he will be civil to you, as he would be to anybody, but he wouldn't like it."

"But who says anything of the kind?" Millicent broke in indignantly.

"Well, just that assumption underlies everything the colonel says to you about Ireland in the abstract. He can't help being himself, fortunately; but he can't help having the opinions of his class."

He pulled up short. She was looking at him now with a perceptible shade of mockery in her glance.

"Well?" he asked, in reply to it.

"Oh, nothing. You're very wise. But, hasn't Colonel Lisle lived here a good deal more than you?"

Frank answered, with a touch of heat, "He has. And he has lived out his life in an order of things that is dead and done with. England has sent us over another order, ready-made. Well, if we are to work under it at all, we must accept the supposition it rests on."

"But where is your new order?" she asked. "What is it?"

"You're going to see it," he said, as they came to the long wall in among the trees, and he opened the door leading in. "Conroy stands for the new order."

The door opened on such a garden as Millicent had never seen. Fir trees, quarter of a mile off, marked what must be the end of it, but she could see no limit. The wall ran from her to left and right, and along the wall was a deep border of flowers; everywhere trees backed the wall, and in the border tall white lilies stood up in rows, and phloxes and Canterbury bells. In the middle was an endless fruit garden — orchard, raspberry beds, kitchen beds, all in admired confusion; innumerable currant and gooseberry bushes; the eye wandered over a fine disorder.

"What an immense place," said Millicent; "and oh! what lilies. But where is the new order?"

"Among the beehives," said Frank, turning to the right, "and beyond the strawberries."

"Tell me about him, quick."

"Conroy is a Gaelic-speaking peasant out of the west of the country. He was a school-master, with a passion for bee-keeping, and he used to take prizes. When they were looking for instructors to develop cottage industries, he applied to be taken on, and now he spends his time going about encouraging people to start bees, and telling them how to manage them. One of the poorest baronies here is paying its rents almost entirely with honey."

"Honey and wax — sweetness and light," she quoted. "The new order comes with good things. But surely Colonel Lisle would have no objection to people who make honey and pay rent."

Frank laughed. "Conroy is employed by a County Council, and County Councils are anathema. But he brings more sweetness and light than you think for. That is why I wanted you to meet him. He's a mystic, a seer of visions; he sees the gods walking in their liss."

"Oh, what is a liss? and what sort of gods?"

"You must ask him," he said. "Here he is."

Along the south face of the wall was a long row of yellow straw-covered beehives, golden now in the sloping sun. And there stood a tall young man stooping over a new hive of the modern pattern, a square black box set on four legs.

Frank hailed him from far off. "Good evening, Mr. Conroy. Is it safe to come near you?"

Mr. Conroy turned towards them with a noticeable slowness and deliberation of movement.

"You had better not, sir. They are a bit unsettled yet, and if a person was not quite easy with them, they might hurt him."

"What is it you're doing with the hives?" Frank called to him.

Conroy came towards them, picking his way through the strawberry beds, and, as he came, Millicent saw a close-shaven face, singularly calm and expressionless.

"There were three times too many hives," he said, "and not one of them strong enough to do the work. They have got to be put into new skeps."

"Have you ever seen bees working, Miss Carteret?" Frank asked, turning to Millicent. "It's curious. This is Miss Carteret, Mr. Conroy, an English lady who is staying over here."

"But, Mr. Conroy," said Millicent, "why must you do away with all those beautiful old hives?

They are much nicer to look at than that black box."

"I often hear English ladies and gentlemen saying the same about the houses," he answered. "They tell me there's nothing so picturesque as a cabin when the thatch has gone a bit green, and the walls are out of the plumb. Sanitary inspectors tell you another story."

"That's quite true," Millicent answered. "That new hive of yours is just like the little ugly cottages along the road. I liked the thatched ones much better. But do beehives need sanitary inspectors?"

"Certainly, miss. Indeed, the chief fault in their hives is just the bad ventilation. The creatures do their best to fan air in, but they aren't strong enough."

"Come, now," said Frank, laughing, "isn't that rather steep?"

"It's a well-known fact, sir. If you were to come here any damp warm day, you would always see two or three of them there in the door of the hive, fanning away with their wings. They do it in any hive, but in a bad one the air can't get through."

"What a lovely notion," said Millicent. "But I don't quite believe —"

"The most of my time goes in telling people things they don't believe," Conroy answered gravely.

"But do you make them believe?"

"Some of them are too wise to learn," he said, with a grave smile.

"That's a gibe at me, Miss Carteret," said Frank.

"Why?"

"Because I never can quite admit that you can learn to see what is invisible."

"I'm sure you're not putting that fairly. Is he, Mr. Conroy? I'm never too wise to learn, tell me."

"You're quite right, Miss Carteret. Mr. Norman has no will to see. He could never learn, because he would not let himself see."

"But what is it Mr. Norman won't let himself see?"

"No, Miss Carteret," Frank struck in, "I won't have my limitations shown off. But there was a question you wanted an answer to. Mr. Conroy can tell you, if anybody can, why the people don't like having their portraits painted."

"Will you, Mr. Conroy?" she asked.

The grey face relaxed a little.

"I could tell you, miss; but they don't know themselves. It's only part of the tradition that they keep out of the old knowledge. Here and there you would find an old man that would tell you that he would not like the likeness of himself to go out of his own keeping."

"And why in the world not?"

"Because some harm might happen to it."

"And would that do him any harm?"

"He thinks it would, miss."

"What an extraordinary superstition!"

"Asking your pardon, Miss Carteret, I wouldn't be sure that you haven't the very same belief. Did you ever hear that it was unlucky to break a looking-glass?"

"Of course I did," said Millicent. "I broke one once, and I was miserable for ever so long whenever I remembered it."

"I know," said Frank, "you cling to your superstitions because they are picturesque, just as people in dining clubs keep up all sorts of absurd ceremonies. On your honour, now, do you believe a word of it? It didn't really make you uncomfortable!"

"Yes, it did. I'm certain it did. And it would be horrid not to have superstitions as well as the country people. I hate people who are so dreadfully rational."

"There's a difference, Miss Carteret," said Conroy, gravely. "Theirs are not superstitions; they are beliefs."

"But, Mr. Conroy, you say yourself they can't give any reason."

"They believe what their fathers believed, and they believe that their fathers knew a reason."

"I don't think that's a reason at all," said Millicent. "People who go on believing just what their fathers believed might as well be dead. Surely we've got to find out things for ourselves."

"There you have it, Mr. Conroy," said Frank; "that's the orthodox creed of the unorthodox nowadays. And if you can give Miss Carteret a reason for believing what she plays at believing, she'll be grateful to you for ever."

"That isn't fair," retorted Millicent. "I don't play at believing. One has a vague kind of belief. It's in your bones, I suppose. But every one believes in luck, and in things that are lucky or unlucky."

Conroy smiled. "The truth is, Miss Carteret," he said, "you're believing just the same thing as the country people about the pictures. What is counted unlucky isn't the injury to the glass, but the hurting of the image that has been in the glass. Only people have forgotten the reason, since they forgot the old knowledge."

"I don't understand," said Millicent. "What old knowledge?"

Conroy hesitated for a little, and looked at her. She was plainly in earnest with her desire to know, and her face conquered the shyness or constraint that came of Frank's hostile attitude.

"You see, miss, there's no doubt that the ancients believed that a man's reflection in the water, or in a glass, was a part of him — just like his hair or his nails; and you could work on him by working on them."

" Why," said Frank, " that's the belief of negroes; they think you can hurt a man by wounding his shadow. Was the old knowledge the wisdom of the cannibal black? "

Conroy winced a little under the contemptuous tone, and Millicent saw it.

" I don't think that's an argument! " she put in hotly. " Negroes are supposed to do extraordinary things by witchcraft."

" There's no doubt," said Conroy, gravely, " that the black man knows things that the wisest lawyer in Ireland has no glimpse of. But I'm only telling Miss Carteret what this belief about the bad luck of broken glass really is, and not what I hold for the truth in it."

" But that's just what I want to know," said Millicent. " Will you tell me? "

Conroy hesitated for a moment. Then he spoke.

" Can you tell me what it is makes the reflection on the glass, Miss Carteret? — or you, Mr. Norman? "

" No, I can't," said Frank; " but of course any man of science can."

" Can he, then? He can tell you just this: that water reflects — he can describe the laws that govern reflection. He can tell you that there is something transmitted through the ether; but he can't tell you what is transmitted."

"Well," said Frank, "and what is it you believe?"

"I believe that through free air everything is giving out something of itself; and that what strikes the mirror is a part of you, like your breath, and that it leaves something of you on the mirror, — like the bloom of a flower that you press against your hand."

"That seems to me rather a beautiful idea," said Millicent; "but surely it's fantastic."

"The greater part of mankind believe it. Why else do the Easterns shut up their women, and veil them?"

"But you don't mean to tell me that Donegal has the notions of the Turks? That would be news to most of us," retorted Frank, laughing. "And anyway, it isn't maiden modesty that would make an ugly old salmon poacher run like a hare from a camera, the way I've seen one do in Connemara."

"He doesn't know more than that it is unlucky," Conroy answered. "But the notion at the back of that is that if an ill-willy person wants to do harm on you he has only to get something of yours — and a picture of the man is best."

"To work spells with?" asked Millicent.

"That's the notion, miss."

"But, truthfully now, Mr. Conroy, do you believe that by saying charms over an image, or roasting it by a slow fire, or sticking pins in its heart, one person can hurt another?"

"It's not as simple as you think, Miss Carteret.

But the powers of the air have powers on the lives of men, and the powers of the air can be brought under man's science."

Frank listened with growing impatience. "It seems to me," he broke in, "that your modern mysticism aspires to the culture of the African savage."

"Well, Mr. Norman," Conroy answered, with a touch of asperity, "if you asked me whether was wiser, the man who believed that that body, shadow, and reflection were all part of one soul, or the man who believes that soul begins and ends with this body, I would say at least that the former was the less ignorant."

Millicent listened to the dispute with growing resentment. The generous temper of her mind favoured the singular rather than the normal; and constructive theories — even if they were such stuff as dreams are made of — awakened in her sympathies that ranged her promptly on their side as against the easy way of light scepticism. And, with a true woman's instinct, she took the part of the more sensitive nature.

"I will tell you one thing, Mr. Conroy," she said; "when you are in earnest over a thing, and have thought of it a great deal, you should never argue about it with a person who hasn't thought of it at all."

Frank winced a little; then he laughed. "I'll tell you one thing, Mr. Conroy. You should never gaff a salmon for Miss Carteret, or she will turn and rend you whenever she gets a chance."

Millicent reddened again a little. Frank's unlucky retort recalled to her the fact, which in her animation she had forgotten, that their acquaintance was scarcely three hours old. She had been treating him on a footing of established friendship.

"Indeed, Mr. Conroy; I was very grateful to Mr. Norman before; but I am more grateful to him for having brought me here. I never heard so many interesting things before in my life. I wish I could stay and hear more; but I must be going."

"Oh, nonsense," said Frank; "we haven't found you a strawberry yet, or a solitary plum. I couldn't face my cousins, if you went empty-handed."

"I'm afraid you must," she said. "Margaret Coyle will be wondering what on earth has happened to me."

"Are you the lady that was coming to Margaret's?" asked Conroy.

"Oh dear," said Millicent. "I have never found my movements known like this before. I might have been chronicled in the *Morning Post.*"

"Margaret was greatly set up about it, I can tell you, miss," said Conroy, "to have English ladies coming to stay with her. She was telling me about it the other day."

"Were you trying to make Margaret go in for bees?" asked Frank.

"I was, indeed. And I had her half persuaded; but she wouldn't decide."

"Oh, but, Mr. Conroy," said Millicent, "do let me help you. I'm sure I could persuade Margaret. Won't you come over and talk to her when I'm there? And I'll back you up."

"Indeed, then, Miss Carteret, I'll be glad to do it."

"You ought to bring over some of those drawings you showed me," said Frank; "they would have a double interest for Miss Carteret, as she's an artist."

Conroy's grey face took a little flush. "I'd be ashamed to take up Miss Carteret's time with them."

"But do bring them, Mr. Conroy. What sort of work have you been doing? Have you had any training? And what do you mean by a double interest?"

"Well, I showed them to Mr. Norman because we were talking about things that I see, and that he doesn't believe I see."

"I believe you think you see them," said Frank; "but in the sense that I see you now, I don't believe there is anything to see."

"Do you see ghosts, Mr. Conroy? I wish I could see ghosts; but I'm afraid Irish ghosts wouldn't show themselves to a mere Saxon."

"I'm not sure of that, miss," said Conroy, looking at her intently. "You would see more than most."

"But I've never seen a ghost, and I've slept in heaps of haunted houses. I don't believe the people who want to see them ever do see them."

"The people I have made drawings of are not ghosts, Miss Carteret, at least, I believe not — that is, I don't think they were ever in flesh and blood."

"I'm sure they weren't," said Frank; "they were like Pallas Athena, brain-begotten. They lived and moved and had their being in the imagination of Owen Conroy."

"Others than I saw them many times, and knew them from my pictures."

Frank only shrugged his shoulders, and his interruption made Millicent impatient.

"You were quite right, Mr. Conroy," she said; "Mr. Norman is too wise to learn. Come and show your drawings to an ignorant person."

"That would not be the way of it, Miss Carteret; but I will bring them, surely."

"Don't forget," she said, shaking hands. "Margaret will always know where to find me. Now, Mr. Norman, I must really go back, and say good-bye."

The great beech trees leaned out heavy boughs over the sun-gilded wall on their left; to their right was the tangle of the fruit-garden, and Millicent walked like a creature in a dream. There was that stillness and warmth of the air that only is found in a walled garden.

"Well," said Frank, with a touch of constraint in his tone, "what do you think of that?"

Millicent started a little. "Oh, I forgot. Of course Colonel Lisle has never talked to Mr. Conroy. Besides, they are so different. I dare say Mr. Conroy wouldn't talk like that to him. But why does he call me 'miss'? He wouldn't if I met him in London."

"Do you want to transplant him?" said Frank.

"No, no," said Millicent, earnestly, "he might stop being a real person then, like heaps of the other geniuses. But he is a genius, isn't he?"

"Yes," said Frank, "I think so."

"Well, I won't let him call me 'miss' any more," said Millicent, reflectively.

"Have you found a vocation already among the savages?"

Millicent thought to herself that she had never known a young man with an equal talent for saying the thing that annoyed her.

"I don't remember that I said anything about savages," she retorted angrily — angry with Frank, more angry with herself for being angry.

Frank was confused. "No," he said, "of course I wasn't serious. It was only a stupid way of putting things."

Millicent was unrelenting. "You know, people don't like to have things attributed to them that they don't mean. I don't want to condescend to

Mr. Conroy. If anybody ought to condescend, it isn't you or I. And I don't believe he would have called me 'miss,' only that you were there, and you bring silly class notions along with you. If he calls you 'sir,' of course he would call me 'miss.'"

Frank was nettled. "Be a little fair. You don't suppose I want him to. One tries to avoid friction as much as possible. He couldn't be natural and call me Norman; it's against all his bringing up. And so I call him Mr. Conroy. But you'll allow he and I talk freely."

Millicent smiled sweetly. Her unchristian feelings disappeared when her desire to strike had been gratified.

"Well, I thought you were rather intolerable; but I'm sure you would have been just as unbearable to — to me, for instance, if I'd been saying the same things."

"Oh, so long as you admit that," said Frank, evidently relieved by her change of tone. "But I don't want to be unbearable to anybody; I won't talk about those things again. Look here" — they were just coming to the gate — "let me get you some flowers before you go."

Millicent relented altogether. "No," she said, "I couldn't let you, really. But you haven't been unbearable; you've been very nice. I've never had such a good day in all my life; and if it hadn't been for you I shouldn't have caught a salmon; and I shouldn't have met your uncle; and I shouldn't have heard about Mr. Conroy's visions. Oh, I simply can't bear to think of how different it would have been. Just fancy if I'd lost that salmon!"

"Well, but," he said, "perhaps I could help you to catch another. Is there any reason why I shouldn't come and see you at Lough Drummond?"

She shook her head. "I'm afraid there is."

"But Conroy is coming."

She laughed at him with her most provoking air. "But Mr. Conroy isn't in my class, you know. He calls me 'miss,' and I am going to civilize him."

"Oh, you're too bad," he said. "Well, if that's all, may I come and row your boat, miss?"

She shook her head again. "I've engaged Hughie already; I couldn't disappoint him."

Suddenly, from behind a great hedge of sweet-peas on the further side of the gate, a tiny, black-clad figure appeared, with a basket on her arm.

"Is that you, Frank?" said Miss Selina. "I saw you and Miss Carteret in such conversation with Conroy that I thought there would be no getting you away; so I just went and cut some flowers and things for Miss Carteret myself," she said, turning to Millicent.

"Oh, Miss Lisle," said Millicent, "it's simply wicked of you. You've been robbing yourself right and left."

"Indeed, then, what would be the pleasure of having a garden if you couldn't give away a few flowers and things. But it's a bad time for fruit, Miss Carteret, so you must make excuses. I was only able to find you the one peach, and the best plums aren't ripe yet."

"I suppose there's no use in saying anything," Millicent answered. "But, Miss Lisle, if you treat strangers like this, what do you do for your friends?"

"We aren't wanting to make a stranger of you," said the little lady, with her soft smile, "unless you insist on it. Here, take that, Frank," she said, handing the basket to him; "you can strap it on to the front of Miss Carteret's bicycle, and you may bring it back to me the next time you're at the lough."

A gleam shot into Frank's eyes; but, warned by previous experience, he avoided looking at Millicent.

"Certainly, Cousin Selina. I'm bound to be there before long. The river's running down fast, and the lough's just coming into order."

"I was just thinking that would be the way of it," Miss Selina answered; and it seemed to Millicent that there was the faintest possible inflection of laughter in her voice, the least ripple of a laugh about her eyes. But, after all, if things were as natural as that, why should she protest?

So she shook hands with Miss Selina, asking leave to come again, and being told in the sternest way that if she failed to do so, everybody would be offended past reconciliation; and she walked with Frank up the long gravelled path to the house among the great trees and on to the mown lawn, fenced in among the green and russet of the pasture; collected her rod and basket, and was escorted down the avenue which led out on to the road a few hundred yards from the cottage, where she regained her bicycle. Frank strapped her rod on for her, and adjusted the basket in front. There was no more said of another meeting till just as she was starting, when he asked: —

"Then I may come for the basket?"

"Oh yes." Then she added, as she shook hands, with another flash of provoking laughter, "I'm sure Margaret will always be glad to give it you."

Frank watched her figure as she crossed the bridge swiftly, and went flickering down the road beyond it till the curve round a corner of hill hid her from sight. Then he lit a pipe and strolled homeward, pondering on many things: all the things that they had said to each other, and many others which it seemed to him he had stupidly forgotten, and which he was wonderfully impatient to say.

But Millicent was already far across the long level sweep through the bog-land; now she was sighting the lough, still and grey in the touch of twilight — for even the long northern day had ended; and now she was speeding round the last corner between the big willow trees and ashes that grew by the road; and now she turned into the little path with its clipped hedgerows, and Toby and Fly were dashing out with bark upon bark of furious welcome. And there was Margaret, short and broad and genial, appearing at the door as Millicent dismounted, flushed with triumph.

"Well, now, miss, is that you? I was near sending the boys out to look for you; I didn't know but you might be drownded, and you with only that wee lock of sandwiches in your basket."

Millicent was breathless in her reply. "Oh, Margaret, I've had such a day, such a lovely day. And I've caught a salmon!"

"You've caught a salmon, miss? Well, now, if that doesn't beat all? Hughie! John! Where are you? Miss Carteret has caught a salmon!"

At the sight of the astonished and half-incredulous faces Millicent glowed; but she felt a pang of regret.

"Oh, I wish I had it here to show you. But it's gone off to London. Mr. Norman did it all for me — you know Mr. Norman?"

"Do I know Mr. Norman, is it?" said Margaret. "Sure, I knew him since he was that high; and a nice gentleman he is. And did he send it off for you?"

"He did indeed, Margaret. And he gaffed it. And they were all so kind."

"Well, now," said Margaret: and "Dear oh!" said Hughie: "Where did you catch it, miss?" said John.

"Ah, get out of that now, John. Will ye let Miss Carteret come in? She must be fair destroyed with fatigue, and her after walking all day. Come in, now, miss, and just sit down here by the fire till I wet you some tea. And what will you have for your dinner?"

"Mightn't I have some of these trout?" said Millicent, displaying her basket. There were more exclamations of admiration and delight. Then she sat by the fire and recounted her experiences, while Margaret's face shone with delight as she bustled back and forwards with "Dear oh!" and "To think of that, now!" many times repeated.

As they sat by the peat fire, after Millicent had finished her dinner, Millicent talked to them about Colonel Lisle and the Miss Lisles and the big old house and the garden; and they talked to her about "Mr. Frank." But she said nothing to Margaret about Owen Conroy, for she felt instinctively that Margaret would not understand.

CHAPTER VIII

FRANK was awake early next morning, and no sooner had he got to his window than he spoke unbecomingly of the beautiful day. For the morning had set in irretrievably bright; not with that glistening brilliance that in Donegal means rain before lunch, but with a calm veiled brightness that will grow steadily to a noonday splendour. And of wind there was not so much as could lift one leaf on the great beech trees, or even shake the tall poplar down by the river. No man that had ever thrown a line could interpret that into a fishing day; and, as for the lake, the thing was absurd. As it was, he had been chaffed enough by the colonel and the little ladies; but if he went to Lough Drummond on a day like this, existence would cease to be possible.

But Millicent had no quarrel with the sunshine. The noise of the fowls outside her window that woke her was pleasant, and the morning air was sweet when she stepped out into it, and Margaret's greeting was pleasant, and the breakfast had an air of adventure, for did she not breakfast on her own trout? But sweetest of all was the sense of independence, the delight and expectation of days all her own. Since there was to be no talk of fishing — and secretly she acknowledged that a stiffness in the arms and shoulders made Hughie's lamentations seem unnecessary — she would see about a sketch; but first of all her fancy was to stand about the door and watch Margaret's bustling labours.

"Indeed, then, miss, I think shame of me to be going about this way before you and not a shoe on me. But I'm terrible troubled with my feet; they swell on me till I can't thole a haporth on them, and at nights they do be that bad sometimes that I'd never stretch side the whole night. You never be troubled that way, I suppose, miss?"

"Oh, no, Margaret!" Then Millicent laughed. "My feet never bother me, except when I've been wearing shoes a size too small out of vanity."

"Vanity, miss! I wouldn't even the like of that to you; no, indeed, now. Sure you have a good right to be proud of them wee feet of yours."

"They aren't wee at all," said Millicent; "they're just ordinary."

"Oh then, they're the beautiful feet, miss; and the lovely hands you have, too. And them wee shoes of yours with the buckles on them — I couldn't be tired looking at them."

Margaret bustled into the house as she spoke, and left Millicent wondering what article of her apparel could be appropriately bestowed on this daughter of Eve. And the more she looked at Margaret, as she came bustling out again with a bucket supported on her strong bare arm, the more difficult it appeared.

" You must let me trim a hat for you before I go, Margaret."

Margaret put down her bucket.

" It's too kind of you, then, miss. But the like of that never goes on my head. Sure what would I be doing with a hat? Sorrow a foot would I be stirring out of this but just to Mass on a Sunday, and it's always the shawl I wear on my head the way the whole of us did in the old times. But them young girls now, you wouldn't know the half of them when you'd see them going into Rathdrum, and them with their grand feathers, and ribbons, and jackets, and what not all."

" Well, Margaret, you're far wiser than they are. There's nothing as nice as a shawl, and I think I'll get one myself, and take to wearing it the way I see the girls here do in the fields. Wouldn't it look rather sweet? "

" Troth, then, it's the pretty lass you'd make in it. But you'd need to take to the bare feet, too, miss, and I doubt you'd hardly stand the travelling. But sure there could be nothing nicer than that wee straw hat you have on you this minute. And isn't that the lovely blouse. Do they be terrible dear in London, miss?"

And Millicent found herself gradually immersed in a description of the latest fashions, while Margaret punctuated the discourse with such questions and exclamations of "Dear oh!" and "Do you tell me that?" all the while running in and out on some new errand, or summoning the fowls about her with her "Tchuck, tchuck, tchuckie."

By-and-by, Millicent tore herself away from this engrossing debate, crossed the road, and wandered down towards the lake. Just where the ground sloped very slightly from the roadway were some meadows, with the hay up in small cocks; beyond them, pasture fields thick with rushes, evidently land that was flooded many times a year. She followed a rough cart-track and came to a gate, which, like most gates of the country, did not open; tracks on the fence showed the way round, not through or over. Across the grass land, where two or three young calves grazed, she made her way to the river, at this point a silent smooth deep stream flowing in a deep-cut channel through the bog-land. There were the boats, as she expected, but her notions of sculling on her own account vanished when she saw the heavy black structures, so unlike the skiffs of her days on the Thames. She followed down the river bank looking at the yellow water-lilies afloat on the smooth stream. In front of her was the immense belt of reeds bordering the lake; nearer, just on the river bank, a little thicket of scrub willows; and here, too, was another hayfield, stretching towards the reeds. Far as she could, she wandered till the meadow ended in a reed bed; and at her feet a strange unfamiliar bird with swift twisting flight, and a preposterous beak, rose with an eerie screech. Then she stopped and looked about her.

The lake was in the middle of a ring of hills; south of it was only a wooded shoulder rising some four hundred feet, and on the face of its lower slope stood a large pleasant-looking house. East, where she looked across the lake's full length, the eye stretched out towards a succession of more distant ridges, jagged and irregular; but the north shore of the lake was the base of a mountain that rose gradually at first, but then steeply to a noble crest. And as she turned westward, she saw the long valley of the river running from her, flanked on each side by mountains that rose, sombre even in the sunlight, with all manner of fantastic outlines; and furthest away of all, there projected over the shoulder of the others one formidable peak.

Even in the sunlight it was sombre; a grey country; grey rock everywhere cropping up, and everywhere the brown of peat, the purplish brown of heather. Everywhere, save actually on the mountains, it was chequered over with fences and stone walls; everywhere dotted thick with slated roofs or grey thatch; but open, but free, wind-swept and spacious, with a sense of leisure in the soft air. Millicent propped her back against one of the little hand-cocks, and rested, gazing up the valley in dreamy contemplation. It was all too new, too strange, for any thought of paint brushes; her eye felt the need to attune itself to these solemn harmonies of colour, so different from the rich crowded English landscape, with its cushioned hills, its poppy-mingled corn.

As she leant there, dreaming, with wide eyes that saw and felt rather the colour of things in masses than any definite shape, people mingled themselves in her dream. Grey hills, grey rock, grey water; even the sunlit hayfield grey through the green; why did they call this green Ireland? Conroy's face came before her, grey too, though tanned by many winds. Grey, lonely, melancholy, even when a smile lighted it; was that the true face of the Gael? Mr. Norman said that, of the men and women she had met, he was nearest the spirit of Ireland. He spoke English — it was true what Mr. Norman said — like a person speaking a foreign language that had been laboriously acquired; he talked like a page out of a book. The colonel — he was Irish in a different way — more like the Irish she had read of. And that, Frank Norman said, was another stock, the stronger, better organized, more prudent race, but moulded and mitigated through long generations of the same soft airs. Yes, and the curious passion for his trees, as if part of his life flowed in their sap; that instinctive clinging to the land — that was Irish — in a sense the word had never before carried to her understanding. And Frank Norman himself — he stood outside in a way, he looked at them more or less as she might look; but still, when he talked of the people of the country, he talked as a man might of some one he was in love with. He had been so pleased that she had liked the colonel, so glad the garden was in beauty with its lilies and Canterbury bells for her to see, so anxious that she should not judge Donegal just by this bog about Lough Drummond, so eager to show her the sea and the cliffs. And surely it was Irish to put yourself out like that for a stranger; for, after all, of course men made a fuss about a girl; but still, he really had been kind. It was very odd how you got to know all these people, and felt as if they had always been friends. There were the little ladies at Ballinderry, and there was Margaret; it was so different, and still it was so like. She was sure the little ladies would be just as much interested in the fashions. Had not Margaret been funny? And she fell to making up the story of Margaret and her views on millinery, that she might tell it to Frank Norman when he came over for the basket.

Suddenly she heard steps rounding the little willow thicket, and there was Hughie.

" Margaret sent me down to look for you, Miss Carteret. She bid me tell you Mr. Conroy was here, asking did you want to see him? "

Millicent had already jumped to her feet, and was shaking the hay from her skirt. As she accompanied Hughie back to the cottage, she explained how she had met Conroy, and tried to elicit Hughie's opinion of him. But beyond the general impression that he was " said to have great learning," and was " a wonderful one for the Irish," she got at little. But she did arrive at the fact that Hughie understood and approved of bees.

She found Conroy standing outside the door, as before, in bicycling clothes, talking to Margaret.

" I hope you have brought the sketches," she said, as she shook hands with him.

" I have so, Miss Carteret. But you said you would help me to talk to Miss Coyle. I'm telling her that there's no one in the country would do better with bees, if she'd only start them."

" Indeed, I'm sure you're right, Mr. Conroy. If a person can make butter like Margaret, of course they would have the loveliest honey too."

" Now, Miss Carteret," Margaret protested, " it's trying to put notions in my head, you are. Sure, what would I know about bees, the craythurs. I'd be feared of my life to go near them. And the fowls has me destroyed already with running this way and that, and redding up after them."

"But you wouldn't need to redd up after the bees, Margaret. It's just the one thing you want to make this cottage perfect — two or three nice hives, and a jar of honey in the kitchen."

"That's the very thing I was telling Miss Coyle," said Conroy. "She's a lesson to the country-side with the flowers over her house, and that trimmed hedge there she has in front. I'll engage, now, you wouldn't see anything neater in England."

"I'm sure you couldn't see a nicer cottage anywhere," said Millicent; "and then think of all the money you'd make, Margaret. Hughie says he knows all about handling the hives."

"Oh, sure, them people in Fanad where he comes from does all have the bees; but you wouldn't get the like of that honey here. But I never thought, miss, you didn't see the box of it that Mr. Conroy's after bringing over for you. Wait till I show you, now. I have it in here covered up, the way the wasps wouldn't get in at it."

"Oh, but Mr. Conroy — " said Millicent.

"It isn't worth speaking of, Miss Carteret. It's just some I had up for a sample, to show Miss Coyle when I was explaining to her about the way of working."

They had gone in, and Margaret was uncovering the exquisite comb with deep golden liquid in the clear white wax — heather honey, fragrant as thyme.

"Well, Margaret, if that won't convince you, nothing would. Think, now, how proud you'd be with a comb like that to show."

Conroy smiled his grave smile. "I think, miss, I may leave her to you; you'll surely have her persuaded against I come back."

"Of course I shall. Shan't I, Margaret? Say I shall?"

"'Deed then, miss, it's little I could refuse you."

"There, Mr. Conroy. Now, will you show me the drawings, please. Won't you bring them in here?"

Conroy went out and unstrapped a parcel from his bicycle, while Millicent pulled the table in her little room over to the window, and sat down on the further side of it.

"Put them here," she said.

It was a strange picture enough. Soft light streaming through the window, the young girl with her bright hair and eager eyes bent over the drawings: Conroy's tall figure standing with his back to the half-open door, through which sounds came of Margaret's bustling operations; and on his face the tense look that comes into the eyes of an artist submitting his work to be judged.

And they were strange pictures that Millicent looked at. Drawings in a light wash of water-colour, a few tints crudely used — ignorant work: but the poverty of the means did not hide the thing expressed. Here a face looked out from between two encompassing and over-shadowing wings, its eyes unearthly bright; there, passing in flight, were wonderful winged creatures; there, again, a figure rudely drawn with a curious luminosity at the finger tips, red on one hand, blue on the other. Vaporous all of them, vague in their draperies, and yet with the vivid suggestion of actual presences; of something positively seen. Here, again, were studies of a man, talking, it seemed: but his arms, raised in gesture, obeyed the lines of strange curves indicated sweeping round him; and here was a face just outlined, with rapt eyes shining out from under a brow so placid that it made the eyes more uncanny than before. It was uncannily familiar to her, like something half remembered. Millicent looked up to question, and she saw the same eyes fixed upon her.

In a moment, in a flash, they had changed — they were as before, grey, courteous, and inscrutable. It made her feel uneasy, this look of vision, of sight other than the bodily. For a moment she could not control a movement of aversion — an impulse to question the sanity both of the work and of the man.

"These are wonderful imaginations of yours," she said; and she was vaguely conscious of an undercurrent in her voice that turned the commonplace remark into a stricture.

"I would not call them imaginations," he answered, replying rather to the tone than the words. "These are the things I see, that is all. Others see the like of them; but they have not learnt to draw what they see."

His words were very quiet, and yet insistent, and his face had relapsed into its curious passivity — the attitude of a mind long accustomed to such opposition as her tone had expressed. Yet, even in his quiet acceptance of her lack of comprehension, there was a touch of pathos that weighed upon her. The man was plainly distressed, or at the least, disappointed, and she grew anxious that he should not be disappointed in her. The chord of human sympathy was touched, and she forgot her momentary dislike of a talent so uncanny, so inhuman. Once that had vanished, the awakening of her interest came with no doubtful intimation. For, however it came into being, the quality of the work was to her indisputable. Whatever the faculty, it was no common faculty that saw unearthly things with that astonishing intensity and completeness of vision. And his face, lonely as a rock on the mountain side, appealed to her curiously. In a flash of sympathy, the sense came to her that these symbols stood to him for an infinite deal; that they spoke a language which had never been understood. And it was for her to understand it.

"I don't think I quite know what you mean," she said softly. "I only know that you seem to have done what all artists are trying to do — to create something. These drawings have life in them, and they are beautiful."

His face flushed and lit up. "It's hard for me to believe that, miss. They're rough things. I had no teaching."

"Of course not. One sees that. But they've got the quality that matters. They're your own — seen in your own way. But tell me what you mean about other people seeing them. How can you know? No one else makes pictures like these."

"No," he said; "but there's always speech to tell of what a man sees. And some of the old folk that use the Irish might seem ignorant to you, but in their own tongue their words are as good as pictures. Besides — here's how I know."

He turned over the drawings till he came to a vague floating figure of a woman, in a long flowing robe of white, embroidered with green, and looped into a fold with a gold brooch of the ancient Irish pattern. Her long hair was braided, and fell over her shoulders in heavy plaits.

"I had that standing in my room one day where I was lodging, and a servant-girl came in. I did not know before where she came from. She had been long in service. And the minute she saw it, she ran over to look closer. Then she turned to me and said, 'That's the queen, where did you get the picture of her?' And I asked her, 'What queen?' 'Oh, it was always the queen we called her, down in the Rosses.' Then she told me how she used always to be seeing that figure when she was a young girl, out on the moors, in the west of the country."

Millicent saw with inward exultation that he was beginning to speak with a new freedom.

"But, who was she, then, this queen?" she asked; "and when did you see her?"

"I saw her in many places, when I would be away up in the mountains, the same way as I saw the rest of them, but always in some lonely place. It was there I mostly saw them best, where the face of the country has not been made strange to them by the work of man. When it has been, they walk in a world of their own; and you must lose the things under your eyes — hedges, and trees, and maybe houses — before you can see. But out there, in the valley clefts that face out on to the sea, and on the bare mountain sides, they pass walking before you; and it is easier to see."

Millicent listened in rapt attention; but there grew up in her mind, as it were, a surprise that she felt no surprise. His eyes still looking steadily at her, he seemed fully of her world, and he spoke in an ordinary voice of things that belonged to a land of dreams.

"But who are they? You don't tell me. Are they the dead that you see? Do they speak to you?" she asked.

"Never to me. They are said to have spoken to others. And I do not think they ever died. You see," he said, and he pointed to the drawings, "some of them have shapes that never were on earth — on this earth that we see. I do not know what they are. But I think," he went on — "I don't know will it seem foolishness to you — I think they might, maybe, be the old gods that grew out of the country, or that the people made for themselves out of their long thoughts and desires."

He looked at her with a kind of anxious challenge, as if in fear of her laughter. But the girl was too much moved to laugh. His mood had power on her, and it seemed as if she had lost all sense of strangeness in his talk — as if he told of some land foreign, but not unnatural.

"I don't know," she answered; "this is all wonderful. Tell me more. Do they take notice of you?"

"None. They go on their way, sometimes together, oftener alone."

"But do you never see the people that have died, and come back to where they have lived — people that can be recognized? Do you not believe they can be seen?"

"I never saw them myself," he answered; "but there are many who have, of course. Men see according to their nature, and those who have the vision, but live mostly in the present, see what touches the present. I always saw the same sort of things I see now ever since I was a boy, and did not know that everybody did not see them. The only difference is that, since I have studied the old knowledge, I can see them more at will."

Millicent smiled and shook her head. "Mr. Conroy, you talk to me as if I understood; but I don't. What is the old knowledge? Some sort of enchantment?"

He smiled his rare grave smile. "The old knowledge is a thing you get more by a discipline of the will than anything else. It is a discipline of the body too, and a study of the powers that are in certain signs."

"Do you mean it is something that everybody can learn, or only those who have powers that the rest have not?"

"Surely," he answered, "I mean that every one can learn; only it comes easier to some than to others, and some will never get far. But all should try."

Again Millicent shook her head. "I believe in things coming by nature. You are developing what was natural to you. You were born to see visions and to paint them. What appeals to me is the common life — the life I live and that people live about me."

"Ah," he answered earnestly, "but if once you had learnt to see, you would realize how much finer a thing life is when you have learnt — just as a spectacle. And then — beyond the spectacle — there surely ought to be a power — "

"Asking your pardon, Miss Carteret, but would you like your potatoes peeled and crisped, or will I give them to you in their coats just the way they are?"

Margaret stood, a genial figure, filling the doorway, and Toby, at the mention of dinner, slunk up beside her with a sentimental request in his eyes. Millicent felt as if she had been suddenly awakened. As for Conroy, his face settled back into its greyness, like a granite rock when the sun leaves it; there was no change, only a transfiguration.

"Oh, Margaret, I had forgotten. Whichever way you like. They were lovely last night. But wait five minutes; I haven't finished yet looking at Mr. Conroy's pictures."

"Very well, miss," said Margaret; "but sure I thought you'd be hungry, you that's not used to being out in the air all day. Give a call on me whenever you're ready." And she bustled off, padding on the clay floor with her broad bare feet.

Conroy looked a little confused. "I ought to beg your pardon, miss, for taking up so much of your time. It was thoughtless of me."

Millicent flushed. The change of tone distressed her, and she felt it needed courage to protest. "I only wish I wasn't afraid of hurting Margaret's feelings by putting off dinner, Mr. Conroy. I hope you won't let me be disappointed altogether. There are so many things to ask. Will you come again?"

"Surely, Miss Carteret," he said, and a little of the light came back into his grave face.

"And will you forgive me if I ask one thing. Please don't call me 'miss.' It's the only Irish habit I don't like. It's different with Margaret. But I don't like it from you. Is that settled?" She had flushed very red, and was looking anxiously at his drawings. His face had sunk back into its coldness at the little criticism. She went on quickly without giving him time to answer. "About the drawings — we haven't talked really about the drawings. You know they're wonderful. And it seems an impertinence to say anything. Only there seem to be a lot of things, about mixing colours and perspective and so on, that any trained student could tell you. Will you let me try? It would be a great honour. Will you leave the drawings with me, and come again when you can?"

He was quite silent, and she feared she had wounded him.

"You aren't vexed with me?" she said. "I can't tell you how presumptuous it seems to me. It's only about miserable technical details that I want to preach to you, and you — you have been making me guess at thoughts such as I never dreamt of."

"'Tis not that," he answered, almost roughly. "Miss Carteret, I don't know how to thank you. You that live in the centre of things can't understand how doubtful a person is of his lonely thoughts."

"They couldn't be what they are, if they were not lonely thoughts," she said, with a glow of enthusiasm in her voice.

"And that's true," he replied gravely, almost, it seemed to her, with resignation. "But a man gets weary of his loneliness." Then his tone changed suddenly, and he looked at her with eyes shining. "You don't know what this day has been to me, Miss Carteret."

A great compassion rose up in her face. "When you are lonely, come and see me," she said simply. But it seemed to her that sleeping faculties had suddenly wakened in her. Never before had she known the woman's craving to give her sympathy, to feel her power of giving in the only almsgift that ministers both to the giver and receiver. Her nature was quick in response to any form of intellectual life, and she felt with a sharp pain the disproportion between this man's gift and its recompense. She would give with both hands the tribute that was its due. Beyond that, she did not look. There was enough in her of the artist to realize the artist's hunger for comprehension, his longing for some echo to his own emotion. Here, plainly, was an artist who had never known the answering thrill, the evidence of his own transmitted power; it came to her like a vocation. The fascination of his strange thoughts, his strange visionary experiences, the maimed power and beauty of his unskilled creations, she would have felt like any other intellectual influence; but it was the man himself who appealed to the passion in her, the instinct of sympathy. And that passion, that impulse newly awakened, was still unsatisfied. It was as if something had been spoken to her that needed an answer, and the word was trembling on her lips but would not shape itself, and with that answer still unspoken, the chord still uncompleted, it was hard for her to let him go.

But a superior power intervened.

"May I have the table now, Miss Carteret? The chops will be destroyed if you keep them waiting on you." And Margaret, taking the law into her own hands, ran back the table from the window.

"Margaret, you're a terrible tyrant," said Millicent, laughing.

"'Deed, then, miss, there's no sense in letting good meat spoil. Mr. Conroy, will you not stay and have a bite of something with me and the boys?"

Millicent felt horribly embarrassed by the tacit assumption that Conroy's place was not with her. But he showed no sign of feeling it, and she was thankful.

"No, thank you, Miss Coyle," he answered. "I must be going. I'm ashamed of myself keeping you all this time waiting on me. I'm away down to the Carrick side this evening, and I won't be back for four or five days. But will you send in the cart, and get the hive from my place? Hughie can fix it up; and when I'm back I'll bring you out a nice swarm. And then Miss Carteret can finish looking at my drawings, if she has the patience."

He shook hands, and, mounting his bicycle, rode off, while Margaret tended on Millicent, and remonstrated on the poor dinner she was making: though, indeed, by any less exacting standard than Margaret's hospitality Millicent's appetite would have been found very sufficient. But, even as she sat at table, her mind was filled with new thoughts, and, after her meal, she went back to her haystack, and spent a great part of a long afternoon turning over the strange record of Owen Conroy's visions.

CHAPTER IX

It must not be thought that Miss Carteret was an undutiful daughter. She dedicated a good hour of her afternoon to the business of acquainting her mother with anything that Mrs. Carteret would like to hear. If there were any circumstances that might seem likely to ruffle that lady's perfect repose of mind, Millicent was too considerate to mention them. Naturally, she enlarged upon the capture of her salmon, and found it an easy transition to other subjects. For instance, to the Mr. Frank Norman who had come up and landed it for her. And from him it was an easy step to Colonel Lisle, who had so kindly arranged for the sending of it; and to the Miss Lisles, who had been so charming and hospitable. Altogether, the impression to be gathered was that Millicent had fortunately found a discreet introduction into the most steady-going society.

But that evening, when the candles were lit and the long talk over the fire with Margaret and her boys was ended, Millicent sat down to her table and filled sheets to Kitty Hammond with a less measured economy of facts and impressions. Owen Conroy filled a large space in that letter: about him Millicent let herself go. Was it not extraordinary that one should fly to the wilds to escape from studio-shop, and then should stumble up, the very first day, against a person who was doing the real thing — and such a strange kind of it — something so unheard of, so original. Millicent felt the joys of a discoverer as she wrote: she knew that Kitty always scoffed and always listened — what more can be expected of a *confidante?*

As for Frank Norman, he figured too, but considerably less to his advantage. Millicent related with great spirit their mutual embarrassments, especially over the episode with John Gallagher. "Wasn't it awful?" she commented — with two strokes under the epithet — for Millicent never disdained to give a word that emphasis in writing which her voice was so well accustomed to convey. But, on a general view of the epistle, it seemed to Kitty Hammond, as she read and laughed over it, a day or two later, that Mr. Norman's name cropped up in a good many places.

"This is going to be the man," she observed to herself; "there always is a man. And the other is going to be a cult. There generally is a cult, but I did not expect her to start one in Donegal. And there is going to be trouble. There always is trouble. I wonder if I shall be well in time to go to the rescue."

But, in the meanwhile, the man whose name flowed too readily from Millicent's confidential pen, was finding the day long. It would have consoled Frank Norman vastly to know that he should loom to Miss Kitty Hammond's apprehension as a future source of embarrassment; but, then, he did not know it. He only knew that the sun shone relentlessly, and not an air stirred the poplars; and, moreover, that by all likelihood it would be so on the morrow. This young girl haunted his imagination: the sense of comradeship, sprung up so quickly, chafed at the restrictions on their meeting. There seemed to be a whole world of things that he wanted to talk over with her. Her quick and vivid response to all the impressions of this country and this people that he loved doubled his joy of living. He wanted to witness her pleasure in the soft blue sky over mountains, to hear her speak of the scent of Margaret's peat fire. She baffled him with her mixture of experience and shyness; there she was, lodging alone in a strange country, and yet he had seen her blush and stammer like a schoolgirl on her introduction to the colonel. He knew that she had been an art student; he knew the conditions of studio life; and he knew also, perfectly well, that he must not make his way to Margaret's cottage without a reason that was not an excuse. He was ready to ransack the world for a reason, but he knew better than to go without one. And all the while he grudged every hour that this delightful playfellow spent in his own country, and he not there to play with her.

It is a question whether the two little ladies saw Frank's diplomacy with quite his own admiration, when at tea-time he dexterously and — as it seemed to him — imperceptibly led the conversation to Miss Carteret. The little ladies smiled their serene smile, and thought it was unlikely that young lady would make a long stay at Margaret's. It would be all very well while she was new-fangled with it; but a few wet days would soon put her out of conceit with the place, said Miss Selina, using, in her customary way, half from habit, half with a sense of their quaintness, the Donegal idioms. Frank repudiated the suggestion. He said that they did not realize the modern young lady — the young lady with a taste for adventure.

" She's the sort of girl that will live in Paris on a franc a day sooner than come home, if she's interested in what she's doing. And she'll simply revel in Margaret's place. It's a new experience; and you may be sure Margaret will make no end of a fuss over her. Of course, if she gets bored, she'll go; but I don't believe she will. I'm sure I hope she won't," he added, with a touch of candour.

"It would be a dreadful thing to happen, Frank," said Miss Cassy, with her little soft laugh.

"Oh, terrible!" added Miss Selina.

"It would be a disgrace to the county, Cousin Selina," said Frank, seriously. "It must not be allowed. I think we must talk to the colonel, and see if he and you couldn't show her a little of Donegal before the fine weather leaves us. There's McSwyne's castle. I'm sure the colonel would delight in showing off the place to her, and telling her all the old stories he has about it."

"I'm sure that would be very nice for Miss Carteret and the colonel," said Miss Selina. "You wouldn't be thinking to come along yourself, I suppose?"

Frank got up. "I should think it my plain duty," he answered, parrying the laughter in her voice. "And, Cousin Cassy, Miss Carteret will never know what a picnic hamper ought to be till she sees one of your packing. I'm going to shoot the wood-quests that are destroying your gooseberries now."

"The poor birds!" said Miss Cassy, with a final shaft; "they must be greatly disturbed with the way you keep firing off guns near them."

Frank went off well content, and knowing that to suggest a hospitality in that house was the same as to issue the invitation; but knowing also that it took his uncle and his cousins some time to make up their minds.

However, in his anxiety for his own ends, he omitted to calculate the fact that the two little ladies were, in their way, almost as willing to see more of Millicent as he himself. They had liked her — especially they had liked her obvious admiration for the colonel, whom they themselves admired and adored more than all the men in history; and their hospitable souls conceived of her as rather deplorably stranded. She had told them, of course, of Kitty Hammond's involuntary desertion, and they had a compassion on her loneliness which Millicent was far from meriting. A little touch of curiosity completed the impulse of natural kindliness, and at breakfast next morning Frank, already resigning himself to another day of disappointment, was amazed and overjoyed by a word from Miss Selina. A note from some neighbours, their most intimate allies, had come asking him to tennis next day; and it had contained a suggestion that the two Miss Lisles should drive over in the afternoon.

"I wonder, Frank, would Miss Carteret like to come over with us? Maybe she doesn't play tennis, though?"

Frank laboured after a decent show of indifference.

"Oh, I don't think that matters. She can play croquet instead, if she likes. But, if she likes gardens, the Rockhill one is worth seeing. I'd give her the offer, anyway. Write a note, and I'll ride over with it and bring back your basket."

So it came about that, early in that forenoon, Frank Norman was speeding along the road towards Lough Drummond. Margaret greeted him with effusion.

"An' how are you, Mr. Norman? I was thinking it wouldn't be long before we seen you, when I heard you were over. But I'm feared this is not a good day for the lough."

"It isn't for the fishing I came, Margaret. I have a note here from my cousin for the young lady that's staying with you."

"A note for Miss Carteret, is it? Oh, now, Mr. Norman, isn't thon the lovely young lady? An' quare and pleased she'll be to get it, for she couldn't say enough good of the Miss Lisles and the colonel. An' all them flowers Miss Lisle gave her, she has them arranged the way that the room's a fair picture to look at. I oughtn't to be taking you in without her leave, but sure you might just peep through the door. Come in now, till I show you."

And Margaret, entering the kitchen, opened the door into Millicent's room, which was indeed strangely transfigured with the masses of great red poppies and tall spikes of Canterbury bells.

"And will you look here now, Mr. Norman," said Margaret, pointing to her own little table, "nothing would do her but I must have a bunch of roses in here. I told her it was very slavish of her to be taking all that trouble for the likes of me, but she be to do it."

Frank laughed. "Well, Margaret, if you told her that, I expect you surprised her a good deal. Tell me, now, does she have any bother understanding the Irish way of talking?"

"Is it bother? Sure, not the least in the world, Master Frank. I beg your pardon, Mr. Norman, I do be forgetting."

"Keep on forgetting, Margaret, I like it better; or do you want me to be calling you Miss Coyle? But, tell me about Miss Carteret. I would have thought there would be words that she wouldn't have heard before."

"So there is, surely, and now and then she passes a remark on them; but she isn't like one of them impudent people, that'll come here and laugh at you till your face, and tell you you don't know how to speak English. There's them'll do that, then, and I seen myself hard set not to forget my manners with them. But, sure, this young lady doesn't take on her the least in the world, and whatever little thing you'd do for her, she'll be as pleased as pleased, and always the kind word with her and the bright way."

"I suppose she told you about her fish, Margaret?"

"Oh, then, maybe she didn't. But, Master Frank, wasn't it the great luck that you came up in the right minute. She said you had to go through the river after it. Dear oh! but you dear bought it."

"Indeed, then, Margaret, I didn't think so," retorted Frank.

"Well, now, that was what Hughie was saying, that he would have faced at it in the snow-water, rather nor see thon young lady disappointed; and it her first day, and all. I couldn't tell you, now, how glad I was, Master Frank. But, sure, I'm keeping you, and maybe, there's an answer waiting to the note. Will you take it down to her yourself, or will I send Hughie with it? Miss Carteret's just away down there by the wee lump of sallies down thonder in the field."

"I'll take it down myself," said Frank. "Is she painting?"

"I think she is, Master Frank. Dear oh, but she's the clever young lady. Nothing would do her last night but make a picture of me, sitting there by the fire. But it's terrible hard to sit that way."

"You'd be always wanting to lift something off the dresser, Margaret; isn't that it?"

"Just that, Master Frank; or maybe to put a hand to the lamp. Indeed, then, I was fair ashamed; but Miss Carteret she did nothing but laugh and say, Martha ought to be my name and not Margaret, and

Martha was always a bad sitter. What did she mean at all, Master Frank?"

Frank only laughed. "I'll go and ask her, Margaret. I suppose I can't miss her?"

Over the fences, and down along the river bank he sped quick-footed, till the sight of a large sketching-umbrella made him slacken. Under it was Millicent, engrossed in a study of silver-grey willows, blue water, and brown bog-land. She did not hear him coming till he stood before her, note in hand, thinking it well to have in evidence the reason for his coming. Again Millicent's first conscious impulse was one of fury with a person who disturbed her composure. She had started a little, and, as she put it to herself, turned a silly crimson. However, with a woman's quickness, she perceived in the same instant that Frank, on his part, was not less confused, and even shy — quite too confused to notice her confusion. And in the perception came the conscious impulse to forgive him.

In the meantime, Frank, ignorant alike of the offence and the pardon, was making the commonplaces of greeting. Then he pointed to her sketch.

"May one look?" he said.

"There is nothing to see; but you may."

Frank looked, and wisely decided that of drawings in that stage it was best to say nothing. He expressed himself to that effect.

"But, anyhow, you are still liking it — all of it?" he went on.

"More every minute."

"That's all right. And you have been telling Margaret so, I gather? She kept me quarter of an hour listening to a rhapsody about you."

"It would be a tragedy if Margaret did not like me," said Millicent, "for I have lost my heart hopelessly to her."

"But you mustn't let Margaret monopolize you. Here is a note from my cousin. Do try and do what she wants you to. Will you read it? And may I sit down — and smoke?"

"Of course."

He sat down cross-legged on the short grass, lit a pipe, and settled himself with infinite contentment to watch her. A droll look of perplexity was passing over her face, and she made no attempt to hide it. On the contrary, it was expressed in the least suspicion of a *moue* — lips closed tighter, eyelids half shut over laughing eyes — when she turned to him.

"It is awfully kind of Miss Lisle, but — but —"

"Two 'buts' too many," he objected.

She shook her head. "But — but — but —" she reaffirmed.

"Why, then?"

"Well, this to begin with. You know, I meant to come to a country where I shouldn't know any one but Margaret, nor want any one but Margaret to look after me."

Frank looked hard at her. "Is this a reproach?" he asked.

She was a little taken aback. "No, no — of course not."

"Quite sure?" he said. "Honour bright? Because if you would really rather be let alone, you shall be let alone to your heart's content, and nobody will be one little bit offended."

"That is rather nice of him," thought Millicent, as she sat on her campstool, aware that he was looking at her with a friendly scrutiny. And she wondered if she wanted to be let alone.

"Oh, you mustn't think —" she began; but he interrupted.

"Don't be polite. Look, let me explain. It began between you and me, didn't it! We met in an odd sort of way. I was awfully keen to get that fish for you. And now I'm awfully keen that you should have a good time here. You don't want to be let in for duty visits, of course. But these people are rather nice people, with a nice place, and, you see, my cousins thought you might get lonely and bored. I think I understand a little better. I don't think you will get bored if you have your work. Only, do you want to play too? Just say truly what you want and it shall be that."

Millicent was easily accessible to the kindlinesses of friendship; and it did not seem to her that she was unreasonably grateful to this young man, who certainly had kind eyes, she decided. With a quick impulse she stretched out her hand. It was a woman's gesture, though, not a man's — pretty, gracious, a little imperious in its condescension.

"You are a very nice understanding person," she said.

Frank's face shone, and he shook hands in all good comradeship.

"That is very good of you, especially as I don't understand. Do you want to be a hermit? Yes, or no?"

Millicent laughed. "Shall I tell you the true truth?"

"Go on," he said, with a little inquiring lift of one eyebrow.

"Well, first of all, I'm shy."

"Stuff. I've been shy myself — ten minutes ago. But one gets over it. You know one does. And the Irwins are the least alarming people in the world. First of all doesn't count."

"Oh, but it does, though. And, next of all, I've no clothes."

"That's absolutely irrelevant," he said. "It's a tennis party, and there will only be about half a dozen people, and they'll nearly all come on bicycles. So I leave you to judge. No; all this is beside the mark. You may say you will be a hermit if you like, but you mustn't refuse for ridiculous reasons."

"Shyness is a real reason," she said seriously.

"But," he said, "you come on your bicycle to lunch with us. You aren't shy of that. Then my cousins get into the phaeton, and either you get in with them or you bicycle over with me, and we all arrive together. Do come. You owe me one for the salmon."

"Oh, well," she said gravely, "if you put it to me as a matter of obligation — "

"You're too bad," he said. "Well, if you refuse you must write a note. If you accept, I will be content with a verbal answer. Think it over. And now tell me about Margaret — and all the rest of it."

So she began, and she told him about Margaret, and Margaret's dogs and cats, and Margaret's churning, and Margaret's curiosity, and Margaret's comments; and then she mentioned Conroy's visit.

"So Conroy actually came to see you. Upon my word, you should be flattered," he said.

"I am," she retorted. "That visit was an honour" — and she put enough laughing emphasis on her "that" to mark a distinction.

"Thank you," he said, bowing. "But, seriously — doesn't he impress you a good deal?"

"I should rather think he did."

And so they drifted into talk of Conroy's drawings, and his visions, and his fancies. All the time Millicent was oddly conscious of an inner resentment against Frank's easy criticism of the man in whose eyes she had seen a new light kindle — for her. And at the same time she was proud of her power to withhold knowledge. She, and she only was in the secret of that strange nature; and in the meanwhile it pleased her to talk of him from the outside with Frank, as she talked so many things — she relating mainly, he interrupting and questioning — each keenly interested in the canvassing of new ideas, or the attempt to catch and render the colour of life, with that fresh interest which sits so pleasantly upon the days when life is still an exploration, of voyage of discovery. And yet that interchange of thought did not wholly account for the pleasure to which they surrendered themselves, half consciously. There was a deeper interest to which, all the time, not knowing it, they were more keenly alive, more vividly responsive — the results, not formulated, of a more instinctive exploration, the unconscious revelation of themselves. All our words are at best half-defaced symbols, imperfect pictures of some thought; all our thoughts have, with some slight difference, been shaped before. But the human creature is a fresh mintage, a labyrinth of unexplored possibilities, a new country. We see a little way into each other's lives, and some fascinate us at the first with a sense of strangeness, as the vineyards and olive groves of Italy bewitch a northern. Yet the human instinct is for kindly surroundings, and the true alliance springs out of a sense of kinship, a rallying to the same loyalties, a natural sympathy in laughter and in tears; and it is when lives are drawn by a recognition of such likeness beyond the differences, whether of sex, or age, or circumstances, that there grows up an abiding bond.

When Nature's work is severance, pain dogs her feet; she has balms to heal, but few anodynes for suffering, and her work is felt then for the most part in pangs and spasms. But when she sets to binding, quietly and in secret she goes about her business, and those that are united scarcely know their own joy. In the supreme moments, when the man and the woman are mated, when the child is wrenched from the mother, excess of conscious feeling marks or stigmatizes the hour, accentuates the symbolism; or, again, when Nature's work is hurried by circumstance, when allegiance is claimed and given in a moment, when comradeship is prematurely forced into full life, man must be aware. But for the most part the web that links two together is woven while those who ply the shuttle of word and look are ignorant of all but a vague happiness, a full content; they embroider into it an hour of sunshine, or of firelight, the sound of each other's voice in light question or reply, the ripple of each other's laughter; and they do not know that every remotest corner of the whole design will cry aloud for the inevitable echo of those carelessly struck harmonies.

The conclusion of the matter is that two young people sitting near the bank of a smooth, slow-flowing river, blue where it reflected the sky, and brown in the bank shadow, close by a little clump of willows, silvery in the sunshine, were exceedingly inattentive to the lapse of time. The sunshine was within them as well as without, and they basked in it without other preoccupation. Finally, a pang of conscience smote Frank.

"Your sketch," he said. "Why shouldn't you go on? Do you mind being looked at?"

Millicent looked across the river and laughed. "I'm afraid the light is wrong now."

Frank looked at his watch. "Heavens!" he said, "I've wasted your morning. And you'll have to begin another canvas."

"Margaret will be in a fuss about lunch," said Millicent; "that's the only thing that matters. I must go in."

And so the morning ended. But before Frank left it was definitely settled that Millicent should join the Ballinderry party next day.

CHAPTER X

Far away in the west of Donegal is a wild, grey valley that looks across the ocean to America and the setting sun. Ringed about with mountains, it lies flat and spacious, hardly raised above the level of the sea. An arm of the Atlantic it should be, but for a strong mole of rocky hillocks, some two hundred yards in width, that blocks the entrance, and through these a little river finds its tortuous way. The bar of rock piled up with sandhills avails to keep the wave out, but makes no shelter from the wind; and far to the landward side the roads and paths, silted up with blown sand and sea wrack, testify to the force of winter gales. A bluff front of mountain to the south, to the north a headland fronting the sea with a sheer cliff all but a thousand feet in height, mark the valley's boundaries; and the wind striking on these portals finds between them open passage, and scours up the level floor. Trees are none in sight, scarce a bush even; and into the walls of every cottage are built projecting stones round which ropes are fastened, lest the roof be suddenly lifted and hurled into the air. Boats you shall see, three or four, perhaps, on the sloping shingle of one cleft in the rock, but hauled so high above the water-line that it would seem a day's labour to launch them. And, in truth, the days when it is safe to launch a boat or beach a boat, in that inhospitable nook are for months together few or none. Nature, that in so many bays seems to call vessels inward with alluring shores and windings of the waterway, has here set up a mark that might be a beacon to warn seafarers from the coast; for, off the corner of the great cliff, there towers one huge fragment, a mountainous pillar of rock, fallen apart and outwards, severed at the base from the shore, as though some fierce sword-wielder had struck down once and for all upon the headland and cleft the steep contour into sheer precipice, determined that here, at least, earth should be inaccessible from the sea; here, at least, the eagle should breed secure.

And yet this glen, so girt about with all the savagery of sea, and rock, and sky, is thickly peopled. Tiny plots of land show tillage, corn or potatoes crouching under the shelter of massive stone walls and mounded banks; yet these plots must yield scant provender for all those huts that nestle close into the folds of the hills. How they live, these folk — not fishers, for the harbourless sea forbids — must be a wonder; but here in this valley, for immemorial ages, men have been thick upon the ground. Monuments of time before history attest their presence; great Druid rings, grottoes raised of enormous upright stones, and roofed with even huger slabs, once the shrine of a forgotten cult, now sometimes turned to styes or stables; subterranean passages covered in with great flagstones that three men could scarcely lift; all these speak of the older days. And on the mountain side a ruined chapel, still a place of pilgrimage, keeps alive the memory of Donegal's great saint; a cairn of stones speaks the multitude of worshippers that have piled it, leaving each his pebble. Centuries have passed over the valley, and made little change; a church, a schoolhouse, here and there a slated roof; but still in its wind-swept space, man and his dwellings seem a little thing, hard set to keep their hold among wild elements, and yet man and his dwellings are still there, looking out from a treeless earth upon a sailless sea.

There was the birthplace of Owen Conroy, there he had grown to manhood, there in the unaltered fields and mountains he had seen all his life from time to time creatures walking that were not of human flesh. And there he returned now, to fight with a trouble that was wholly new to him.

He had made himself an existence above fear or desire. Money had little meaning to one of such simple needs. Ambition and the thought of rivalry had scarcely touched his mind; he lived lonely with his visions and his dreams, using his art rather as a means than as an end — at most as a pastime. Living as he did, he had shown his work to very few — had scarcely considered in himself the question whether it was good or bad. The half-friendship which had sprung up between him and Frank Norman was not of his seeking; it was due to the other's sympathetic curiosity. That a man rather over-educated than unfamiliar with such things should stand in wondering admiration before these jottings, seemed to Conroy at first matter for surprise, rather than for pleasure. Still, it pleased him, and if it did not excite, it made a little stir on the surface of his tranquillity. He felt himself returning now and then to the thought of what artists would say.

Then had come into his ken this new creature, equipped with all that in himself was lacking, an artist by training as well as by instinct, — an artist, and a woman. Educated men he had met and known, but all the women in his life had been peasants. And now the first woman that he met on a level, was not only beautiful, he thought, not only accomplished, but vibrating with that power of instant divination — the woman's faculty, to give rather than to take, to perceive rather than to originate. The atmosphere of her being was full of changes, responsive to the mood of what she heard, what she beheld. The play of her face, the altering radiation, as she studied his drawings or listened to the exposition of his thought, was more to him than any spoken criticism; it revealed to himself new meanings in the image. For the first time he felt that something was lacking to his completion. Alone, he was not sufficient to himself.

It was now the second day of this possession, and his nature, new to it, revolted. His work done, he had ridden long miles over hilly roads to get back to the old theatre of his dream pageants; he had come out into the loveliness of that long summer evening, he had climbed the hillside, and lay looking out across a smooth Atlantic, following the sun-path with his eyes. About him the grey rocks were gilded, the short, crisp grass of the cliff-top took a hue of gold, the glen below him was bathed in golden splendour. Peace lay upon the face of all wild things, the manifold life drank in the benediction of the time. He had only to compose himself, to attune his mood to the great harmony, and, his mind detached from earthly preoccupations, would fall of itself into that tense and yearning vacancy which is the prelude to vision.

But on this day, hill and valley were dispeopled of the strange habitants: no shape of winged creature, no majestic moving presence vouchsafed itself to his inward eye. And in his heart he knew that the mirror on which these had been wont to reflect themselves was clouded and troubled. The image that it craved was not their image; it was an image that had framed itself merely on the transitory and imperfect sense. He could call up to memory, almost in the fulness of their unearthly perfection, the visions of his mysterious and secluded world; but the picture which he now consciously strove to shape must be constructed from partial and faulty recollections: a fleeting turn of the head, the gesture of a hand. He was aware now, for the first time, of the difference between his human perceptions and those which came to him in vision. Revealed to him in their essence, in their totality, the shapes from behind the veil fell at once into their own harmonies, and soothed the mind with a consciousness of universal order. In them his spirit could acquiesce, could repose. But this apparition of his own world came to him, a thing to be slowly comprehended, to be disentangled, complex, not simple, and appealing at once to many faculties in him.

Abandoning himself entirely to the thought of her, he took his pencil and fell to drawing. But he was astonished by the triviality of his own impressions. This was not the woman; these had no relation to the soul of which glimpses had come to him; none, at least, that he could trace. The beauty that at once haunted and eluded him was not there. It had been stamped with a larger impress, it was a power, an element, kin to the winds and waves.

"I have not seen," he said to himself. "It is strange, I cannot see."

And he lay there on the hillside, perplexing himself with thought till the slow twilight closed in, and lights were visible across the valley, and the stars shone thick in heaven.

CHAPTER XI

But while Owen Conroy dreamed of the woman whose face he had half-seen, half-guessed at, the girl was busy with her play.

Millicent had dealt severely with Frank's suggestion that he should ride over with her in the morning and help her to find her way to Ballinderry. She returned dutifully to her painting, and became engrossed in her work till the shifting light stopped her. Then, to her horror, she realized that it was within twenty minutes of the time that Miss Lisle had named for lunch. Three-quarters of an hour later she was pedalling, hot and breathless, up the Ballinderry avenue. It reassured her to see Frank on the doorstep in flannels, playing with a retriever puppy.

"Am I frightfully late?" she asked, as they shook hands.

Frank smiled placidly at her. "We aren't the slaves of time in this country. Lunch may be in half an hour. I wouldn't like to promise. But, come in, and I'll go and find my cousins."

And, indeed, it was long enough before the family gathered itself together in its leisurely way, and sat down to its leisurely, easy-going lunch. Millicent was filled with wonder at the suave and distinguished-looking old retainer in grey tweed, who handed round the plates, pressing second helps upon her with a note of personal appeal, occasionally joining in the conversation, and moved to a dignified merriment by the colonel's stories. He did not laugh; he merely beamed; and Millicent was aware that he smiled with a kind of proprietary satisfaction. The colonel was doing him credit before a new audience. Partly also, Millicent felt, the smile signified his approbation of her, because she was amused.

"Whatever you do, Miss Carteret," the colonel was saying, "don't forget to make them show you the sun-dial in the shrubbery. These young people don't think much of it, but I tell you there wasn't as much talk when Cleopatra's needle was put up in London as there was in this country when old James Irwin, that was grandfather to this man, had that dial put up. He was a great one for plantations and laying out walks and the like of that, and it was he made the shrubbery; and there wasn't ever a book written about the way of doing those things that he hadn't read. And by what he could learn, ornamental grounds — that was what he always called them — 'Come down and see my ornamental grounds '— well, ornamental grounds were nothing at all without a dial. So he got this dial made up in Dublin, and he had inscriptions on it in all the genteel languages — in Latin and Greek, of course, and in Hebrew and in Irish no less; anything you please, so long as no one would be able to understand it. And then the thing had to be set up, and he had old Dr. Higgins over from Tullyaughnish Rectory, for of course, Tullyaughnish was one of the college livings, and old Higgins was a Fellow of Trinity and a famous mathematician. And you never saw such work as there was getting it set just exactly right, the way there'd be no error in the time. Well, then, it was set up, and old James Irwin said that there would be no more disputes about the time, in this neighbourhood anyway; for, you see, there was no telegraph then, and we were all depending on our own watches. Well, the first thing that ever happened was a terrible row between James Irwin and old Higgins, for the church clock had a way of going fast; and one morning James Irwin and the whole batch from Rockhill — two car loads of them — marched into church just when Higgins was finishing the second lesson. And nobody would have thought anything of that, but James Irwin, instead of putting his face into his big top hat the way he always did, drew out the big hunting watch out of his fob and opened the case of it, and turned to his wife that was standing beside him and showed it to her, and then he turned and held it up to Jemmy Hayes in the pew behind; and, of course, the whole church knew James Irwin was finding fault with the church clock. And after church he and Higgins had it out in the vestry, and, you see, Higgins had nothing to say, for it was he set the dial himself. 'The sun can't be wrong,' says old James, 'but, of course, Dr. Higgins, your calculation may be at fault.' And you may be sure Higgins wasn't going to allow that."

There was a general laugh, and the butler put in his word.

"It was after that Hugh McConnell got the job of mending her, colonel."

"It was, David. And if the man out of Derry made her go fast, McConnell made her go slow; and that was always better. But I was telling you about the dial, Miss Carteret. James Irwin was the proudest man you could see when he knew the whole countryside was looking to him for the time of day, and you may be sure there was plenty of talk among the country people about this wonderful kind of clock. Well, one day old James was down by the shore there, watching the men that were busy on his new walk, and he was beginning to feel a bit hungry. 'I don't know is it near dinner time,' he said, 'and I've left my watch in the house. Run up,' says he to one of the boys that were working—"

"It was Andy Freel was his name," put in David.

"Just that," said the colonel. "'Run up, Andy,' he says, 'and fetch me the time by the dial.' Well, it was a good piece away, but still James wondered what was keeping him so long. 'Powers above us, what's thon?' says one man that heard something trailing along round the corner of the walk; and next minute there was my bold Andy that had torn the dial clean out of the socket and was dragging it after him. 'Here she is, yer honour,' says he to James, with the sweat running off him in streams, 'and hard set I was to get her.'"

"And you may think, Miss Carteret," said Frank, "if Dr. Higgins was likely to make his calculations again."

"Oh, it was a great day for Higgins," said the colonel, "and after that there was no time in the county but just the church clock. And it was Willy Irwin's father that had the dial put up again, for the old man had lost conceit of it entirely."

All things have an end, even luncheon at Ballinderry; and in the slow process of time the phaeton was at the door. Millicent found it taken for granted that she was to ride on with Frank, and was in no way inclined to protest. Accordingly, he and she set off — Millicent having stipulated only that a meeting by the road should be arranged, so that the whole party should arrive together. Their way was from the front of the house, down a curve of avenue overshadowed with great beech trees to the river and a little high-backed bridge. Trout were rising in the sun all over the long, still reach, and Frank stopped for a moment to stare over into the water and show her the fish swimming below. The avenue ran level to the road, and they began then to climb out of the river valley — gradually at first, with the timbered country still close to them; then turning their backs on it, they reached outlying patches of wild, barren moor. But as they rose, Millicent began to have glimpses of the sea-lough that her steamer had crossed, not grey now, but glorious blue, shut in by purple mountains. Then a long line of plantation on their left blocked it from sight, but to their right now was open moor, rising long and brown towards peaked hills sharp against the sky line. The look of the road itself pleased the artist sense in Millicent and almost propitiated the cyclist. It was metalled with granite, pink and grey, and full of tiny mica particles that made a twinkling reflection of the sunshine from the sandy surface — where the surface could be spoken of as sandy. Frank was full of apologies for the rough going, but Millicent was in no humour to grumble. The air was full of warm scent from the straggling furze bushes that overgrew the rough bank on either hand with green prickles and golden bloom; and the stunted and weather-beaten plantation, with trees all driven inward by many winds from the bare moor, was picturesque enough. At last the by-road struck at right angles into a main highway, marked with telegraph poles, and Frank jumped off his bicycle.

"Stop here a minute," he said.

They had the lough now full before them. Beyond it the distant centre of the picture was filled by one great mountain, peaked yet not jagged, rising with exquisite grace and dignity of line to its majestic height. And, broad under its base, the lough stretched transversely across the nearer distance, making the eye of the scene: its own contour broken and varied by little wooded promontories, itself breaking and varying the curves of the land. Towards it the road ran, a long ribbon of pinkish white, and in the foreground lay tillage country, golden with many ripening oatfields, and green in patches with root crops.

"There," said Frank, "that is Donegal. There are finer things in the county, perhaps; but we are content to be judged by that."

Millicent looked long at it. "What a country!" she said at last. "When I saw it the other day, it was all like a wash of sepia; and to-day it shines like jewels."

"It wants sunshine. Sunshine never turns it leaden like an English July. You see that sort of pearly look in the atmosphere between you and the mountains. If you dropped me out of the clouds and I saw that look in the air, I would say I was in Ireland. I suppose steady sun would dry it out. But you never get too much sun in Ireland," he added, with a queer laugh.

Millicent was quick to understand his thought, and to put her own application on the symbol.

"Aren't you dreadfully afraid sometimes," she said, with just the least inflection in her voice of a serious laughter, "that some day there will come a dry summer, and you won't know your own country any more? How long would it take, do you think?"

"About three centuries," he answered. "There are long arrears of sunshine in Ireland."

Mounting again, they soon had crested the hill now, and below them they saw the other arm of the lough. After a few hundred yards over level causeway built through bog, the road began to descend.

"How blessed!" Millicent called out in glee. "I'm going to coast!"

"Not you," said Frank. "I'm in charge. It isn't safe. There's a shocking corner."

Nothing in the world angered Millicent so much as an order.

"You're not in charge. I am taking very good care of myself. And I always coast."

She put her feet up on the rests and waved a hand to Frank, who was back-pedalling steadily.

"Good-bye!" she called out.

But in another minute he was beside, driving his machine hard to keep up with her growing pace.

"Look here! This is simple foolishness! It gets steeper, and we have to turn sharp to the right at the bottom. Put your brake on, anyhow!"

Millicent was aware that the pace was getting high; but she waited a moment sooner than appear submissive.

"Don't fuss," was all she condescended to answer. "There's plenty of time."

Then she took hold of the brake and pressed on it. But, to her horror, the lever refused to move, and in an instant she realized that, since the railway journey, she had had no occasion to use it. It must have got somehow bent.

Frank was urgent with her. "For Heaven's sake, slow up! You'll certainly come to grief! You don't know the turn!"

She tried her best, and he saw her effort. "The brake won't work!" she gasped.

He felt himself turn sick with fear. They had not two hundred yards to the turn, and the speed was tremendous over a stony road.

"Put your foot on the tyre! So." He shouted, suiting the action to the word, and, as he did, losing ground. From a little behind he saw Millicent try; but her ankle had not strength enough to bear on the flying wheel, and, in the effort, she nearly lost her balance. He regained his own pedal with some difficulty and got level again. Her face was white and red in patches, he saw.

"I can't catch the pedals!" she cried to him.

"Don't try. Sit quite still. I'm going to stop you. Steer as straight as you can. It's the only way."

He rode up as close to her as he dared, and, stretching out his left hand, caught her arm. For an instant the two rushed side by side with added impetus; then he put on the brake with his right hand. The uneven drag pulled the bicycles across; but Frank swayed to counterbalance it, and to his delight he found the pace slackening.

"Get your pedals quick!" he said, still nervous.

But Millicent, in her hurried attempt to recover them, lost something of her balance, the two machines swayed, and Frank, gripping at the brake and checking the pedals with all his force, found himself actually supporting most of her weight just as he reached the turn, and endeavoured to steer to the right. The pace was gone, but the angle could not be taken under such conditions. Millicent's wheel went from under her, and in falling she carried Frank down. For a moment there was inextricable confusion; then the two were on their feet — Millicent vehemently dusting her skirt, while Frank overwhelmed her with inquiries and protestations.

"I was a fool to tell you to move. If you had kept your feet where they were we could have come round all right; only I was afraid of meeting something."

"It's all right," answered Millicent, very curtly. "Am I in an awful mess? Isn't it sickening?"

Frank was offended. "Your skirt's dusty," he said. "But you may be very well content if your neck isn't broken. What thief made that bicycle, I should like to know? A brake like that is a pretty thing to trust to!"

He picked it up from where it lay in the road and tried the lever. It moved freely.

"Why," he said, "look at this! I can't understand. Look here!" and he snapped it on and off.

Then, to his blank amazement, Millicent burst into tears.

To say that Frank was contrite would be a grotesque understatement. He was overwhelmed with remorse. He talked hurriedly and confusedly, blaming himself for an inconsiderate brute. Of course he ought to have known that she must be dreadfully shaken. But still Millicent was convulsed with sobs, turning away and striving ineffectually to recover a woman's least accessible property — her pocket-handkerchief.

Then a better inspiration dawned upon Frank. He took the girl gently by the arm and led her across the road — unresisting now.

"Come and sit down here," he said, seating her on the bank. "I'm going up to that house" — and he pointed to a farmhouse a little way up the hill, which they had passed in their wild career — "to get you a drink of water."

Stowing the bicycles out of the way, he ran as if for his life, and in five minutes was back with a cup and a bowl. Millicent, red-eyed, but recovered, was sitting erect.

"I *am* ashamed," she said. "I hate making a fool of myself."

"Don't talk," he said; "drink some water."

She obeyed meekly; then she looked up with an air of contrition.

"It was all my fault. And I've never thanked you."

"I told you not to talk," said Frank.

She made a little face.

"I hate doing what I'm told. That was just the trouble. But you're very good — really and truly *very* good. Am I to dabble my face in that bowl?"

"Far be it from me to suggest," he said, laughing. "I will only say — here is the bowl, there is your face. I will even go so far as this — here is a clean pocket-handkerchief."

She dabbed at her eyes with a wet corner of the handkerchief; then she looked up.

"Don't you hate women who cry and make scenes?"

Frank considered a moment. "That depends," he answered judicially.

"Well, I do," said Millicent. Then she added inconsequently, "I was horribly frightened, you know."

"So was I — never worse," said Frank, with heartfelt emphasis.

"Was that why you began to scold me?"

"Scold you?"

"Scold me. I should rather think you did. You were simply unbearable."

Frank broke into a fit of laughter. "Oh, if you come to that, you're past all endurance. Why, I wasn't saying a word about you. I was merely examining your brake, when — oh, well, when you surprised me."

"Don't. I forbid you to speak of it."

Then she looked at him with undisguised but kindly laughter in her eyes.

"Poor thing! Didn't you wish you were a hundred miles away?"

"No," said Frank, with a weight of emphasis that stopped her.

And if the truth must be told, he was wondering in himself whether he had made the most of the situation. When she fell he had been too much concerned to think of anything but her safety, and then, when she broke down, of her comfort. Now, it occurred to him that he might as well make some capital out of his emotions.

"I wasn't thinking much about myself," he said, with a touch of reproachfulness.

Instantly her tone changed. "You were a real brick to me," she said.

Her frankness of comradeship was very disarming. Frank's little scheme perished in a glow of exultation. He had never in all his life, it seemed to him, felt on such good terms with himself. His answer was not less eloquent than her acknowledgment.

"Rot," he said. Then, getting up, "Let's look at your bicycle." He overhauled it, straightened up the handles which had been slewed round, tested the brake again and again. "The beastly thing must have got jammed somehow, and the fall freed it. There seems to be nothing wrong with the machine. And you? Only dust. You'd better let me brush you. That's one of the natural uses of a tweed cap."

Millicent submitted to the operation, and with much laughter they supervised one another's toilette.

"Am I really all right — really and truly? My hair?"

Frank looked at her with half-shut eyes, and adapted a quotation.

"'A fine disorder in the hair
Gives some a most beguiling air.'"

"Oh!" said Millicent; and her hands went up to her temples. "What *am* I to do? Is it very bad? Don't laugh. I forbid you to laugh."

"I don't laugh. I admire. Truly it's all right. You can ask my cousins. But you needn't. If you like, you know, *tace* is the Latin for a candle. I don't see why this regrettable incident should ever have occurred."

She looked at him questioningly, and he explained.

"I can take that bowl back before my cousins come along, I think. Shall I —"

"Fly!" she said.

And when the little phaeton came along the lower road ten minutes later, the Miss Lisles found two young people sitting in great comfort upon a grassy bank.

"Nothing would induce Miss Carteret to move a step further, except under your wing, cousin Selina," said Frank, in explanation. "Now you're come, we'll race the pony."

Nothing need be said about the tennis-party, except that Miss Carteret played croquet persistently with one of the young Irwins. But she allowed Frank to take her to visit the famous sun-dial, and, what is more, she stayed for dinner at Ballinderry, and let him see her home to Margaret's afterwards in the long soft cool northern twilight.

CHAPTER XII

THREE days later the weather had broken. Owen Conroy, back from his tour of inspection and demonstration in the West, had made his way late on a windy afternoon to Margaret's cottage. But Millicent was not there; and at Margaret's answer — that she was out on the lough fishing with Mr. Norman — he felt a sudden stab of pain. His first instinct was to rise and go — to run from this new and horrible sensation. But a heavy pelt of rain had come on just as he reached the house, and Margaret assured him that it must bring the anglers in; looking out of the door she showed him the boat heading up for the river.

" They'll be no time at all now. Mr. Norman's rowing along with Hughie. But, such a day for Miss Carteret to be out in! and her with no cloak or nothing. I must get a fire lit in her room this minute."

And so Margaret ran on, while Owen Conroy sat by the hearth, divided between emotions, unwilling to stay, unwilling to go.

In ten minutes there was a sound of voices in the lane, and Millicent, wrapped from head to foot in Frank Norman's long mackintosh, came bursting in with Frank behind her. Dripping but radiant, her bright hair in wild confusion, she seemed to Conroy, as he sat in the darkness of the chimney corner, to bring with her the spirit of fresh wind and rain.

"Oh, Margaret, I'm so wet; but we've had such a jolly day — and we've caught such a lot of trout. Where are they?" and she turned to Hughie who, laden with rods and baskets, was blocking the light in the doorway.

As he came forward with the fish hanging in the bag of a landing-net, Millicent became aware that Frank was greeting some one, and she turned and saw Conroy.

She shook hands hastily, and at Margaret's bidding disappeared to "take off her." When she emerged she found Frank Norman still sitting by the comfortable fire, drinking Margaret's strong tea from Margaret's large and solid cups, and eating Margaret's best soda-bread, while he talked politics to Owen Conroy. But on Conroy's face Millicent's quick sense detected a cloud that she had not seen before, and it embarrassed her. The three talked together for a little, and Frank, whose perceptions where Millicent was concerned were quick as hers, detected the constraint, and instantly rose.

Jealousy had a small hold on his light-hearted temperament. But, nevertheless, as he rode home through the rain, it seemed to him that his friend had been evidently relieved by his departure. It was true she had said good-bye in the friendliest and most cordial way, but with an air of relief, as if she were grateful to him for going. It was a symptom he did not wholly like. And Conroy — Conroy as a man and a brother was all very well, but decidedly he did not like Conroy in this new aspect. All his class prejudice was roused; and yet through it he felt keenly how strong might be the appeal of such a man to a girl of Millicent's intelligence and habit of mind. The strongest appeal of all — the appeal to her for support and sympathy — he did not understand, but the attraction of power was plain to him. Also, for it was his habit to reflect on his own emotions, he was struck with a new fact. Whether he was falling in love with Millicent Carteret or no, he had left out of consideration; taking thought for the morrow or even for the day was none of his qualities. He had fallen in love before, in the natural course of things, and he had been no ways loath to fall in love again. But now he was conscious of something different. When another personage appeared, the thing uppermost in his mind was not the instinct of competition; it was now a thought for the girl. Whatever he himself might stand for — and he hardly took that into conscious reckoning — Conroy represented a possible mistake. There would be nothing mean about it, Conroy was cast for tragedy; but a tragic blunder was only one degree better than a comedy of collapse.

Altogether he was disturbed in mind, but still sanguine, still confident. And the day had been a good day; even the rain had helped, giving him the chance to wrap Millicent up in his mackintosh.

In the meanwhile, Millicent, blissfully unconscious of these apprehensions, was deep in discussion of technical points over Conroy's drawings.

"There," she said at last, "it's ridiculous of me to criticise. The work is far and away beyond what I could ever attempt. But there are the faults in drawing."

"I see them all," he said. "It's the hand fails — or the knowledge, Miss Carteret. And then it's hard — if you can understand me. It's in a way translating."

And as Millicent plied him with questions, Conroy rose into a long rhapsody over the nature of his visions. He explained to her how he saw them as shapes walking in a world not chequered in light and shade, but bathed in a simpler and more uniform luminosity — how he drew their shapes and outlines, but to suggest contour must invent shadows such as the world sees. And the colour — but of the colour he told her only that no brush of the greatest painter could imitate its vibration, its blending play of tints, when the pulsing life flashed through it like wind on a field of sunlit corn. The colour that he gave was only symbolic, he said, or, at best, answering dimly to the reality, and indicating the nature. For the shapes differed according to their creation — shapes of earth, water, air, and fire.

"And you know, Miss Carteret," he went on, "I see living men and women too that way mainly."

"I know," said Millicent, "Margaret is an earth spirit."

"Yes," he said, "rooted in it like the crops growing in the field. And Mr. Norman, now, he has the shape, in my mind, of running water."

"Unstable water?" asked Millicent, a little reproachfully.

"No, Miss Carteret, that was not my thought, but the water that goes its way with a pleasant noise, and is for ever varying while you watch it. It has the shapes of flame, too, but it makes downwards, and the flame mounts. — It is yourself that has the shape of flame, Miss Carteret," he said, pausing abruptly.

Millicent was taken aback by the sudden turn.

"Flame!" she said. "I don't think I like that. Flame burns — and burns out."

"Not the sun's flame," he answered quickly.

Millicent laughed a little nervously. "Let us be modest in our comparisons," she said. "And yourself, Mr. Conroy — you are surely some cousin to the creatures of the air!"

"No," he said, dropping again into the level unimpassioned tone in which he habitually uttered his strange sayings; "my nature is of the earth."

"Not like Margaret's, surely?" the girl put in.

"Not of the tilled land," he answered. "It is the spirit of the lonely earth that I have in me — of the lonely unforgotten earth," he repeated, as his face and voice began to take on something of the fire of rhapsody. "What is it, will you tell me, Miss Carteret," he went on, after a pause, "that keeps calling and calling our people from the ends of the world, from thriving farms out yonder in Australia and America, back to their desolate windy mountains and coasts here, if it is not the spirits that I see yonder in the hills, and that I know are some way part of myself? They were made living by me and men like me, and the strong life they have in them lasts for ever, bound to the place where it was created. And the boys and girls that went away from them are out yonder, in other lands that have spirits, too, of their own, but spirits that are strangers to our folk; and away there over the sea, they are for ever thinking long for the old grey country." He stopped for a moment, as if following out his own thought. "Sure, there's many a one hears a voice calling and does not know where it calls. Ay, and the ones that call do not know what they are calling on. I tell you, I saw the great steamer for America trailing smoke after her away out beyond Horn Head, with a hundred of the people out from Fanad on her, and all the time these folk" — and he pointed to his drawings — "were passing through the lands, and not a tear in the eye of one of them. No. Whether it was the heart of man, or the heart of God that made them, they live their life and work their work in ignorance: it is the heart of man that suffers — and maybe the heart of God."

There was a kind of far-off thrilling in his voice as he stopped, that was to Millicent infinitely pathetic. It seemed to her to put him beyond human reach of help — almost of sympathy — so strange to her were his thoughts. And yet she was determined that the gulf should not remain unbridged.

"Mr. Conroy," she said very gently, after a moment's silence, "you must be patient with me. You see and you understand what is hidden from me."

"It need not be," he said quickly, "for the veil is thin. I can see that."

"But it is there. I cannot lift it. You were born seeing. You cannot teach what you never learnt. Try and explain."

"Surely," he said, "all I can."

"Why is it, then, that you are born seeing what you say I might possibly learn to see?"

He hesitated for a moment. "The books I have read say it is because the soul that now inhabits me was, in its latest life, much taken up with the things of the spirit, and learnt to see so much that now it sees from the first."

"But what would the books teach me?" she said.

"They would teach you, by constant and earnest endeavour, to see what you desire to see."

"Yes; but don't you understand, Mr. Conroy, these things that you see are strange to me — just as you say the spirits in other lands are strange to the people from here. You want me to change my whole nature."

"No," he said. "I'm not asking you to change it. I would not be the one to bid you do that. It is only to make stronger in it what is strongest — to rise toward your full range of power. Why is it I can speak to you as I never spoke to any one? How is it you understand easily, and see the beauty where another would only see the fancies of a madman? You can guess so much — why should you not learn to know?"

"But, Mr. Conroy," said Millicent, with a little laugh that was half a sob, "I guess nothing. I only listen to what you tell me, and because I like you it is easy to understand. Don't you see, if I were desperately interested in my own thoughts, and in gaining my own knowledge, I should not be so well able to understand."

Conroy looked at her strangely, with the fixed intent gaze that she had seen before, but with a new expression, not of searching, but of contemplation. Millicent grew uneasy under it.

"Don't you think that's true?" she asked, wishing to break the tension.

He gave a kind of start, and his face changed. "True. It's God's truth. I was the one that did not understand. 'Tis as if I would ask the sunshine to change itself into that other light I was telling you of. The earth needs the sunshine, Miss Carteret. I see that now."

Here was indeed a change. Millicent had listened before like a disciple, but now the teacher had suddenly become a man and she a woman. There was a whimsical sense of relief mingled with her embarrassment. At least, she knew where she was standing — on the common level of humanity. But what to do or say was not plain to her. "The earth needs it." She could not forget his identification of himself with the earth. And yet to accept that sense of his saying was to transform it into a sort of claim on her. If she chose to treat it as a mere compliment, she had always to hand the defence of laughter; but when the man's soul lay bare before her, displayed with the rare unreserve of primitive natures, she could not wound him. She took the simplest way — accepting the phrase just as it was spoken, and trying to shift the talk to less personal issues.

"Thank you — for the sunshine," she said, with a little laugh. "But tell me, Mr. Conroy. Some of these are pictures of living people, aren't they? Why do you make them look like the others?"

"I can't draw things unless I see them that way — on the other plane, as the books call it."

"Well, then, what is it you see? The souls of these people?"

Conroy slightly wrinkled his smooth high forehead.

"No, Miss Carteret, I couldn't say that. These are themselves — only as I see them on the plane where thought has a shape to the eye, and can move the matter it is embodied in."

"Then, when you see the people like that you can see their thoughts?"

"I can see what they are," he answered, "and the thought is only a form of themselves."

"And can you make them think what you want them to think? Can you will them to think it?"

"I've never tried, Miss Carteret," he answered almost brusquely. "It would be what I have no right to do."

But she was interested — she touched the question of power so fascinating to women.

"Then you think you could have the power, but it would be wrong to use it."

"I am very sure it would be wrong," said Conroy. "Are there not snares and delusions enough on our own path without taking on us the snare of a power like that?"

He spoke with a tremendous emphasis, as a reclaimed drunkard might speak of the power of drink. Millicent leant forward quickly in her chair. It seemed to him that here was a new glimpse into this baffling nature.

"Mr. Conroy, were you never ambitious?"

"Maybe I was," he answered; "but the other things in me were stronger."

He put his face in his hands for an instant, then raised it to look at her, and there were signs on it of a struggle that she had never seen before on that passive repose.

"Isn't peace and the joy of the spirit more than all the world?" he said solemnly, but with the accent of one who desires to convince not so much his hearer as himself.

A thought rose up in Millicent's brain that she would not have put into words. But as the question formed itself within her the exaltation died out of his face.

"Ay, what do I know of the world?" he said as if in answer to it. And he dropped his face into his hands with a deep sigh. "What do I know of the world?" he repeated, looking up at her face with eyes that shone wildly out of the grey face propped on his elbows.

Millicent was horrified and a little frightened to feel her thought snatched from her. And for the first time she guessed that she might have loosed forces that she could not control. But she took her courage in both hands with an odd sensation as if the movements of her mind were visible, and must make a brave show. She felt herself responsible, yet she was too young not to exult in responsibility.

"If you mean the life of big towns," she said, "I dare say you know nothing of it. I know this, that you could gain there perhaps a little reputation, perhaps a great one; and I know what it would cost you in heartburning. The joy of the spirit would be gone then, Mr. Conroy. And now, shall I tell you one thing?" she said, rising to her feet. "I have lived in what they call the world, and I have seen plenty of people, and none of them seemed so far above me as you yourself. It is an honour to me when you come to see me. Will you come again?"

And she held out her hand to him, her eyes shining with all the candour of admiration. The presence of this strange creature raised her to her highest level, and the gesture of friendship was a queen's gesture of dismissal to a great noble — the crowning act of courtesy in one secure of her prerogative.

Conroy rose a little awkwardly, took her hand, grasped it till the slender fingers ached, stumbled out of the room in a bewildered way, and was gone.

Millicent was looking out of the window, and seeing nothing, with many phrases of the talk reframing themselves anew in her mind, intent in thought upon the strange interview, when Margaret's voice made itself heard.

"Isn't thon the quare man, miss? What was he talking about in the world all this long time? He lifted his cap off the table thonder and away, and not a word out of him. It's the quare man he is surely."

Millicent came to herself with a jump. "Yes, Margaret, he's a queer man, and it's a queer world. I think I'm hungry. Is dinner ready?"

CHAPTER XIII

"WHAT are the dogs barking at that way at all, Hughie? It must surely be some stranger that's feared to come forward."

Hughie rose from the deal table in the dark corner, where he and John were sitting at their afternoon meal.

As he reached the door he uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"It's the old woman that Owen Conroy lives with. Down, Toby; be quiet, will you?" he shouted as he disappeared out of the door.

"Ellen Dooey!" said John. "What on the earth will the ould witch be coming after? Sure she never stirs out of the house."

But Margaret was gone to the door to receive her visitor.

"Is that you, Ellen? 'Tis seldom you get this length. Come forward to the fire."

A huddled-up shape entered, a woman with that look of extreme age which comes early in cold, damp climates where rheumatic pains soon bend the back and stiffen the joints. A grey plaid shawl was over her head, and her clothes were vague and dark. She took her seat on the form that ran along the wall between door and window without a word, except a muttered "God save you." Margaret busied herself to get a cup of tea for her, and the young men rose and went about their work. The old woman seemed tongue-tied; but Margaret in her preparations took no notice till she had provided the tea, and then, plumping down in her accustomed chair, began the conversation.

"'Tis bad weather for the crops."

"'Tis that."

"This rain will be apt to bring the blight."

"Ay, troth."

"Mr. Conroy was telling me he seen it away on the Carrick side. Is he with you yet?"

At the mention of his name the old woman seemed stirred to a vague activity. She fumbled in the folds of her dress.

"He's away to Fanad the day. There's a letter he bid me send."

Margaret took it with some surprise. "'Tis for Miss Carteret. She's away out at the painting, now. Was he wanting an answer?"

"Not a one of me knows."

"Sure," said Margaret, "he be to want an answer or he wouldn't be making you travel all this way with it."

The old woman was silent for a minute before she spoke again, nervously.

"He went away suddent like. There was a telegraph came for him; and he wrote the note and bid me send it down."

"An' could you not get one that was passing the door to take it?" said Margaret, in wonder.

The old woman was silent for a while, and she looked intently at the door into Millicent's room.

"Is it in there she stays?" she asked mysteriously.

"Surely," Margaret answered.

"An' she's not in the house?"

"She's out at the painting, I'm telling you."

Ellen Dooey seemed to struggle with herself and finally to make a great effort. She rose up and she moved to the creepie-stool beside Margaret's chair and laid her hand on Margaret's knee.

"Tell me, now, Margaret, what sort of a young lady is she at all?"

"As nice a young lady as ever you seen," answered Margaret.

Again the old woman paused before she spoke. "Isn't it the quare thing for her to be coming over here by herself — a young girl, and no one with her?"

"Well, and if she does," answered Margaret, "'tis for no harm, anyway. An' mind you, Ellen Dooey, she knew well where she was coming when she came here, for didn't Captain Duncombe write to me about her? An' I think them that found fault with her would have little to do. Sure we have our notions, and the quality has theirs. She's well respected in this house anyway, Ellen Dooey, you may know that."

The old woman was reduced to silence by Margaret's indignant championship. Then she muttered to herself a few words in Gaelic. Margaret fairly leapt at her.

"What's them words you're saying? Is it coming here you are to put spells on them that's in my house? Here, Toby! Here, Fly! Be off with you out of this, or I'll put the dogs on you."

Instead of moving, Ellen Dooey bent herself forward as she stood, and began to cry and wail.

"Och! och! dear God! Och! och! to hear that!"

Margaret was touched with pity for her, and partly with fear.

"Be quiet, then, Ellen woman. I was too quick. Sure I know Father Doyle says there's no truth in it. But what is it at all at all? Speak out and tell me. Sure you know yourself there's still the talk in the country that you and Owen Conroy aren't like the rest of us."

The old woman still bowed and rocked herself; but words began to come slowly.

"May the blessing of all the saints be on you, then, Margaret Coyle. Sure, I'm nothing but a poor old woman, and if himself has power or not, 'tis not I that know it, and 'tis the power of goodness anyway. But there's trouble on him, Margaret, and it's changed he is. An' the people on Sunday did be taunting me, and that big girl of Quinlan's, that would be glad to get him for herself, came up, and, says she, 'So it's among the quality that Owen Conroy's coortin'. The likes of us wasn't good enough for him. Runnin' after ladies, he is. But isn't it the queer lady that would look at the likes of him,' says she. 'A lady!' she says; and she let a laugh out of her."

Margaret was red with indignation. "Let her come and laugh to me. I'll learn her manners, the ugly lump. Och, Ellen, I don't know what to say to you. 'Tis a great hardship to have a talk raised about you. But sure, there's no sense at all in that kind of talk. Still and all, you might speak to Mr. Conroy, and bid him not be coming."

"Is it speak to him? You don't know the sort of him, Margaret. I would sooner speak to the priest at the altar."

"Ay, he's the strange man," said Margaret. "Sure the last day he was here — 'tisn't that often he's been here — he sat in by the fire, talking to me and Miss Carteret about the bees and the ways of them, and it was a fair wonder to listen to him. 'Tis he has the gift, then! And her taking him up and putting questions to him — it was a wonder to hear them. And indeed now, Ellen, before that I would be wondering to myself what she would want with talking to him, but, says I to myself, 'tis no wonder any lady or gentleman would be for listening to a man that spoke like thon."

The old woman only rocked herself and wailed, "Och! och! the poor lad."

Margaret was perplexed. "Sure if Mr. Conroy hears there's talk about him, he'll quet coming," she said.

Ellen stretched out her hand again to Margaret's knee.

"Woman dear, the talk's bad, but it's worse nor that. It's like a sickness on him. Sure, till he seen her, it was always the one way with him; he would be at the reading or the drawing, or still sitting looking out in front of him, and his face that happy. An' now he'll scarcely touch meat or drink — and 'twas little enough he took any time — and never a book in his hand, but him walking up and down half the night, or sitting staring into the fire and stirring it to make a blaze. I saw him the other night throwing sticks on it, and looking and looking till the eyes were red in his head — and the Lord knows what he was looking to see there. An' another thing, Margaret dear, the way he was before he would always be drawing and drawing — "

"Ay," said Margaret, "sure it was to bring his drawings to show her he came first."

"Well, mind you, now, whatever he'd draw he'd just leave it lying there, or maybe stuck up against the wall, and Father Doyle was quarely against him for drawing the like, for, says he, 'Them's no Christian figures.' But now he'll draw for a while, and then tear the whole, or burn it, and not let you see a sight. But sure one night he got up in the middle of it and left the papers, and I slipped in, and all he was drawing was a hand; and it was like a woman's hand, Margaret — very fine in the fingers, wee tapering fingers and soft-looking."

"Ay," said Margaret, reflectively, "her hands is wonderful wee and soft."

Ellen Dooey began to sob and rock herself again. "Och! och! why did she ever come here? Why could she not keep to herself and her own kind?"

But Margaret's partisanship was roused. "Keep to herself, woman! Sure, what would ye be thinking? Do ye tell me that Owen Conroy, learned man and all he is, would even the likes of himself to her? It would never enter the mind of her to think on such foolishness. It's looking to see her married on young Mr. Norman, I am, one of these days; him and her's terrible great. But Owen Conroy, that was your sister's son! — I'll tell you what you'll do, Ellen Dooey. Stay just the way you are till she comes in herself, and ye see her sitting there as simple, and talking as friendly as any of us, and the grand way with her the whole time; and then go home and tell Owen Conroy if she's for him. Not a word would I say against him, for he's a learned man and skilful, and they say he has power over things and over folk; but, Ellen, thon young lady's clean beyond him."

CHAPTER XIV

DAYS were running smoothly with Millicent now. Conroy had come again, bringing Margaret's hive, and talk had followed naturally and easily on that subject, but this time, as has been seen already, including Margaret. And, if Millicent detected now and then that strange look of inner vision in his face, it made her less uneasy; Margaret's presence was a good conductor to draw off the surcharge of magnetism in the air. And on the other days she had worked with great industry, once refusing to be beguiled on to the lake with Frank, and only appearing for a brief moment by the river bank to scoff at his empty-handed return. He took the hint and kept away, and Millicent was not more than half grateful. She knew vaguely how much pleasure it gave her to see his face light up when they met. Finally, she grew restless, and, a fine morning coming, she set out on her bicycle, aiming to make a circuit of the lake.

Frank, for his part, was undisguisedly discontented. Fishing days came and went, the river was low, and he reasoned with himself that it was perfectly unreasonable to keep away from Lough Drummond. It was four afternoons now since he had seen her even for that little minute. Margaret's boats were for hire; why should he not hire them? Under ordinary circumstances, he told himself, he would have been on the lough every day in the week. Nothing kept him away but this absurd over-sensitiveness. He did not like to go without asking her to join him; he did not like to seem to force his company upon her.

Finally, on the fifth day, fishing was out of the question; he plainly had no excuse. Uneasy in himself, after lounging through the forenoon, he set out on his bicycle, and took automatically the direction of Lough Drummond. He passed the first bridge and held on the road, meditating in himself. There was no reason at least why he should not pass Margaret's door and make an errand to Killydonnell. But when he came to the branching of the road, where it turned to the left for the long circular sweep through bog-land to the fringe of the lake, he swore at himself for a fool. Was he to go hanging about on chance of a glimpse of the girl? She would only laugh if she saw him. He swerved to the right, crossed the river by another bridge, and the road took him by a straight, sharp rise to the foot of a long ascent slanting up the side of the hill.

Just at the bend a decrepit-looking old woman was shouldering, with an effort, a sack that lay on the ground. Frank, who had jumped off at the rise, was touched with the dumb resignation of her gesture, and he stopped beside her, exchanging greetings.

" What had she there ? " he asked.

" Just a wheen potaties they gave me down by there in the town."

She did not ask him for anything. Except where the tourist frequents, those who live on charity in Ireland seldom ask it by the wayside or of strangers. They beg, or rather they collect alms, from houses where they are known : here and there a sixpence from the gentlefolks ; but odds and ends of food from the poor, and the poor are their main dependence.

" Is it far off you live ? "

" I'm the widdy McCormick, your honour, out of Ballylough."

Frank knew the group of houses about a mile further up the hill.

" That's a heavy sack you have with you ? "

" 'Deed then, it is. May the blessing be on them that filled it for me."

" Well," said Frank, " it will be handier taking it on wheels. I'll leave you up as far as Ballylough."

He balanced the sack on his saddle amid the old woman's protestations, and began to push the machine up, talking the invariable countryside talk — the crops, the bad weather, the hard times. But at the next bend of the road a figure came in sight — a girl sailing swiftly down the hill on her bicycle. Frank had time to grow shame-faced, and wonder if he looked a fool, and to curse his luck, before she shot past him with a wave of her hand and a word of greeting.

Here was the meeting he had hoped against hope for, and it found him tied and bound to an old woman and a sack of potatoes. And the old woman was continually overwhelming with thanks, and imploring him not to trouble himself further. Why should he go on, he was asking himself. It was only a sort of superstition; but the superstition refused to yield to his reasonings. And so he crawled obdurately on, keeping to the old woman's snail-pace, while he pictured every instant the girl's swift flight away from him. It was five minutes to the top of the hill — five minutes that seemed an hour. Millicent, with the hill and the level road beyond, must be a good half of the way to Margaret's. To pursue was absurd — imbecile, ridiculous.

So he reasoned till the cottage came in sight. Then he laid the sack down outside the door of the old woman's house, put a shilling into her hand, and, to her blank amazement, turned his machine down the hill again, and was out of earshot of her voluble blessings in a second.

The hedges were a streak of green as the wheels spun and the pedals whirled; the intoxication of pace possessed him while he reckoned in his mind each furlong before him of the well-known road. She must be somewhere on the circling sweep; but was she this side of the bog or the other? There was a patch full of common loose-strife and meadow-sweet. Last time he had been at Margaret's the house was full of the mingled spikes and clusters. Perhaps she might have stopped to gather more to-day. If so —

Then, as he shot madly round the last corner, and swung over to counteract the bend, the bridge was before him, and there, standing peacefully on it and looking at the water, was a girl in a white blouse and blue skirt.

The twenty yards of steep drop sent him past her like a hurricane, the machine leaping under him at the hog-back of the bridge, and the devil which gets into the body of a bicycle that has been allowed to get out of hand downhill, took him a hundred yards before it was subdued, and he could wheel and come back, feeling that his weaknesses were all discovered.

"Well! For a person who preaches caution to me!" said Millicent, nodding her head at him. "You climb up hills simply to have the fun of going down them. And you won't let me. I came down that hill with all sorts of good advice in my head.

But in future I'm going to follow your example."

"Oh," said Frank, vaguely, "it's different when you know the roads." Then, after a moment's pause, "Besides, you know, I don't defend that example. Only, I was rather in a hurry."

"Were you? Were you thinking you would be late for afternoon tea? You seemed to have plenty of time to spare just now. But if you are in a hurry, don't let me keep you."

"I'm not in a hurry — now," said Frank, with a laugh, looking at her.

She looked back and laughed too. "You ridiculous person. If you wanted to see me, why didn't you tell me to stop. I believe you were afraid of being laughed at."

"I believe I was," said Frank. "Anyhow, I was afraid."

"Well, you needn't be. You shan't be laughed at. Come here and look at the little fishes. I saw quite a big one just now. Look — there he is."

Frank stared over into the clear brown water, lightly rippled by the break below some large stones, and full of waving weeds.

"I see," he said. "What will you bet me I don't catch him? I have my rod."

"Box of cigarettes," returned Millicent, promptly.

"Has Margaret found you out yet?" he questioned.

"Oh, I hope not. Hughie did the other day, when I was out sketching; but I swore him to secrecy. I don't believe Margaret would mind now, though; she's got used to me."

"Well, you can smoke a cigarette now, while I'm putting up the rod," said Frank; "and it's more comfortable in here."

They went into the field above the bridge, Frank a little desirous to show off his skill, but chiefly concerned for a pretext to keep Millicent with him. The rod was got ready, the finest cast put up, and Frank, using infinite precautions to screen himself, got to the water, and in a couple of casts covered the eddy where the trout was lying, and where the shadow of the bridge defeated the sun's glare. He was justified of his faith. There was a rise, and he had hooked the trout; and in a few minutes it was being drawn cautiously into a little creek in the bank.

"There," he said, "would you like to try? It's bright, but this is a first-rate piece of water just above. Let's go up and fish it down."

Millicent, fired with emulation, was nothing loath; but though she fished the broad, sunshiny stretch of swirling water with the best of her will and skill, it produced nothing but two or three tiny fingerlings, which were jerked out summarily and restored to think over their folly.

"Oh, I give it up," she said at last.

"Let's sit down," Frank suggested; "there might be a cloud up presently. Tell me what you've been doing. Is the portrait of Margaret getting on?"

"No," said Millicent, as she settled herself on a slope of the bank; "but there was a wonderful old creature who came in the other night. She wouldn't talk, but she sat in the corner, and she glowered out of the dark in an uncanny sort of way. Ellen Dooey was her name, Margaret said; but when I wanted her to ask the woman if she would sit, Margaret didn't seem to take to the notion."

"Ellen Dooey? Why, that's the old woman who keeps house for Conroy."

"Does she?" said Millicent, looking a little puzzled. "Of course; she brought a note from Mr. Conroy. But how extraordinary of Margaret not to tell me."

"I think I know why," Frank answered. "Most likely she was afraid you would ask Conroy to get her to sit, and she doesn't want Ellen about the house."

"But why not?" the girl asked.

"Because she thinks she's a witch."

"Oh, but I must get her, then. Of course she's a witch. She looks it, all over. It would be simply splendid. Who on earth is she?"

"She's Conroy's aunt."

Millicent was struck dumb for an instant. "What do you mean?" she said. "That old woman — Mr. Conroy's aunt! But you said she was his servant. Why, there's a whole world between them."

"She was his mother's sister," Frank answered.

"And I might have offered her half a crown, and thought I was doing her a kindness. Good heavens! What a blessing Margaret stopped me! I suppose she thought I would feel awkward if she explained."

"I don't think it was that," said Frank.

"But, of course, it was that. Why, how stupid you are! Don't you see! Mr. Conroy is my friend, and he's a genius — he's miles above people like you and me — and this woman is his near relation. If I'd offered her money, I could simply never have looked him in the face again."

"I see," said Frank. But his heart was sore in him, and he thought he saw far more than he desired to see. "You know," he went on, "I told you Conroy was a peasant."

"Yes, yes. But one doesn't realize. He seemed so different from all of them — unlike anybody here or anywhere else. It was as if he had sprung out of the ground."

"That old woman was his mother's sister," said Frank, doggedly. He was determined to drive the facts home, anyhow.

Millicent gave a sort of shudder. "Why," she said, "she wasn't even clean." Then she turned sharply on Frank. "Is Mr. Conroy ashamed of her?"

It seemed to him more and more evident that only one cause could account for this eagerness, and he cursed inwardly the day when he had ever mentioned Conroy's name to her.

"No," he said, ungraciously enough, "not that I know of. I never saw him show any signs of thinking about it either way. He told me once that he got most of his knowledge of the old stories and folk-lore from her and from his mother."

"That's very fine of him," said Millicent.

There was silence between them for a while, and she was too much absorbed in her own thoughts to notice the constraint of Frank's manner.

"Go on telling me," she said at last. "What's this story about her being a witch?"

"A pack of nonsense. She and Conroy came when he settled here, and she speaks Irish mostly. They all about here have a notion that the Gaelic speakers and the 'mountainy people' are apt to have queer ways. So far as I heard, Ellen Dooey had a quarrel with another woman, and lost her temper, and scolded her in Irish; and the woman was sure she was bewitched, and a few days after her butter wouldn't come in the churn, so she blamed it on Ellen. And Conroy heard this, and went down, and found the cow was sick and gave her something, and after that there was no more bother with the milk. So the end was that he got the name of being a good witch and she of being a bad one. And of course the people like Margaret partly believe and partly disbelieve, but at the bottom of their hearts they all believe in all these things. And you know," he said, with a laugh that made an effort after indifference, " when you see Conroy handling a lump of bees as if they were so much brown sugar it does look like magic."

But Millicent took no notice of his tone. She was deep in thought, and her eyes were far away.

" Poor Mr. Conroy," she said at last; " it must be dreadful to be isolated like that."

" I never saw anything to pity in Conroy," he answered brusquely. " He always seemed to me as contented as a Sister of Mercy."

There was nothing in the words to take hold of, but Millicent felt the note of hostility, and she was quick to resent it. Her admiration for Conroy would have made her his champion in any case; but it was not only that. She felt in him the pride of a discoverer, that keen partisanship known to all who love the arts for some unacknowledged talent, and the partisanship was made into a closer loyalty by his undisguised worship of herself as a woman — as a comrade more sympathetic than a man could be. Just because she admitted to herself nothing but comradeship on either side, she was the more emphatic in his defence. Comradeship was nothing that should be concealed.

And at the back of her mind, unacknowledged, lay a revolt against the challenge that was unspoken in the young man's words but discovered in his tone. He had no right to resent her friendship.

"I don't think you understand Mr. Conroy," she answered stiffly. "Your comparison shows that."

As she spoke, she watched covertly a look of pain pass across his face, and a pain in her own heart answered it. She was angry with herself. Why should she be sorry because he was absurd, she thought. And with her revolt against the pain came a definite impulse to wound, that increased as his features set themselves to an assumed composure.

He shrugged his shoulders and that made her angrier; and his words completed the offence.

"I dare say I have not given him so much thought as you have."

For all his show of indifference, it was spoken awkwardly, in a tone that she was entitled to declare war upon. She sat up straight, alert, tense, combatant.

"What is it that you mean? I don't like people to hint things."

He, as he lay stretched on the turf, avoided her eyes, and his fingers tore nervously at a clump of rushes.

"If you like to force a meaning you can. I mean that I am glad you have seen that old woman — Ellen Dooey. It will help you to realize the existence of natural barriers."

A gust of rage swept up in Millicent. She hated him for saying this. It was not only that she resented the implied warning as an interference quite unjustified; it was the thing said, the point of view, that seemed to her wholly unworthy. And yet, even in her anger, she did not accuse him to herself of using unfair weapons; she guessed at a genuine anxiety for her. But the whole assumption was one that she detested — this application of a narrow conventional standard. She had thought better of him, she said to herself, and she was not going to conceal her displeasure.

"The only barriers that I admit are in people themselves," she said. "And you are helping me to realize how very difficult it is for me to be friends with you."

She got up as she spoke, and Frank rose also. He was perfectly silent. The sun was bright still, and the river flashed in it, running with its pleasant noise towards the shadow of the bridge, and out of it to the race beyond; but the day was changed for them to the blackness of east wind in March.

She was angry with him because he did not speak; it was as if his offending continued. She wished he would speak; she did not want him to go away like that. When they had reached the bridge, and he had pushed her bicycle through the gap into the road, he spoke at last in a voice of formal constraint.

"I beg your pardon. I ought not to have said that. I see I was stupid."

But the stiffness of his tone made her rigid.

"I'm not angry — only sorry. Good-bye."

She was mounting her bicycle when he stopped her, putting his hand on the machine.

"Wait," he said, in a choked voice. "Ah, wait."

Something in her told her that the strain was near breaking-point, and her courage failed.

"No; I can't talk any more. Not to-day. Good-bye. It doesn't matter, really."

She was gone, leaving him lugubrious; in his hand still the poor little trout that Millicent had promised to eat for her supper. It was all stiff now, sun-baked, and ugly; an hour ago it had been glossy, supple, and many-coloured when he drew it from the water. Things changed fast. The world was black in his eyes. Whether she cared for Conroy or no he could not tell; but it was plain he had offended beyond forgiving.

And still in her last words there had lingered some heart of hope. "Not to-day," she had said.

Before he had left the bridge, Millicent was back in her little room, and had thrown herself on the bed, and cried, cried, and cried.

He had been hateful, she told herself. She was angry with him still. But she — what was it in her that made her so cruel to him? She hated giving pain, and yet him she could not resist hurting. The only thing she regretted — the only thing that she would have had otherwise — was that at the end she had not kept up her tone. He might have thought she was sorry for what she had said; it would be dreadful if he thought that. He had apologized formally — she had formally accepted his apology. So it should have ended.

But further down in her heart another voice was speaking. He, too, had broken the constraint. "Wait," he had said; "ah wait!" And she had not waited. She wondered what he was going to say. Would he ever say it? And what must she say, if *that* were what he said?

So she tossed about, this untamed creature, hearing sharp in her ears the girlish cry of revolt, that was half pride, half shyness, or wholly love of freedom; yet, vaguely beyond and below that, discerning the voice of her womanhood that cried to her to achieve her life's end by surrender: quick to be offended by anything or nothing in the man to whom her heart, in spite of her, as she knew already, would forgive all.

CHAPTER XV

But Frank, as is the way of nature, had no glimpse of what allies fought for him. He was plunged deep in misery — the extravagant misery of youth. He spent long hours over sheets of paper trying to defend, to justify, to excuse himself. But the more he tried, the more difficult it seemed to do any of these things without renewing the offence. "If I thought that what you are doing would be for your happiness, I would not consider myself." That was either too much or too little. It was better to say all.

And so he determined to say all. It was a solace to pour out his heart into the passionate words that would not come from his lips. He asked for nothing: he only spoke out.

"You are all this to me, and so much more," he wrote, "and even if it means nothing to you to hear it, still you shall hear."

And so, having unburdened his soul, he slept. But with the morning came reflection. He would send this letter; she would answer it. If what he feared was true, there was an end of everything. He could not see her again to have free speech with her. Living, as she was, by herself, he could not importune her with entreaties. It was too high a stake. If he went otherwise to work, Fate might allow him at worst a few more hours of the sunshine. He burnt the letter, and wrote simply: —

"Will you forgive me? I ought not to have said that. May I come and see you again?"

He addressed the letter — but how to send it? He could not take it himself; if it came by a messenger, Margaret would know and wonder. But if he left it to the post — this was Saturday morning. She would get it on Sunday; and he would receive at soonest on Monday the answer that a couple of hours could bring.

Half of that day went in debating the question, and formality prevailed. The letter went by post, and there was Sunday to be lived through.

Not wishing to entrust it to the Ballinderry post-bag, and face inevitable comment, Frank made his way to the neighbouring post-town. There, placards announced a meeting of the latest agrarian league, to be held the following day, after mass, at Ardcolumb. A version of the announcement in Gaelic testified to the growth of a new propaganda. Frank, at all times interested in Irish politics, now welcomed a chance to kill the hours.

And so, the next morning found him on his way to the lovely group of lakes from whence, ten miles above Lough Drummond, the Owenbeg had its rise. Heading away from Margaret's cottage, and its inmate, he struck the valley far up among the hills, and followed up long curving gradients, while below, on his right, the river dashed and leapt down precipitous channels. Now he was at the valley head, and thick belts of trees showed the sheltered hollow in the mountains, and presently the first and largest lake was in sight, studded with many islands. Not here was the meeting-place. He followed a road thronged by many peasants in their Sunday clothes, and passed another loop of river joining the great lough to a little tarn ringed about with feathery reeds, and starry with water-lilies white and yellow. Then up again, climbing the steep rise of road on to a hillside, green but scant of trees, to where above the third and highest of the lakes the crowd streamed, gathering thick about an old ruin. It was the ruin of a church, tiny, but strong built, and of immemorial sanctity. For here had been born the greatest, after Patrick, of Irish saints — Columba, the " dove of the churches," whose coming Patrick had foretold, and left to him the preaching of the gospel in Tyrconnell. Here he had been born, and here, in after days, he had built the chapel. It was a place of pilgrimage, consecrated by many traditions; a place of memories and of the dead. Fenced by a wall, just above the ruined chapel, was a graveyard — common resting-place of all in that countryside. The ground rose so steeply that nearly all the enclosure was visible from below; and, within it for a central figure, standing on a great tombstone, was the orator of the day. His audience — some hundreds of them — were grouped inside round the gravestone and downwards to the wall, and outside again on the little knoll on which the remnant of the chapel perched itself. Frank recognized the speaker — one whose face and name were known through the length and breadth of Ireland. But, at the same instant, he recognized a figure of far other concern to him — a tall girl, on the outskirts of the crowd, leaning against the chapel wall.

He hesitated a moment, then went up to her, raising his hat. She started and flushed, but the look in her face reassured him. Joy was in his heart, but his words came formally.

"I did not think of finding you here."

"So he had not gone to look for me at Margaret's," Millicent inferred within herself. "And I had thought he had come after me." After that she was not going to make things too easy for him.

"Naturally," was all she answered, in a very non-committal tone. Should she let him see that she was glad to see him? That must depend.

His eyes scrutinized her face a moment, then turned away in embarrassment.

"Did you get my letter?"

She nodded, with an enigmatic meaning in her eyes.

"Is it all right? You aren't angry with me for turning up here?"

She gave him her frankest smile. "I'm very glad," she almost whispered. Then, hurriedly, "Don't talk any more; I want to listen. Isn't he wonderful?"

And, indeed, the speaker, always eloquent, was that day, in these surroundings, and in all the fervour of a rising propaganda, at his very finest. He was telling them of the progress of the movement and its onward sweep; how, in all mortal things, there was the ebb and the flow, the rush and the recoil of the wave; how, wave after wave, the national cause through a century had swept forward, and wave after wave spent itself, yet each attained some foot of ground. The tide was always rising, he said, and at the last the limit would be reached, the barrier would be overwhelmed. And the new wave that was gathering, drawing them into itself, the wave that they helped to swell, was a greater, fiercer, and stronger wave than any that had gone before it; let them add every man his single impetus, and surely before the surge was spent they would have swept all before them.

"They have all said that," said Frank in an aside to Millicent.

"What matter?" she answered, in her excitement. "They go on."

She was new to such speaking, to the easy fluency, the dexterous management of voice, so unlike the hemming and stumbling of most English addresses; and at the end, the tremendous rolling period with which the orator closed fairly carried her off her feet.

But the next speaker was of a very different order, and he wearied her with his array of figures, rents and prices, his statistics of valuations, land-court decisions, and law costs; and her attention turned to the audience, who followed so keenly, catching up and applauding every point.

A few women, with their shawled heads, grouped near about the chapel, alone broke the monotony of colour; the men were all black or grey coated, dark haired for the most part, tall, gaunt, and high cheekboned; melancholy faces, with downward lines drawn heavily on cheek and temple. And as Millicent looked at their faces and figures, she began to realize that, with the difference of a little better nourishment, a little less manual labour, here was the type on which Owen Conroy had been moulded. His father must have been such a one. As for his mother, the slight girl who stood near her, graceful now and even pretty in the freshness of her complexion, was yet surely destined to turn hard-featured and weather-beaten, like the rest; and perhaps in the end, when time had done its work, to be such another crone as Ellen Dooey.

The second speaker ended.

"I'm so glad," said Millicent. "I hated him."

"They were to have some one to speak in Gaelic," said Frank; "probably that will be the next turn. No; it's McManus again."

The orator was on the grey slab of granite again.

"They say we in Ireland have too long memories. I do not think it; but anyway, one thing we have nearly forgotten — the tongue of our fathers. It was strange to myself in my childhood, and I am not rightly skilful with it yet. But there are those of you here, and many of you, that have spoken no other in your homes, and it is time that we spoke to you in the language of your hearts."

Cheers had broken in again and again on his words — wild acclamations in Gaelic. And as he ended with a sentence or two in that tongue, the crowd at his feet parted, and he gave his hand to a man coming out from the inner side of the wall, who sprang up upon the stone. It was Conroy.

Frank turned sick at heart. So this was why she had come. "Did you come with him?" was on the tip of his tongue.

But Millicent looked at him, her eyes dancing with laughter.

"This is a day of surprises. Do you think Margaret is sitting somewhere round that corner, and is Colonel Lisle going to speak next?"

Frank's face cleared instantly. "I'll answer for the colonel. I didn't venture to break it to him that I was coming here."

The speech began, slowly and in level utterance, listened to in silence.

"I wish I understood," whispered Millicent.

"So do I," said Frank. "It's a fine tongue to speak in. Aren't the vowels splendid?"

Conroy's face, grey and impassive as the granite, was in strange contrast to those that they had seen before. But his voice had a ringing quality, and Frank realized, as he listened, the reserve both of emphasis and gesture. The audience followed him in deep attention, as if at a religious rite; but now and then a guttural note of assent from one of the mountain men broke in upon the measured words. Gradually the voice took tones that Frank had never heard in it, but Millicent recognized them. Conroy's eyes ranged over the audience, as he began to gain command of it. Then a sudden alteration passed over his face; he hesitated and stumbled for a moment.

"He sees you," Frank muttered.

The face relapsed into its impassivity, like a mask, but the voice took on fresh range of tone. The words came, not quick and quicker, but slower, more emphatic, detaching themselves. A woman began to weep audibly.

"Oh, I wish I understood!" said Millicent.

But Frank's ear caught the repetition of a word. "Eithne — he is telling them about the stone of Eithne. Yes, he is pointing it out to them."

"What stone? Tell me, quick. Oh, why can't I understand?"

As she spoke, Conroy ended. There was a dead hush. He made as if to leap down; but a voice cried from the edge of the crowd —

"Spake it again. Spake to the rest of us."

"There isn't one in four who understands," whispered Frank, "and yet they know how well he was speaking. It's their instinct for the art."

Conroy checked his motion. He raised his hand to his forehead as if making an effort of memory for the transition to another language. Then he faced the crowd, drawing himself to his height, with a peculiar look on his face — the inward laughter of triumph.

"Well, then, I will speak to you — to you that have forgotten. You have forgotten the tongue Columbkille spoke in. Do you mind the tale of his birth? Do you mind the name of his mother?"

"Ay, we do that. Eithne, Eithne!" many voices answered.

"And you know the stone down yonder where the marks are of Eithne, that she left with her knees in the sore labour? And you know the story they have out on it, that whatever man sleeps on the stone of Eithne the night before he goes from home, will never think long for the country and the ones he left behind. You have heard tell of that?"

"We have then, Owen," voices cried to him.

The grey face relaxed a little. The inward smile stole outward.

"Well, then, I will tell you this that I was telling them in the old language. That story is none of the old stories. It is a foolish tale invented in the sorrow of men's hearts for a little consolation, when they began to leave the old country and go away across the black sea, and when they had the fear before their minds of the long ache that would be in their hearts, and they thinking long in America."

His voice took a sudden leap of passion.

"There is no truth in it. Neither Columbkille nor Eithne had the will to lay such power on any stone. And I will tell you this. There is neither rock nor stone, sod nor herb, running river nor well water in all this country that has power to put you past thinking long when you leave it. There is neither rock nor stone, sod nor herb, running river nor well water in all this country but has the power to add an ache and a desire of itself to the hearts of its own people — to your sons and your daughters, your brothers and your sisters that are away out yonder, over the sea."

Millicent could feel in her flesh the thrill that ran through the listeners; it did not need the sobbing of women to tell her that the silent audience was shaken by the notes of his voice as he uttered his descant on the central theme of Irish emotion. The pause was barely of an instant, yet it seemed long before he went on.

"The land and the people are one. They are the best of the life in its veins. When they die and return to it, the land has no sorrow; but when they cross the seas and leave, the land aches for them and sends out its sorrow to them in the far ends of the earth. And why not? When they go, do others come and fill their places? What is it we have seen over there?" — and with a great gesture he pointed across the mountain that rose behind the graveyard.

An angry murmur ran through the crowd.

"That was where the great evictions were!" Frank whispered.

"We have seen fields that once grew good corn and potatoes slipping back into sour grass and rushes, and three sheep feeding where a family of men and women lived."

"'Tis the true word! 'Tis God's truth he's speaking," came from the crowd.

"Ay, and they will tell you that it is best it should be that way. What is it they have been telling us in Ireland — the people that govern us? What is it, but that the best we can do for Ireland,

and for our own selves, is to go out of her, and let the lowlands be pasture for cattle, and the highlands be sheepwalks, and make of the mountains game preserves and deer forests. And there were too many that listened to them. And what is the end of it to-day? I tell you this day there are not enough left in Ireland to work the land the way it should be worked. It was winning land we were before, and now we are letting it slip back from us. If a man wants a labourer to-day, where are the labouring men that he should hire to help him in his ploughing or his harvest? Away in America, or in England, or in Scotland. There used to be good plenty of men in Ireland, and now there is a dearth. Every week that passes there is some hearthstone left cold that will not be kindled again. That is against the nature of us — us of the Gael; and that is why I stand here to-day. For I know well that with us our nature is to hold to the land for better or for worse; and where there is a hearth lighting on the land that one of us can call his own — ay, his own, and his own for ever — that hearth will not be let go cold.

"Look where you stand," he went on, after a pause. "The dead are not far off you. Catholics and Protestants, they would all tell you the same story. They put their life into the land, they kept it living and in use; would it be better if they had left it to run back into bare mountain? If they had seen the chance, as you see it this day, to get the land for themselves, so that no man could put them off it, would they have stirred themselves, do you think, so that their sons and their sons' sons should inherit, and that the kindly land they wrought on might never cease to be tilled, and the rooftree, where they welcomed their neighbours of an evening, might never be left bare to the wind?" He paused again.

"You have been told what there is to do. I say to you in the English tongue what I said in our own: Do it. And be sure of this in your hearts, that the right speech for every man is the speech of his own country; and the best country for a man to live in, and to work in, and to die in, is the country where before him for long ages his fathers lived and worked and died, and lie as they lie here about our very feet, in a land that is still rich with the life that they poured into its veins."

For another long instant he paused; then, standing stiff and erect, he spoke one more sentence in the sonorous Gaelic, and leapt down from the gravestone. There was a tumult of shouting, and men rushed round him to shake his hand.

Frank touched Millicent's arm. "Come away. There will be nothing worth listening to after that."

They went out of the field and, crossing the road, sat down on the bank a hundred yards away from the speakers and listeners. Neither said anything for a little while. At last Millicent broke silence.

"What strange people! Imagine a speech like that to English labourers."

"It did not seem to you incongruous, did it?" he answered. "And half of these people can't read or write. Conroy knows how to speak to them."

"Yes; like one of themselves," she answered. "What a strange people! It was like a religious assembly."

"It is their religion — or a good part of it."

Suddenly a new sound arose from the crowds — groans and shouts of execration.

"What is that?" she asked quickly.

"Bad work, I'm afraid. Denouncing land-grabbers, you may be sure. See! there are the police!"

Half a dozen of the tall, soldierly, black-clad men had moved forward, and the sergeant was saying something to the speakers. There was an ugly commotion in the crowd. Then McManus was on his feet again on the platform.

"Gentlemen, the sergeant says that the meeting must disperse. The reason he gives is that Mr. Freel named the names of certain persons — names that I will not repeat — who have taken evicted farms. You will remember this, boys. Remember well — " There were vindictive cries. Then McManus raised his voice. "The meeting is at an end. Good-bye!"

Frank laughed bitterly. "He is clever."

"What does it all mean?"

"It means that all those people will be marked.

They will be called up before a court of some half-dozen of these men, and ordered to give up these farms."

"And if they don't?"

"They will be censured — that is the new word."

"That doesn't sound very terrible."

"It only means that no one will buy from them, nor sell to them, except where the law forces them. That, if they go to mass, the others will move away from them as they enter and go out; that no one will give them good-day on the roads; that they will be outcasts, morally. That is all it means — at present. If things get bitter — but in this part of the country there has never been much worse than that. Still, you know what has happened."

"How horrible!" said Millicent, with a little shiver.

"There are two sides to most religions," Frank answered. "It is all studiously legal, at present. You see, they are breaking up quietly. There won't be any row for you to see." Then he stopped for a moment. An impulse had risen in his mind. "Do you mind waiting? I'm going to speak to Conroy."

Without waiting for her answer he left her and made his way in through the press. Conroy was standing a little apart talking earnestly in Irish to three or four wild-looking mountain men. At the sight of Frank his face fell back into its strong composure.

"I congratulate you," Frank said. "I did not know you could do that."

"It was not much to do," Conroy answered.

"The meeting did not seem to think so. But Miss Carteret would like to see you. She is sitting on the ditch across the road."

Conroy moved to go, his face making no signs of pleasure or displeasure.

"Can you get me introduced to McManus before you go?" said Frank. If he had been ungenerous before, he was determined now to give the other man every chance in the moment that his eloquence had made.

"Surely," said Conroy; and he handed over Frank to one of the organizers of the meeting.

He made his way through the crowd, part of whom were already streaming away down the road voluble in talk. Millicent rose to greet him with eyes shining.

"Oh, Mr. Conroy," she said, with a reproachful note in her voice, "why did you not tell me? I might never have heard that speech. Was that friendly of you?"

The grey face was luminous now. "Indeed, then, Miss Carteret, I never thought of your caring. And, besides, it was only to speak in the Irish I was asked, and you have not the Irish."

"But I would have come all the same," she said.

"I'm so glad, though, they made you speak 'to the rest of us,'" she added, with an emphasis on the quoted words. "I am sure I must be only one 'of those that have forgotten.'"

"I think you have known everything — one time or another," he answered in a low tone.

She was flushed with the excitement of his eloquence and the music of the blood in her own veins, reckless with the intoxication of life, too happy to be wise. She had forgotten all but the impulse of the moment.

"I have been learning a great deal over again since I came to Donegal."

Then, as she felt his eyes upon her, she remembered — she remembered him.

"Do you know why I was able to speak like that?" he asked, in a low voice. "I never spoke like that before."

She saw what she had done, too late, and sorrow came on her; but she had not the heart to dash the exultation in his eyes.

"It was the place and the people — it was what you saw and felt," she answered, with a touch of constraint. He heard it, and he misunderstood her hesitation.

"Do you know what I saw and felt?" Then he paused for an instant. "If I only could tell you in my own language. It is this. I saw a flame — a white flame — leaping up and growing under the breath of my words, and swaying to me. That is what I saw. — But I cannot tell you."

He stopped for a moment. She was not looking at him; she did not dare to let him see the compassion that was in her face.

"Do you understand?" he went on, "that these thoughts which you heard me speak I have always had, and always kept them to myself. It was you that drew me on to speak them." The words came slow and emphatic. He, too, was still under the power of the emotions he had given and received. The barriers were all down. "You have taught me to speak my thoughts. It is as if you had brought me into the living world among faces and voices that answer me."

She was dumb before him, struggling with her thoughts. A moment before she had been in the full flush of enjoyment. Standing in the crowd, in the companionship that gave her mere and unreflecting happiness, she had exulted in the display of power, in the triumph of the talent that she had discovered. But now she was forced into a new part; it was denied her to be a spectator. He came to her in the glow of his success, and threw at her feet the tribute he had earned. It was a crisis that she had not foreseen, could not control; she knew well, now for the first time, what he was asking, rather what he was assuming as his own. "Look," he seemed to say to her, "I have done this through you, and for you."

And for the moment she wondered if this were a vocation — a call, summoning her away from the very fruition of her own lesser and personal joy. Between her and Frank nothing had yet been spoken; the summons came in time. One way or other, it seemed that she was called to pledge herself, to decide; and in the enthusiasm, under the spell of the influence that he still diffused, the instinct of self-dedication was strong in her. What he had done, what he could do yet, was through her; she felt that urged in his words and in his look. And she did not know how to answer either word or look.

Voices broke on them from outside. A group of four or five people were coming up the road to where she sat and he stood. She saw Frank and welcomed his presence with a throb of relief. The others stopped a few yards off, and he came towards them.

" McManus is asking for you," he said to Conroy; "they were afraid you had given them the slip. There's been no end of a fuss over your Irish; the police sergeant was convinced you had been talking treason, and the interpreter they have with them was giving him a sketch of what you said, and he was mortally incredulous. You'd better go and offer to dictate it to him. I'd like to see the inspector's face when he read it."

Millicent was grateful for the return to regions of laughter. She felt as if an immense weight was suddenly lifted off her soul, and she held out her hand.

"Good-bye, then, Mr. Conroy. Go and cast your pearls before the constabulary."

Conroy's face relaxed a little. "Ah," he said, "the sergeant's an old friend of mine. He has as nice a lot of beehives as you could see. 'Tis most likely some one has been speaking rough to him. He'll take my word fast enough."

He lifted his cap gravely and was gone.

CHAPTER XVI

It seemed to Millicent as if she had suddenly walked out of prison and had ears again for the singing of the larks. She was free: she could be herself. There was nobody with her who would make a demand upon her. She could be and do and say just what she liked, and she wanted to dance there in the middle of the road. She was going to be happy, and not to think. Frank was asking if he might see her home.

"Yes, yes," she said, half dreamily, looking away over the shining lake. Then she turned on him with a quick gesture. "I'm so glad you're here. I want to talk nonsense — nothing but nonsense — not a word about anything serious."

For a moment she looked at him appealingly. There was a touch of disappointment in his eyes.

"Oh, please," she said; "I'm so tired of serious things." Then quick as a flash she changed. "Promise," she said, in her most imperious tone that always roused him to acquiescent laughter, and he laughed now at the sudden transformation.

"All right," he answered. "I won't say a word about politics."

"Oh, politics!" she answered, with a fine disdain. "I don't call politics serious. You may talk politics as much as you like. Only I won't listen. I'm tired of politics. I don't think I like them."

"Well!" exclaimed Frank, as he paused to contemplate her. Then, as he lit a cigarette, "You're incorrigible. Perhaps, then, you'll consider the subject of ways and means of getting home. You came up along the river, I suppose? Would you like to go back another way over the mountains? It's jolly; but the road is awful."

"Oh, I don't mind," she said. "You shall shove my bicycle at the bad places."

"It's up this way," he said, pointing up the hill.

"Then you can begin now," she retorted.

And it seemed to Frank that the most desirable thing on earth was to be ordered about by this young lady.

All the same, her good intentions of talking nonsense seemed a little hard to realize. She fell into a reverie, and walked beside him with her eyes not looking at anything, with her head a little hung. The challenge and the alacrity was gone from her carriage, as if the vitality was drawn inward, rather than expressing itself in gait and gesture.

Frank waited on her mood, till it seemed to him she was growing downcast. He stopped, and, balancing the two bicycles, extracted a copper from his pocket.

"For your thoughts," he said, tendering it to Millicent, who returned with a jump from her dreaming.

She took it with a little grimace. "Thank you," she said.

"Pay up, then."

"Go on pushing. That's right. I like talking and walking. It's only this. Would you rather be yourself, or be some one else's notion of yourself?"

He stopped again, with each hand propping a bicycle. It is not an advantageous position.

"Are they too heavy?" she laughed. "Shall I take mine? Poor thing! We're very near the top."

"Really," he said resignedly, "you're too bad. Who was it said we weren't to talk serious things?"

"I don't call that serious," said Millicent. "It's only a question."

"As if questions weren't the only serious things!" he groaned, resuming his progress. "Well, then, if you insist. Of course it's better to be one's self."

"But suppose some one else's notion of yourself is much nicer than yourself?"

"You can't go on being some one else's notion of yourself all the time," he answered.

"But you could try?"

"I wouldn't," he said persuasively.

She looked up at him with a flash of laughter. "Would you not? Do you know, I think you're very wise. Now, if you please, Mr. Norman, I can get on quite well. Give me my bicycle."

The road tilted over a hump of ground, and she was up in a moment, and away down the far side on flying wheels, with poised head and feet resting, while stray wisps of her hair blew out behind. When Frank got level with her, and the burst of speed was ended, she was calling out in delight about a hill slope all one glow of purple heath. And, after that, there was no occasion to complain of her for any relapse into serious things.

Soon they turned off the high road into a byway, laboriously built across boggy moor. Relief works in times of famine have intersected all the poorer parts of Ireland with a superfluity of thoroughfares, and the counties maintain them — under protest. Frank and Millicent picked their way along the raised causeway, choosing by preference the narrow pad worn by barefoot traffic along the edge of roughly metalled road. To right and left the moor and bog stretched away from them — brown, purple, olive, with patches here and there of bright sappy green — and beyond the moor were hills on their right, and to the left the great chain of wild mountain shapes that follows the northern sea-line.

They had the landscape to themselves for a long way, till, at a bend of the road, they saw in front of them a horse and car. And saw also, to Millicent's amazement, the driver leap down and pull off his coat in desperate haste.

"Is he quite mad?" she said to Frank, as the lad rushed to his horse's head and proceeded to wrap his coat round the animal's eyes.

"Not quite," he said. "Look out! Give them good room." Then, as they shot past the carload of grave-faced peasant men and taciturn, huddled old women, who solemnly acknowledged Frank's greeting, he added, "They're new to bicycles here. This is as near the back of beyond as you'll get in Ireland."

"Well, yes," said Millicent, looking out over the wild stretch of country; "Margaret's is suburban compared to this."

"Those people must be coming from the holy well I told you about. You'll see the Rock of Doon in a minute or two."

And, at the next turn in the road, he pointed to a sharply marked bluff or hillock, with scarped sides, that rose beyond the bog to their right, well defined against the tumbling line of more distant hills.

"There you are! Shall we go up to the well? This isn't a day of pilgrimage, but it's worth seeing."

So they turned up the track, which was rougher even than the one they had ridden. It ran straight for the base of the rock: first through levels of rushy ground and scrub heather, scarred and pitted with the deep brown turf cuttings, and the black water that lay in their depths; then rising to the rocky ground, until the road ended suddenly on a space of greensward. Rounding the end of the bluff, they found this green extending in a sunlit level on the southern side of the rock; there, sheltered from all observation, was the well.

"Look at the crutches," said Frank, pointing to a group of tall grey objects erect in the grass; "and do you see? — there's some one at the well."

By the little coping of grey stones that marked where the well was covered from defilement, an old woman knelt in deep prayer. Frank and Millicent, moving over the grass, and examining the votive crutches bound with weather-beaten rags, and the strips of clothing knotted into tufts of rushes, or strewn over the ground, kept away till her devotions should be finished. They saw her fill a bottle at the well, cork it, and again crouch herself in prayer. When she rose up to go, hobbling cheerfully, like one well content with her errand, they approached her. As she passed on her way with head bent, not looking to the right or left, Frank gave her a greeting. She looked up, and, catching sight of the girl, started violently, while a look of terror crossed her face, and the bottle that she was carrying clasped under her shawl fell to the ground, struck a stone lying on the grass, and there was a crash.

The old woman stood for a moment as if stupefied, then burst into a storm of sobbing, while Frank, dreadfully concerned and embarrassed, picked up the bottle. The whole underside was broken, and not a drop of water remained in it.

"I'm afraid it's clean gone," he said. Then he thought for a moment. "But maybe the saint has more ways than you think of working. What did you want the water for? Is there anything we could do?"

To his surprise, Millicent's hand was on his arm and she drew him away peremptorily.

"You mustn't offer her money," she whispered. "It's Ellen Dooey. What are we to do? Isn't it dreadful? Go and speak to her — say something."

The old woman was sitting now on the ground, rocking herself to and fro and wailing.

"Ellen, Miss Carteret's just told me it was you. It was all my fault, and surely if there's bad luck it's on me it ought to come. Isn't there anything I can do? Shall I get you another bottle out of the house there? There's always water in the well to do good to them that believe."

But Ellen only rocked herself and wailed the more.

"Don't fret yourself," he went on. "Wait till you see Owen Conroy, and he'll be able to put you in better heart about it. Indeed, Ellen, I'd give a great deal for it not to have happened."

Not heeding him, she began to lament to herself in Gaelic, and Frank, not liking to leave her, yet thinking it useless to stay, spoke again.

"I haven't the Irish, Ellen, and I don't know what you're saying. But I'd be glad to hear you say that you won't think there was any blame on yourself. I had no right to speak to you when you were thinking of your prayers, and I'm as sorry as you can be. Is there nothing I can do?"

To his amazement the old woman stopped her lamentation and darted a glance of hatred towards Millicent. Then she stood up and pointed at the girl.

"Take her away," she cried out; "take her away to them that she belongs to. There was no luck came with her. Take her away."

Frank flushed red. "I tell you this, Ellen, that Owen Conroy would be badly pleased if he heard you saying that. I wonder you would say such things of a lady that is a stranger, and that never gave you or him anything but kind words. I'm ashamed for you."

But the old crone broke out into a wild rush of Gaelic, shaking her fist and cursing.

"The devil take you, then, for a superstitious old hag," said Frank, losing his temper.

But Millicent came up to him, her face discomposed with tears.

"Come away, come away. She doesn't know what she's saying. There's no use talking."

When they reached the road Frank began to utter his apologies and regrets; but Millicent cut him short.

"Don't talk any more about it. It was horrible; but it wasn't anybody's fault. I wish that old woman didn't hate me. No, don't say any more. I want to forget it as quickly as I can."

And the last few miles of the ride were melancholy enough.

CHAPTER XVII

THERE were still two good hours of sunlight left when Millicent parted from Frank and came in — for once uncommunicative in reply to Margaret's questionings. Gladly enough she let Margaret blame the long road for her tired face, and she made fatigue a pretext for her desire to be alone. There was a terrible deal to think over.

Ringing in her head were the old woman's words, insistent on her memory was the old woman's look of bitter detestation. "There was no luck came with her." And oh those fierce furtive eyes! She had no need to ask herself the reason of the hatred. It had been given in the words, "Take her away to them that she belongs to." She wondered if she ought to go. It was easy, even without leaving the country. Frank had been propounding to her a scheme for joining, on the next day but one, a party that should follow a round of golfing competitions from hotel to hotel on the coast. The little ladies had no part in it, but the kindly and pleasant Mrs. Irwin would chaperon them; it would be a good time, she thought, and she would escape from her perplexities. And besides — Frank had obeyed her wish; but there had been a significance in the tone in which he had reminded her of his submission when he said good-bye. "I haven't talked serious things, have I — not to-day?" It was something more than a claim on her gratitude. She had promised to give him an answer in the morning about this project. If she said "Yes" — oh, well, it would certainly be a change — bright sand and blue sea, and away from the grey landscape of bog and mountain, grey reeds, grey lake, and slow flowing river. Perhaps there, she thought, when everything else was not so serious — perhaps there — she might not forbid him to talk of serious things.

But the very thought instantly brought up to her mind the other man. She thought of Owen Conroy — and she thought of the old woman who accused her of bringing him ill luck. It was true: she felt that now. Her happiness was bound up with his hurt. But, still, she remembered his taciturn face as she saw it first; she recalled its sudden lighting up as she had told him what she thought of his drawings; she remembered the look of loneliness in his eyes; she remembered his struggles for speech; she remembered the strange, impalpable barrier that seemed to shut him from Frank Norman on the one hand, from Margaret and her boys on the other. And then she recalled him as she had seen him those few hours ago, a centre of men's eyes, putting into language the inarticulate cry of their hearts, thanked by them with word, and shout, and tear, and the whole thrill of their nature; one with them, giving and taking, no longer lonely and uncomprehended. And she remembered his words to her. He had said that it was she who had wrought the change; it was she who had let in the sunlight. The old woman did not understand, she thought, but saw trouble where there was only growth. Was it right, then, she should go away? Was it not well that she should stay rather?

"But — but —" she said to herself aloud, and it seemed to her that life was made up of painful contradictions.

A tall grey figure passed her window, and she felt her heart suddenly sink. Margaret rapped, and came in.

"It's Mr. Conroy, miss. I told him you were tired with the riding."

"I'll see him, Margaret," said Millicent.

She told herself quickly that it was absurd to be afraid: that he had simply come down to talk to her about the meeting.

The little room seemed to grow lower as the tall, gaunt figure entered it, and closed the door. There was no suppleness in his movements, but he stood straight as a young larch. The lines of the face had little play in them, but his eyes shone with an inward exultation.

She was conscious of clutching at a subject that was at least impersonal, and might lead the talk away from her and him.

"Oh, Mr. Conroy, I'm so glad to see you!" she began. "A dreadful thing happened to me this afternoon."

And, in a few words, she told him of the meeting with Ellen Dooey and the tragedy of the spilt holy water — but not of Ellen's angry words.

Conroy listened in vague perplexity; shadows clouded his eyes.

"I wonder what in the world was Ellen there for? She didn't tell you that?"

"She was so distressed we couldn't get her to speak to us. She kept lamenting to herself in Irish," said Millicent, dealing out a modicum of truth. "But you will explain to her — won't you? — how sorry I was?"

"'Twas no fault of yours, Miss Carteret. And, indeed, 'tis kind of you to be troubled about it; for many a one would have only laughed at the poor foolish old woman, with her spells and charms. But I know well you would understand that, to her way of thinking, it was a strange thing to happen. A strange thing, indeed," he repeated, as if to himself.

Millicent laughed a little nervously. She felt oppressed by his presence.

"I am afraid I must be as foolish as she is. It gave me a great shock. Was that unreasonable? Don't you believe in the holy well, and the wonderful things that happen there?"

His face began to take on it that look which she knew and dreaded.

"Believe?" he said, in a monotone. "Why would I not believe? Why would there not be wonderful things happening? Who knows the power of the spirit upon itself, and upon other spirits? Is there not a change in me as wonderful as the change from sickness into health?"

It was true. He stood transfigured from the man she had met that day in the garden by the beehives. And, as she looked at him, she had not the heart to dash the rapture in his face. Rather, her instinct was to stretch out her hand to him — to rejoice with him in his felicity, that seemed a thing she had a part in, yet that was alien to herself — like a statue that some artist has created. The pride in his triumph came back to her with its old force, and the homage of such a man was sweet to the woman.

"I'm so glad if you are happier," she said softly. Then she paused for an instant. "You made me very proud to-day. What you said to me wasn't true — I had done nothing. But I liked you to say it."

Something leapt into his eyes that changed their dreamy contemplation, and a movement of revulsion answered it in her. It shifted the relation; his face could no longer be seen in detachment, impersonally. The change in him was not a thing finished, ended. It was a process that she had set on foot, and that glance had made her feel bound to her own creation. If he told her that she was necessary to him, she must relinquish much to deny it.

He dropped his gaze from her, and spoke awkwardly and with hesitation.

"There's a thing I want your advice upon, Miss Carteret, if you'd be so good as to give it."

"But, Mr. Conroy," Millicent answered, with growing embarrassment, "my advice is no good. It isn't painting, is it?"

"You're the only one that can advise me. It's this way. You know this new League is putting up members all through the country for Parliament? Mr. McManus asked me to-day would I be willing to stand?"

Millicent looked hard at him. This was a new development, indeed! All her intellectual curiosity reasserted itself, and the odd, ironical look, that Frank was familiar with, came about the corners of her eyes. Conroy, lonely and unrecognized, appealed straight to her sympathy. Conroy, successful, with a career suddenly opening before him, might be looked at critically.

"Well," she said, "aren't you pleased? Isn't it a tremendous compliment?"

He was quick to detect the absence of enthusiasm in her tone, and the intellectual pride in him rose in revolt.

"'Tis not so great a compliment as you think. The half of them will be publicans and small attorneys. They're hard set for men, that's the truth."

"But why?" asked Millicent. "Are brains so rare as that?"

Conroy fidgeted a little in his seat. "There's many of the best men don't like the pledge."

Millicent paused for a moment and scanned him questioningly.

"Mr. Conroy, do you want me to advise you? or do you just want to be congratulated?"

"Surely, I want to be advised," he answered earnestly.

"Then tell me more about it. What pledge do you mean?"

"It's the pledge to be bound in everything by a majority of the party."

"Of the publicans and small attorneys?" she said, with a touch of irony. "Mr. Conroy, you are quite sure you would like that?"

"I'm very sure I would not," he answered, with emphasis. "But it's necessary — I see that. There must be a pledge. Look what has been happening."

He spoke freely now, in the abstract, absorbed in his argument, as he proceeded to demonstrate to her, by a review of the last years, the extent and consequences of disunion. Millicent, relieved of the instant demand upon her sympathy, listened; translating, after the fashion of every woman, the general into the particular and personal. And the process of translation did not flatter the prospect.

"I see," she said vaguely, when he finished. "But you know, Mr. Conroy, aren't you perhaps carried away? Do you realize what you are giving up? You never thought of all this before?"

"Never in my life. What call had I to?"

She bent forward eagerly. "But, don't you see that it is just because you have stood outside of all this — all this scheming and compromising, and the rest — and lived your real life, and thought your real thoughts — that is why you are what you are?"

His face fell. "And that's true," he said.

Millicent pursued her advantage, relentlessly obedient to her sense of artistic fitness. "Publicans and attorneys!" The phrase stayed in her mind, and she remembered the groans at the names of the land-grabbers.

"What would the mountains or the rivers mean to you, if you were thinking all the time how many votes you would get?" She broke off brusquely from the tone of persuasion, and her voice and manner grew incisive and emphatic. "I can't help it. It may be all right for other people. It doesn't seem to me the right thing for you. It isn't your place or your work. You're an artist. What do you want with it? Why can't you let it alone?"

Then she saw his face drawn with silent pain, and her tone changed almost to pleading.

"Oh, what have I said? I'm very sorry. It's all nonsense, and I don't know anything about it! Of course, there's another side to it. It's splendid to stir people the way you stirred them to-day. And, if you like to give up your peace and your contentment, to work for what you believe in, that's fine. I know it isn't vulgar ambition. Do forget what I said!"

The lines on his face drew and deepened. For a while he said nothing, then words came from him with an effort.

"I'll never forget, then. It was because you thought well of me you said it. But don't be deceiving yourself with words. It isn't for the sake of the cause I'd go in. It would just be to break down the barrier between you and me."

He spoke with passionate weight, and she looked at him with eyes full of trouble. She had not sought it, this evidence of her power; but she could not forego the hearing of it. The pride of her sex was strong in her, filling her with the sense of what she had to give or to withhold. Almost instinctively she fell back on the eternal evasion.

" Why do you say that? There isn't any barrier. Aren't we friends, you and I? "

In spite of her, her voice shook; she trembled under the eyes that seemed to pierce her unformed thought as it shaped itself.

" 'Tis your own fault if I speak," he went on; " no — but your own goodness. But for your kind heart, I would never have lifted my eyes to look at you. But, since I lifted them — and since I saw," he said, with an emphasis, " why would I not speak the thing I have in my heart? "

" Since I saw." The words bore in over her mind, loosing a flood of thoughts. What had he seen? Half of her received with anger, and almost with ridicule, the imputation that what she felt for him was love. But the other half doubted. There seemed to be two selves in her — one reluctant, angry, eager to be free; the other, and it spoke the louder, asking whether, after all, the chiefest thing in life was not to be tender of this life that had such desperate need of her? It was as if they stood in the desert, and she held a cup of water. Should she drink it herself? or should she follow the other prompting that said " give "?

And present with her always was the thought that this turmoil within her was somehow manifest to him. Words would be a relief from that silent scrutiny. So, at least, she would know what was spoken, what was heard.

"Of course you may speak," she answered. "But truly — truly, you are wrong. There is no barrier."

He shook his head. "I know better, Miss Carteret. But it is this way. What I told you of the League party was true, and the easier it should be to rise in it. And if a man was a leader — one of the five or six with millions at their back — then, surely, he would be something? He might come to one like you and ask — what I could not ask you to-day? Might he not?"

Here, at least, was an issue that shaped itself to a definite answer. She knew instinctively that Owen Conroy, once committed to such a career, would no longer be the man that she had known and divined; that he would cease to have any hold on her imagination; and yet that, if he entered such a life by her counsel, she would feel herself bound to him by the tie that she had laid on his life. This, at least, she could avoid. And it was part of her loyalty to be true with him — true to the ideal conception that she held of his powers.

"You make it very hard for me," she answered quietly, putting as much of kindness into her voice as she could. "You ask me to advise you; and, I think, if you do go into Parliament, you may very likely do what you speak of, and be what you mean to be. And, if so, you will certainly find that many of the people who set up barriers will take them away. But — " and she stopped significantly.

" 'Tis not that I want to know," he said eagerly. " 'Tis only this. Would you advise me to do what I am speaking of?" His voice took a note of almost angry passion, as he went on. " Well, you know why I think of doing it!" Then he stopped for an instant, his eyes heavy on her. " 'Tis between you and me, and no one else!" he added.

Now, at last, it was come to a choice for her. She felt as if she were shut in between walls. There was no way to elude the passionate question in his eyes.

She spoke at last, slowly, and with pain.

" Between me and you it would make no difference. You might be a great man, but you would be no greater in my eyes than you are now."

She saw the expectation pass into perplexity — into a despair in which a ray of hope lingered, and her heart smote her sorely.

She leant forward, her eyes streaming, and in both her hands she caught his.

" Oh, my friend, give it up — give it all up. Give up the thought of me — I mean the thought of me like that. It will only make you miserable. Let me go away, and do not make me sorry that I ever came."

He gripped her hands tight and fixed his eyes on her for a minute.

"Give up the thought of you!" he answered, with terrible intensity. "I would rather live in torment with the thought of you than have the peace of all the lonely angels."

She did not dare to look at him; the pain was too fierce in the white face. As she wavered before him, she doubted what would come next. But with the very touch of his hand, and the sense of his nearness, there was born in her a growing revulsion. Instincts in her older than the sympathy born of intellectual admiration woke and stirred. Then she felt her hands loosed.

"That was the right advice you gave me," he said. "It is not my place nor my work. I will make my own life and gain my own ends in my own way."

There was a passion of unspoken resentment in his voice and in his gesture; and he made as if to leave her. But she called him back. Her head was turned away, for her eyes were swollen with tears.

"Don't go," she stammered. "I can't let you go like that. I'm so sorry — so dreadfully sorry. But I'm going away from here at once, and you won't mind in a little while." Then she straightened herself to face him, and held out her hand. "Good-bye," she said.

She was determined not to be afraid, and yet she felt as if she stood on a cliff-edge, and a little thing might throw her off her balance and send her life crashing to ruin.

But he did not take her hand. He stood a little way off gazing at her with that trance-like gaze, and he spoke like one in a dream.

"There is a barrier between us, here, this day. I can see it and feel it. But it will not be there always. I have no call for saying good-bye. Day and night, night and day, my thought will be mingled with the thought of you; the eyes of my soul will be on your eyes always. You may go away, but you cannot take yourself from me. It is only in the body that you bid good-bye to me, and it is a hard thing for soul and body to be parted. One day you will come back, and then there will be no barrier."

For an endless moment he gazed at her without speaking, then a mask of stone seemed to settle down upon his face.

"Good-bye to you, Miss Carteret," he said, taking up his hat.

His bearing was perfectly impassive as he left the room, and Millicent heard him exchange greetings quietly with Margaret before he went out into the lane.

CHAPTER XVIII

MILLICENT ranged up and down the little room in a kind of inarticulate despair. Her whole nature was up in revolt. It was monstrous — intolerable — ridiculous, she thought — this assumption of a control over her. Her first movement was to write and tell him how far he deluded himself, if he thought that only the barrier he talked of kept her from falling into his arms. No barrier would hinder her from giving herself where she chose. If she had misled him, that was only because she had been so unwilling to give even necessary pain, so quick to see where he shrank.

And yet as she framed this indignant justification for herself, a question began to arise in her mind. Was it possible that he could be right? that this feeling, so new to her, should be what all women talked of and speculated over — that she was really bound to him by an inevitable constraint — that she would never forget the passion of his voice, the appeal in his eyes? His eyes haunted her till her own streamed with tears, and she was ready to fly after him and implore him not to be unhappy. Yet, at the same time, she remembered and realized how, as he drew nearer, she seemed to recoil the farther from him; how she listened willingly when he spoke of himself and his interests, but was ill-pleased when he spoke of her. She had encouraged him to talk of what lay nearest to his heart, just because she felt no other interest but one of the brain. It was so different, she reflected. When Frank Norman was with her, she was studiously superficial; she pushed away every hint of personal faiths and aspirations. She was on guard against herself, in a word. And yet at the most he had looked as if he had wished to talk of things that lay deeper. And because she had consciously wished to hear him speak, she had been perverse. Perhaps, she thought, she had only misunderstood. He liked her, no doubt. But this other man — there was no question with him of liking or of friendship. There was the bitter need of love. His was not the passion to be put off and held in check by a laugh or a light word. She was angry with Frank that he had not spoken.

It was unbearable. Now, at the very moment when she wanted a pretext to go — when she had told Conroy that she was going — there was this golfing excursion. If she went now, she would feel that she was going in order that a young man who very likely meant no more than friendly flirtation, should give her the opportunity really to know her own mind. Suppose he did not speak — how would she feel then? She would not be able to look herself in the face, she thought. She was not going to let him think that she ran after him. If he wanted to say he loved her, why had he not said it before? She would go back to London.

Her ponderings had reached the point of considering the necessary explanations, when Margaret broke in upon them, accompanied by the usual irruption of cats and dogs. And as the spotty tortoiseshell arched her back and rubbed herself against Millicent's skirts, and Toby pressed a moist cool nose into her hand, and Margaret's genial person bustled through the room, the girl felt a great scattering of the mists.

"And are you rightly rested now, miss? Troth, then, I was giving Mr. Norman a talking to for trailing you round that long way. But still and all it would be a pity for you to be here convenient to it and never see the Doon Rock and the Ardcolumb Station."

"I wouldn't have missed it for anything, Margaret."

"Would ye not, then? 'Deed then, I was just thinking it was a wonder you'd be staying always about this ould lough and not away with you to look at some of the other places in the country."

"Are you trying to get rid of me, Margaret?" said Millicent, laughing. "I believe some handsome young man has written to say he wants you to put him up."

"Oh, now, Miss Carteret, I know well it's joking you are! It would be the quare day when I would try to get rid of the likes of you. It's just that I was feared you might be getting lonesome like and tired of being in the one place, for sure there's nothing here at all to see, and they do be telling me that the scenery out by Douros yonder is just wonderful, and the quality does be coming every day from England to see it."

Millicent looked at her severely. "Margaret, some one has been putting things into your head?"

"'Deed, then, miss, not a one of me would deceive you. It was Mr. Norman that was talking to me outside the door, when he was after coming in with you: and quarely vexed I was to see him going away like that, and not staying to take as much as a sup of tea. But, says he to me, 'Margaret, do your best, now, and persuade Miss Carteret to come with us on Tuesday. There's going to be great doings down at Douros, and she oughtn't to be going out of the county and thinking that there's no kind of diversions in it. She'll maybe listen to you?' he says. 'Tell her that she must see Douros Bay.' 'And, sure,' says I, 'what call have I to be talking to a young lady about the like of that?' But 'Never mind,' says he. And, indeed, then, Miss Carteret, and it's the truth I'm telling you; I wouldn't like to see Mr. Frank disappointed, and it's sore disappointed he'll be if you don't go. And there's that wee blouse you have, miss, with the lovely lace. You never wore it since you were here; and I'm sure there's not one of them all would look as nice as you."

While Margaret delivered this tirade, fussing round the table and fetching out properties from the cupboard in the corner, Millicent lay back in her chair, and the laughter mounted in her eyes and flowed gradually over all her face. At last she jumped up with a sudden movement, dislodging the cat that lay curled up on her knee.

"Oh, Margaret, you're a treasure! I'll go and put on the blouse at once!"

In ten minutes she was back, and swept into Margaret's kitchen with a twirl and a pirouette — a dainty figure in the soft, fluttery, cherry-coloured silken garment, that contrasted boldly with her mass of hair.

"There! Shall I be grand enough, do you think? Shall I do you credit, Margaret?"

After dinner, Millicent wrote a little note to Frank, with an enclosure for Mrs. Irwin; and all that evening she devoted to Margaret in an elaborate discussion of chiffons, arising out of certain back numbers of the fashion papers which Mrs. Carteret sent by every other post to her poor exile in this benighted land; and if Millicent neglected them, at least they were not lost upon the lady of the house.

But, late in the night, when the cottage was hushed, and the moonlight streamed in through the white muslin curtains, Millicent found no such easy way of escape from her questioning thoughts. Her brain seemed like a machine that has broken loose and goes on and on, pounding relentlessly. The same things kept recurring again and again to her mind, and would not be put away. The tragedy in Conroy's eyes, that called for her to bring solace; the dreadful shattering of hope as she spoke to him; then the new and strange purpose, like a menace, that rose in them; then the fright when he hung over her, and her will seemed paralyzed. Fear — it was fear that haunted her; fear for her freedom. Whether it was madness or reason, she could not but be impressed with his belief in the reality of what existed for him. He said that he saw into her mind — and he saw that she would come to him some day. It seemed impossible; yet she could not shake off the dread that he might see clearer than she did herself. And this haunting presence obscured all else. She thought of Frank Norman, and she could not separate him from the same obsession. It was as if she shirked a challenge by taking refuge there. Conroy had spoken truth, she thought. "It is between you and me." The one man came to her offering the easy way, the pleasant level of existence; but the other made a claim that taxed and overtaxed all the powers of her nature. And he came no longer as a suppliant. When she refused, he held her bound by her own gifts. He arrogated her as a part of himself. He wove a web of words and looks about her, lest she should break away and be free.

As she tossed and sought for sleep, she began to be aware that it was light. A cock crowed, and a cool waft of air came in through her open window. She got up and dressed, and quietly she unfastened the window of her sitting-room and slipped out on to the lane. Red was flushing in the east over the hills, and an infinite freshness was in the air; in the quiet a rustle of the reeds came to her from the lake. It was as if a cool hand had been laid on her forehead, and she rejoiced in the sanity of the daylight, drawing in deep draughts of the dew-laden air. She heard the cows munching the moist grass, and her own life ran full in her veins again. Out here she could think within herself that Frank Norman would not be displeased when he got her note in the morning. It was pleasant to think that in the world there was still some one to laugh with, still the ease of equal companionship.

And when she stole back, clambering over the low window-sill, she threw herself, dressed as she was, on her bed, and slept sweetly till Margaret came in and wakened and scolded her for such vagaries.

CHAPTER XIX

LATE, too, into that night Owen Conroy was ranging the country; not with the loose gait of the workers in fields, but striding in the long step of one who urges his body to keep pace with the rhythm of his swift thought. Far up on a path leading into the mountain, folk passed him as the stars came out. And two hours before midnight he stood where he could see three arms of the Atlantic among their bordering hills, and lakes and tarns shining in the moonlight through that land of many waters.

But in the cool night and the wide spaces he found nothing of what he sought. Their power swayed against his effort to fix a single image before him, and, on a sudden thought, he turned, and, swifter than ever, faced for his home.

Windows were dark in Killydonnell as he passed through the village, but in his own cottage, where it stood screened from the road by a line of scrubby alders rising behind a thorn hedge, a light shone. Ellen Dooey sat or crouched on her three-legged stool by the chimney corner of the clay-floored kitchen.

She made no sign of any greeting, nor did Conroy take notice of her presence. He kicked the smouldering sods, and set a chair before the fire; then, from a recess behind the dresser, dragged out a bundle of dry sticks, flung them on the peat, and fixed his eyes intently on the leaping blaze. The old woman watched him for a moment, stirred uneasily, then spoke in the Gaelic.

"The night is hot. What need is there on you for a fire?"

He turned slowly to her. "What need was there on you for water out of Doon well to-day?"

She trembled and averted her eyes. Then she answered sullenly.

"They that told you would know well. They that made the sickness broke the cure."

"What sickness is there in it?"

"What sickness? What sickness is there in it when a young man loses his sleep out of his nights, and the peace out of his days? 'Tis the sickness that has only the one cure for it, unless by the power of God. And 'tis little God will do for us against her, I'm thinking, that could spill the good water from between my hands before ever it was out of sight of the well."

"Hold your whisht, woman. There was no art nor power in the thing at all, but your own foolishness." He turned from her and gazed again into the fire. Then he spoke again dreamily. "And if 'twas for me you drew the water, and all the cures of all the world were in it, I would rather my sickness nor that cure."

"Och, och," she cried, and rocked her body to and fro as she sat on her stool; and for a long time no word was said between them as she moaned and swayed, and he watched the crackling twigs spire up in flame. Then the old woman spoke again.

"She came from far, and there is no quiet in her face."

"There is better than quiet," the man answered, as if speaking to the vision that was before his straining eyes. "She came from far, but she came, and a man would go far following her."

"'The crow and the sea-gull follow the plough together, but when did they mate?' is the saying. Och, Owen," she said, changing her tone, "what use is there in thinking of her? Sure the man that she's for is the man that was with her to-day at the well. I saw it in the eyes of them."

Conroy's face darkened. "Is it he? He has the light word for her pleasure, and the light laugh! But will he bring the look into her face that was there when I spoke to her to-day across the crowd? Ay," he went on, with his gaze again fixed upon the fire, "I could see the vapour of her body swaying towards me as the flame sways to a leaf that you hold above it."

Then he turned sharply to her. "Did you never hear tell of a way that could bend the mind of a woman to the will of a man, though he was a keeper of the cows, and her a princess on her throne?"

A strange quick look came into the old woman's eyes, and she spoke to herself as if recalling a forgotten song.

"A cloth that was worn, or a comb out of her hair; ay, or maybe the hair itself; and to put them on the figure you would make. That was the old way."

"And a foolish way," he said. "What power has the like of that over man or woman? 'Tis the spirit that has power upon the spirit, and 'twas not the figure that wasted in the fire, 'twas the figure that the mind built up about the wax and the clay and burnt in the fire of longing — 'twas that that wrought upon the spirit and filled it with a restless desire."

"They were wise men and wise women that used the old way," she muttered, "and there was still some dressing on the image."

"Listen, now, and I'll tell you, Ellen. They were wise that found the way, but their wisdom is forgotten. In the sleep, souls are made loose from the body, and 'tis easier calling them where they were used to be. There is still something of the body that they know lingering about the cloth that was worn, or the lock of hair, or the glass where the face was thrown, or the picture the sun printed."

"Och, now, did she give you her picture?" the old woman broke in, with an uncanny laughter.

A strange look of triumph came into Conroy's face, and he spoke passionately: —

"The glass takes the likeness of the body and loses it, and the paper that men make takes the likeness and holds it. And yet there was a wise man said that he who could fix upon paper the likeness of the body must have power upon the spirit, for something of the spirit must pass into the image before it could have the likeness. But listen, now, Ellen. If a man could make his body a mirror for her spirit; if he could catch with his spirit the image of her spirit shining through her body, and could hold it before his eyes, and his hand could set it down to be always before him, the way that his desire and his thought should never wane, — would not that have power to draw her spirit from its rangings to the place where he called it, and where it should know its own likeness?"

"God help us," she muttered, dazed with the violence of his half-comprehended words; "it is a strong charm."

He sprang up and stood erect before her, his eyes lit with a wild fever.

"Well, then, Ellen, 'tis I will do it; and when she sleeps in her bed at nights, my eyes will be on the eyes of her image, and her spirit will feel the power of my spirit drawing her to me as my words drew her this day; and the face of her will be there before me, and round it her spirit will shape itself into the likeness of a body, and will know the road to my call as ready as ranging bees know the road to their hive. 'Tis not I that will go to her, Ellen, 'tis she will come to me; and there will be a day when I shall hear her knock on yon door and come over the threshold and cross the floor to me standing at this fire."

"Speak low, Owen, speak low," the old woman entreated; for he was pouring forth the words at the pitch of his voice, and the air rang with them. "It is a madness that is on you."

But he burst into a wild laughter, and, flinging more faggots on the turf, fell again to his reading of the flame.

CHAPTER XX

"I BELIEVE in my heart it is going to lift," said Frank, staring out from the verandah of the hotel across the tumbling line of sand hills to the black ring of mountains which shut in the view.

For, in Donegal, no one counts on a continuance of fair weather with impunity, and for two days Millicent had been seeing what the country could do in the way of wet. Nevertheless, early that morning she had been gathered up by a detachment of Mrs. Irwin's party, had been wrapped in mackintoshes, and set on an outside car, and, at the end of fifteen moist miles, found the golf competition beginning to drag itself through a downpour of warm rain. Now, however, the downpour was sinking into a drizzle, and rifts of a lighter grey showed in the sky. Frank, who had played and lost his round before lunch, appeared reconciled to the fact by the opportunity of attendance upon Millicent. But upon the rest of the party, grouped together in the crowded verandah, there was a settled gloom.

"Willy ought to be back by this," the pretty Fanny Irwin was saying. "He's far out of his turn already."

At that moment one of the stewards pushed his way to the group.

"Where's Irwin, at all? We'll have to scratch him. There's only two pairs more to send out in the second round. It's all nonsense, anyway. He was up all night with this old woman, and he won't be fit for anything, after riding twenty miles over the mountains on a day like this."

"There wasn't much the matter with him this morning, Thorpe, was there?" put in Frank, maliciously; and the secretary looked a little crestfallen.

"I was off my game," he said. "But it stands to reason a man can't last for ever without sleep or rest. Why, Tomlinson, who's to play him, had a walk-over in the first round; but he wouldn't so much as smoke a weed after lunch."

A shout went up from the party.

"Here he is, anyway!" said Frank. "Tomlinson won't have another walk-over."

There was a tall figure seen driving a bicycle desperately up the wet, heavy road. Greeted with many cries of welcome, the young doctor jumped off his bicycle — and such a bicycle! — spliced together with bootlaces, the tyres artfully swathed here and there with bandages of lint.

"Am I in time?" he said, making his way into the hall.

"Just," said the secretary. "But, man, you can't go on at once!"

"Can't I?" said Willy Irwin; and he summoned the waiter, and gave an order. "Where's Tomlinson?"

The neat, well-appointed Englishman arrived, and looked with amazement at his opponent, huge in his rough homespun, and splashed with the mud of twenty hilly miles.

"Well," he said, in some amusement, "how's the patient?"

"First rate. I just removed the dressings, and left her as happy as you please. Sorry I kept you waiting; but the roads were awful."

"It seems to me frightfully hard luck. But Thorpe says we must go on at once. How soon will you be ready?"

"About two minutes."

The waiter appeared, bringing two eggs and two glasses of whisky, and a long tumbler. Willy Irwin broke the eggs into the tumbler, poured the whisky in on them, beat up the whole with a spoon, while a crowd admired and wondered.

"Good Heavens!" whispered Millicent to Frank. "Is he going to drink all that?"

There was no mistake about it. "Well!" said Millicent, as the young man handed the empty glass to the waiter, and strode out of doors beside his opponent.

"Come on," said Frank to Millicent; "let's see the show."

As they rounded the corner of the hotel, blue sky showed to windward and overhead. They climbed with the rest of a little crowd which followed to the top of the small rocky bluff that sheltered the hotel from the winds, and the bay was below them. Now the men were driving off, and the Englishman hit a clean stroke, low and straight, with an upward curl as it flew. But Willy Irwin, like a giant refreshed, out-drove him, and the pair pushed on swiftly across the short crisp turf after their balls.

"It's on the putting greens the fatigue will tell," said an observer. But, when Willy Irwin holed a three-yard putt, and won the hole, this also became doubtful; and by the time he had divided the next hole, and won the next, and the next after that, it became pretty clear that the issue was not doubtful.

At the fifth putting green they were far out among the sand hills, and the course turned to cross the hotel front, and sweep round and back. Frank saw the opportunity that for all the day he had been watching.

"Stop here," he said to Millicent. "Willy has him, right enough. You don't want to tramp all the way round. It's bad going, and we can meet them, and come back for the last four holes. Come out on to the strand and look at things."

Millicent stopped for a moment irresolute.

"Ah! come along!" he said. "It's the loveliest strand in Ireland — and the sun's coming out!"

Sure enough, though the line of hills to the southward was set against inky blackness, away to the west, where they looked, the sun was breaking through a smother of cloud. Under him a great pillar of mist concealed the huge bulk of Muckish, and white fleecy wreaths trailed across and above the lesser heights. It was wild enough, and threatening, but every moment brought out new colour, and it seemed to Millicent that something in her answered to the challenge of the sun.

"Come along, then," she said. "I want to look at the sea."

Their way led over a rough carpet of short crisp turf, with tufts of bent springing through it, and thickly sprinkled with pale empty snail-shells. It was flowered with yellow bed-straw, and yellow lady's slipper, but the lady's slipper buds were orange, passing into redness at the tip. There were tiny pansies, blue and yellow, and odorous patches, in hue midway betwixt lavender and purple, where the trodden thyme mingled its fragrance with the salt in the air.

Passing between two bent-grown hillocks, they came out on to the beach — a beach of unbroken sand that stretched for some three miles in one long curving sweep from east to west, broad and smooth to the rippled water. The tide was ebbing, and its retreat left the sand stained with slow gradations of colour. Just above the drift line, where it was piled in mounded heaps, it glistened white against the silver greyness of the bent; thence it passed through heightening tints of warm brown, till, by the water's edge, it turned almost orange. But the fresh breeze out of the west sent line after line of crinkling foam across the shallows, and there, churning it into froth, made a border of creamy whiteness dividing sea from shore: a frontier otherwise ill-marked, for deep wet blue was breaking through the grey drift overhead, and the soft azure repeated itself on the filmy mirror of the wet strand. The wind came off the bay like a caress on the girl's cheek, and she drew in her breath with rapture, as they set their faces westward and walked away, solitary figures on that long smooth expanse.

"Isn't it lovely?" she cried. "Doesn't it smell good?"

She took her hat off and paced along, swinging it, while the sun and wind played with her bright hair. Frank watched her with joy in every movement of her body, but his joy was tempered with preoccupation, as he debated with himself on the words he must speak and the moment for speaking. It was not easy to break in on her impersonal delight. So they walked on together, he a little embarrassed, she conscious of nothing beyond a sense of great freedom. Here at least she could be herself; here at least there was sanity in the large air; here were no distracting cross currents of doubt and fear.

As they walked a couple of sandpipers ran a little way on the sand before them, then rose, and as they rose, one dropped and trailed the wing.

"Oh, look at that poor bird," cried Millicent; but Frank put his hand on her arm.

"Stop quite still," he said. "Watch it."

And as they stood, Frank intently scrutinizing the level sand, the bird dodged this way and that in circles, keeping always near a certain portion of the beach.

"Ah," cried Frank at last; "there: now do you see?"

He pointed to not five yards from where they stood; but Millicent still saw nothing. Then, as they walked to it she saw a tiny dot, a lump of dogfish eggs, half buried, and scarcely bigger than a walnut. Couched beside it was a tiny creature, indistinguishable in colour from the sand, and already half embedded by the blowing grains that had formed in those two minutes a little rampart about it. Only its bright eyes showed unmistakable. Frank picked it up tenderly; but the old bird piped so pitifully, and ran hither and thither in such commotion, that Millicent begged him to put it down. He did so, setting it near a line of drift weed.

" Now, turn away," he said to Millicent.

In half a minute they turned back and the little creature was as lost to sight as if the ground had swallowed it.

" That's magic," said Millicent. " Oh dear me, what a lot of queer things and nice things there are in this nice country. I wish I hadn't got to go away from it ! "

" But there's no need to talk of that," said Frank. " Why, this rain will have put the river in splendid order. You've got to catch another salmon. Going away. Why, you've only just come."

" I'm going away all the same," answered Millicent, " and I wish so much I wasn't."

" You aren't serious," he said, turning on her a face that had lost colour under its tan. " But when did you decide this ? Why ! Have you been bored ? "

" Oh no. I've not been bored, I've been very happy. But I've got to go."

He hesitated, and from his paleness turned very red.

" Come and sit down and talk about it," he said abruptly.

Millicent felt her self-possession leaving her, but she let him find a place among the sand-hills, and spread the mackintosh he carried to make a seat.

"Will you tell me about it?" he began. "It isn't anything about your own people?"

"No," she said, with some constraint. "There; I don't want to talk about it. Only things have worried me rather, and I think I'd better go."

"I wish I had never introduced you to Conroy," he said impulsively.

She drew patterns nervously on the sand with the toe of her shoe.

"I don't think I wish that," she said hesitatingly. "But I'm not sure."

He looked hard at her. "You know — I don't understand. And I haven't said things — because you asked me not to. Last Sunday — you remember?"

"I remember," she said, very low.

"Do you remember — another day? I told you I was more keen that you should have a good time than about anything else."

Words seemed to fail her. She nodded. "You don't think I forget?"

He stopped again and looked at her; but her face was turned away.

Again there was a pause, he hesitating for speech. A kind of quixotism possessed him; he was loath even to press her for an answer. He tried to put his thought into words.

"You don't like hurting people, do you? Can you understand, I wonder, that I wouldn't like to hurt you by making you give pain — well, even to me?"

"I hate hurting people," she answered, with her eyes still on the ground.

He stopped again, and averted his face. Then he broke out abruptly.

"I can't help it! Since I met you I have thought of nothing but you! Will you not give me leave to speak this once?"

She looked at him, and turned away her eyes from his. Once before she had seen that entreaty in them — the day they had met by the bridge, and quarrelled — and she had turned her back on it. And after that she had been bitterly sorry. But now, in the same moment, there rose before her the vision of another face, whose passion had the whiteness of flame, and with it there came back upon her the flood of doubts. She could not speak.

"Look!" he went on. "I hate to urge you. But say something. If you say 'No' to me, it is all at an end. Then I shall be a friend, and I shall have a friend's right to speak to you, and try to stop you from a folly. But I must know about myself first."

Every word he uttered put before her the alternatives — the easy way, and the hard. She was half angry with him, for this gentle and considerate pleading, that lacked the force of that other imperious demand, made no appeal to her imagination. And yet she knew that the desire of her heart was in her reach. But, when she tried to answer, she felt herself still paralyzed by those other eyes; she had still in her ears that other voice. She would not say the word that would pass sentence on Owen Conroy; she could not think of her own happiness till she had forgotten the anguish on his face.

"Will you not speak to me?" said Frank, as the nervous silence remained unbroken. And he reached out and took her hand; but she drew it away with a start.

"No, no — not that!"

Then she looked at him, and saw the trace of pain on his face, and impulsively stretched out her hand again.

"Oh, be friends!" she said — "be friends to-day! Look! You have always made things easy for me. It is a shame to ask it of you, but will you leave me to my own thoughts — to find my own way? When you see me again — if you will, you may ask. It won't be for a long time; and you won't be bound to anything. Only — to-day I am bothered and unhappy; don't ask me anything to-day!"

He kept her hand for a moment. "It might be worse," he said. Then he put his lips quietly to the slender white fingers, and released them. "It shall be that way, then," he went on. "Only you will promise to give me my chance to speak before — you decide?"

She nodded. "I promise," she said, very low.

"Very well, then. We are friends — till further orders." He laughed as he spoke, but with a touch of constraint.

"I will tell you one thing," she said, looking at him with kind eyes. "You are a very nice friend. No!" — for he was beginning to speak — "Don't say any more. Come along!" and she jumped on to her feet. "I want to see Mr. Irwin win."

But, before she went, she stooped and plucked a handful of the purple thyme and pressed her face into the keen-scented blossom. Then she offered it to Frank.

"Will you have it — because you have been so good to me?"

CHAPTER XXI

The December afternoon was closing in, and the wet bog squelched under Frank Norman's shooting-boots, while the red setter padded wearily at his heels. It was too dark to try the reeds and the rushes by Drummond Lough for snipe or duck; but, as Frank reached the curve of road through the bog, he turned his back on Ballinderry. He was going to Margaret's cottage for a cup of tea — that was how he put it to himself; but it was not tea he wanted so much as to hear talk of Millicent Carteret. Besides, he had an errand.

Margaret's window shone bright as he approached it, and Toby and Fly made noisy demonstrations. And Margaret, who in the winter months missed the coming and going of anglers, was not backward in welcome.

"Och, och, Master Frank! and is that yourself? And how's all with you? Draw in the chair, now, please. Will you have the tea that's in the pot, or will I wet some more thing? And here's the soda bread you like. Wasn't it the great good chance that I'm just after baking. Hughie's milking, and John's just bringing in a load of sods. They'll be done in a minute; and quare and pleased they'll be to see you, Mr. Frank."

At all events, when the circle were gathered round the fire, if any one was not pleased there was little sign of it, and Frank heard with delight the kindly voices. The young men talked shooting — the year's plenty of duck, the scarcity of snipe; they went back on the angling chronicle of the late months, after Frank had departed.

"It would be about the second week of September the last time you were here," said Hughie; "the day you killed the red fish in the Major's Bay?"

"And a good fish he was, Hughie, when he came on to the table, though you wouldn't have thought it to look at him."

"No, troth!" said John. "I mind Margaret wanting you to send him on to London to Miss Carteret, and you saying he wasn't fit to send any place."

"It wouldn't have been any use, anyway, John. Miss Carteret went away to Italy as soon as ever she left here."

"I know that well, Mr. Frank," Margaret struck in from where she sat, with hands resting in her broad lap. "She wrote to me to tell where she was gone; 'deed, and I'd be ashamed to tell you the half of the things she said. She was always too good, and that's the truth."

" Where's the picture she sent, Margaret? " said John; " maybe Mr. Norman would like to see it."

Margaret looked at him with contempt. " Och, hold your tongue, John. What would I be showing it to Mr. Norman for? "

" Why not? What's the picture, Margaret? " Frank asked.

" 'Tis just the photograph of herself in some kind of a dress the people wear out there. But sure you'll have got it yourself."

In spite of himself, Frank laughed. " Not I, Margaret. But I'd like well to see it."

Margaret's eyes were full of incredulity. " It's maybe putting a trick on me you are, Mr. Frank. But come in here anyway."

She led the way with a candle into what used to be Millicent's sitting-room, and there, in a place of honour on the mantelpiece, was the photograph framed, showing Millicent as a contadina. It was the only portrait of her that Frank had seen.

Photography did not do Millicent justice. The vitality, the play of the face, were essential to its charm, and these perished as inevitably as the warm daring colour. It was a thin superficial presentment at best, but Frank acutely desired it.

" Do you think it's like? " he asked Margaret as he scrutinized.

"'Deed then, it's not half nice enough for Miss Carteret, and that's what I was saying to the boys. But sure them things doesn't suit her the way her own did, Mr. Frank. Still, you'd know the wee laughing way she had with her eyes. 'Margaret,' says she in her letter, 'here's one of the girls out of this country; tell me, what do you think of the way they dress themselves?' But if you'd seen her here one day, Mr. Frank, that she got an ould shawl from me, and on with it over that short skirt she had for the bicycle, and off with her shoes and stockings, and away out the length of the road; it was then you'd have thought she was bonny. But, dear oh! there was a thorn met her and back she comes limping, and 'Margaret,' says she, 'oh, I doubt I'll never get to heaven barefoot.' And I be to take the thorn out, and such feet as she had, Mr. Frank; but there now, I was never to let on a word to any one about it."

"Never mind, Margaret. I won't give you away," he said.

"Sure, what signifies? The last word I said to Miss Carteret and her going away was, 'Good-bye to you, miss, and I doubt you'll never come back here by your lones again.'"

"Well," said Frank, "and wasn't she very angry with you?"

"Is it her? Not a one of her; but as pleased as pleased. Then," she added confidentially, "sure, Mr. Frank, many's the time I said to her that no man need ask to see a nicer couple than the two of you."

Frank laughed. "And what did she say to that, Margaret?"

"What could she say? She just laughed the way you did yourself this minute; but faith and troth, Master Frank, I wonder at you if you let her slip."

"Well, well, Margaret," he retorted, "this is your affair now. Write and put in a good word for me. You may tell her I gave you full power to act. But I must be out of this now. I have to try to see Owen Conroy."

"God help us," said Margaret. "That's the quare man to be going to see. Sure he hardly speaks to a creature now this winter time. They say he shuts himself up like the bees, and when the wee touch of warmth comes he'll be stirring again. But he's the quare man anyway."

"Ah, nonsense, Margaret," said Frank, "you'll be telling me next, Ellen Dooey, that he lives with, is a witch."

Margaret's face grew black. "Well, now, Master Frank, I'd be the last to give you a bad name to any one. But, witch or no witch, there were a couple of wee things of Miss Carteret's that I missed out of the back yard when I had them for the washing, and I blamed them on her."

"I hope you didn't say so," he interjected anxiously.

"'Deed then, I did not. I never named a word of it to any one but Miss Carteret, and she was that angry with me you wouldn't believe it. But I'm telling you, Mr. Frank, that has the right to know, for if it's what I think, it wasn't for good Ellen Dooey would take the like of thon."

"I haven't any right to know, Margaret, and I don't believe a word of it; and if I was your priest I'd give you a good stiff penance for such talk. But if you said nothing to any one else there's no harm done. Will you let me leave the gun and things here till I'm passing back? The dog's beat out."

The night was settled down dark and wild when Frank started on his tramp from Margaret's cheerful fireside across the two miles of flat lonely road to where Conroy's cottage faced an ancient abbey and a graveyard, on the outskirts of Killydonnell. It was meat and wine to him to be back in a country where all places and all people spoke to him of Millicent. In the months that lay between him and the summer he had been in London; had met here and there a person who knew her as an art student, or by meeting her in ball-rooms. But here every turn of the road that he and she had passed together called up vivid pictures to his apprehension — he heard her voice, he saw her bright hair. And now he was on her errand.

For he had stipulated that, if it was to be still friendship between them, he must have a friend's privilege to write, and she had granted it readily. He had known of all her movements, and with her letters there came a good deal of herself; their coming had marked red-letter days in the long months. But the last had been by far the most welcome. He had written that Christmas would find him at Ballinderry, and she had answered that the New Year would bring her back to London.

And in that same letter she had charged him to bring her news of Owen Conroy.

"It is almost strange to me how much he is on my mind," she wrote. "I once advised him about something, and I have often wondered if I advised him right. I wrote to him, but he doesn't answer. I wish it was not such a complicated world."

And, with the tone of that, it seemed to Frank that he had every right to be content. But, as he drew nearer to the house, embarrassment was heavy on him. What should he say? He only vaguely understood the relations between Conroy and Millicent. It seemed to him that his own strengthening hope gave him a tenderness for this strange and lonely creature that he could scarcely hide, and that it would be intolerable to express.

He knocked at the closed door, and heard feet shuffling on the clay floor. Ellen Dooey opened it, and started at the sight of him. She said no word, but stood staring. Frank, remembering his last sight of her at the Well of Doon, was painfully confused. This was very unlike the welcome at Margaret's; unlike the greeting with which every Irish cottager bids the known comer to step in. He could not bring himself to speak to her as if they had met before, but asked, was Mr. Conroy in?

"He is," she answered, not bidding him to enter.

"May I come in, then? I want to see him."

She threw the door open ungraciously, and let him into the kitchen, while she herself disappeared into the room which opened off it. Thence in a moment Conroy emerged, tall, grey, and impassive as ever. Only, it seemed to Frank, that his face was thinner, and his eyes more shining.

He greeted Frank stiffly, but without the least show of constraint, and, taking chairs, they sat down by the kitchen fire, while the old woman huddled herself silently in a dark corner.

Frank found himself apologizing for his intrusion, and, for the first time, uneasy under Conroy's steady gaze. He turned the talk on to politics.

Had Conroy been making any more speeches? he asked.

"No," Conroy answered. "I thought the once was enough. 'Tis not my trade."

Talk dropped again. Frank grew more and more restless. It seemed to him that he and the other were matching themselves instinctively in a silent struggle of personalities, nature against nature. And, so long as he avoided his real preoccupation, he must inevitably weaken before the man who took the part of silence. The only course was to speak out, to force the conflict into the open.

"I heard the other day from Miss Carteret," he said. "She seemed aggrieved because you hadn't answered a letter of hers."

Behind his chair, where the old woman sat in the darkness of her corner, there was a movement. Frank could feel on his skin the shudder of dislike which stirred at the naming of Millicent's name.

Conroy's face twitched a little, but he answered in the same civil tone.

"Miss Carteret must excuse me. I'm no great hand at the writing. Maybe you'll tell her so?"

Again the talk stopped. The hostile presence of old Ellen got unbearable to Frank. He wondered how to get away from her, and suddenly bethought himself that he had never spoken to Conroy of the disaster at the well. He rose to his feet.

"I must be going. Do you mind coming into the other room for a minute? There's a thing I want to explain to you."

A strange flash crossed Conroy's face, as if he had suddenly heard something that he dreaded to hear, with so great a dread that the actual hearing was a respite. He turned his eyes from Frank and fixed them on the fire. Then another look grew up — a look in which triumph mingled with the hate.

"Surely," he said, in his slow voice. "There's something in there I want to show you, anyway."

He opened the door into the room, which was neat, decently white-washed, and with a boarded floor. A bed was in one corner, but the main piece of furniture was a strong deal table covered with drawing-paper. On this was a lamp, and the light of the lamp fell on a picture, framed and set up in such a way that the sitter at the table must rest his eyes full on it.

Frank saw it as he entered, and stopped as if struck by a shot. Then he walked across without a word, and looked closely into it.

The picture showed a flame, long and oval, like the flame of a candle, and faint as fire seen by daylight; but at the heart of it a figure shaped itself, nebulous and vague in its drapery, palpitating with the orange tints of flame. And, through the fiery mists, its face was seen shining, luminous and grey, like peat ashes in which the fire sleeps. A face yearning with all the intensity of desire, as if drained of its blood by sheer passion. It was the face, not of a girl, but of a woman, from which all the veils have been stripped or burnt away, till, in the elemental flame of her womanhood, ardour and tenderness, love and maternity, blend themselves in transfigured eyes.

And the face was the face of Millicent.

Frank gazed at it, rebuked and abashed. Were these the eyes of his playfellow? the eyes where he had seen light laughter, and tears not painful? Was this the face that he had loved and longed for? the face he had known — but not divined? What was he in the presence of that face, and of the man who had divined it?

Automatically he stammered out a question. "What is this?"

Conroy was watching him with an unsuppressed exultation, made of many emotions — the rival not crushing out of sight the artist.

"'Tis just one of the things I see in the vision," he answered. "I would say, myself, it was a spirit of the fire."

A sudden thought sprang up in Frank's mind. Imagination, he knew, played strange tricks, and he had always entertained theories as to the origin of Conroy's visions. Was it possible that the impression left on his mind by the girl had, unknown to him, externalized itself; that he had painted not knowing what he painted? He hesitated for a moment, then he took the plunge.

"Is that so? Do you remember you traded off one of your pictures with me for a couple of books? Do you want books? Because I want that drawing badly."

He turned as he spoke, and, to his amazement, he saw a dull red flush spread over the grey face, and a flame like the flame of madness light up in Conroy's eyes. For a moment he thought the man would strike him. But as he looked, the flush subsided, and the flame changed to a cold glitter, and Conroy spoke with undisguised contempt.

" I need no books, and 'tis not you would understand or know the thing you see there. But I know — and I know your errand. And you may go to her that sent you, and say to her what you saw, and she will understand. And you may tell her that the word I said holds true, and the day is not far off when it will be made good. Let her marry you if she will; but this is mine, and she will know the power of it. You have all the world on your part; but all the world cannot give you what is mine. It cannot take the soul from the body in life, nor the body from the soul."

Frank listened with wonder and mounting indignation, heightened by a sense that he had put himself in the wrong.

" I beg your pardon," he said. " I had no wish to offend you. You expressly said that this was a drawing like any of the others. If I had known that you attached a special value to it, I should have said nothing. But, in any case, it was a liberty. I beg your pardon."

He turned on his heel as he spoke and went out into the night.

But Owen Conroy left alone in the room flung himself on the chair, and resting his head on his elbows, fixed his eyes on the picture with a terrible intensity as if all the forces of his soul and body were concentrated in that gaze.

"There is life," he muttered after a while. "The breast stirs. She is coming nearer. She will come soon."

CHAPTER XXII

A FORTNIGHT later, it was the second day of the new year, and Frank was on his way from his chambers in the Temple to see the returned Millicent. He had not trusted himself to write more than a note asking for leave to call, and her answer had been only, " If you come at four you will find me."

From that many things could be argued; and he argued them all. But his reasonings were heavily overshadowed by a scruple of conscience.

The nearest thing in Frank Norman to intellectual distinction was a great reverence for that distinction when he recognized it in others. And the impression of what he had seen on his visit to Conroy was strong on him.

It was true, he reflected, that Conroy had behaved savagely, almost indecently. But passion has little regard for the decencies, and he, by a request which ought never to have been made, had provoked the explosion. Indeed he could not wonder at it. All the world was on his side, Conroy had said; and it was true. Here was he, free to meet Millicent in her own home, on her own ground, in her own atmosphere; qualified at every point where the other was disqualified. And yet, as between man and man, the odds stood far otherwise. All his own advantages were accidental; he was on the spot and had a right to be.

But away in a Donegal cabin was that other, the peasant, with the picture that his brain had shaped, his hand had made. Frank had thought he knew Millicent, and understood her as no one else could; it is the natural illusion. But the illusion fell to pieces when he saw, presented to his eyes, something that disclosed in her powers and possibilities that he had never guessed at; things not revealed to him; an interpretation that set the interpreter on a very different level from his own. He had remembered many times in that fortnight — and how bitterly! — how he had in a sense inclined to show off this man to Millicent almost as a client; how he had insisted on his social inferiority; how he had recalled to her mind the barriers. Barriers: they existed certainly. That was the injustice; but he asked himself with what face he could take advantage of them. He could not conceive that a woman should be indifferent to such a proof of power and insight as that picture had given; but of this proof Millicent knew and could know nothing.

Conroy's fierce words were vivid in his mind, though ill-comprehended. He knew them for a challenge, not so much to himself — indeed he felt with bitterness that the man had seemed to set him out of account — as a challenge to the girl. If it was a conflict, he determined that he would do the one thing by which he could assert his personality. He would do his best to redress the inequality; at least he would not snatch an advantage.

His hansom stopped at the door in the solemn square, and he asked for Miss Carteret. There was little trace of Millicent in her mother's dwelling. But the servant led him through the house to a region in the back, which, as he rightly guessed, was the daughter's own studio and sanctum. The door opened on a large rather bare room; and there from a big armchair by the bright fire Millicent rose to greet him.

It was something of a revelation, this new aspect of her in pretty fluttery picturesque garments that followed the undulation of her figure; and something too was changed in her face. Was it the light, he wondered, or had the curves of her cheeks grown more subtle, the contours about her mouth a shade more sharply chiselled? At all events there she was, and where she was it was good to be, as before: as before, his whole being was at once soothed and exhilarated; it was sunshine and sun-warmth that stole through his veins. The touch of her hand was softer and more thrilling, and her eyes kept their old mystery and fascination. And as before, talk was the easiest thing in the world, and every light word seemed charged with interest.

"Well, and you liked Italy?"

"It was lovely. But tell me about Donegal. How is Margaret?"

"Margaret sent all sorts of messages. She wanted to send an offering of eggs, or something; but I stopped her."

"How unkind of you," she laughed.

"If I had," he pleaded in self-justification, "my cousins would have filled a hamper for you as well. They sent their love, too. And the colonel desired me specially to say that he didn't see why Margaret should have your picture and not he."

"Isn't it sweet of them? I do hope they won't forget me." Then she stopped for a moment, and her eyes fell. "And Mr. Conroy?"

The moment had come, and it was hard.

"I saw him," he answered.

"Well?" asked Millicent, with her eyes still averted.

It seemed to Frank impossible that he should speak what he had to say from that long distance. There was the length of a hearthrug between them, and he felt as if he were talking to her across the world. And yet to take her hand was further than he could trust himself if his purpose were to last.

"Look," he said at last, in a voice curiously strained. "You know what I came here to say."

She was silent, and her face was still turned from him. He went on. "There is something else I want to say first."

She looked round at him with a start of surprise, almost, he thought, of apprehension.

"What is it?" she said. "Why are you so strange? You frighten me. Has anything happened?"

"No," he answered quickly. "It's just this. I'm here. And he can't be here. And you don't know."

A curious tenderness of laughter came into her eyes.

"You strange person. What don't I know?"

"Listen!" he said. And he told her in brief words of his visit to Conroy's cottage, and Ellen's reception of him.

"Oh, that old woman!" said Millicent, with an involuntary shiver.

"I know what you mean. She was on my nerves like a nightmare. So I made an excuse to go into Conroy's own room."

Then he tried to describe to her what he had seen. Embarrassed and halting in speech, he kept his eyes away from her, speaking in jerks. But Millicent watched him, and on her face was a chase of emotions, and the laughter about her eyes was close to tears. It was not of Conroy she thought now.

"It's no use," he said finally. "I can't tell you. It's just this. I felt pretty small looking at it. I realized that you were away up there somewhere — somewhere I had never guessed at — and he had followed you and found you there. God!" he went on — "there was a phrase kept coming into my mind when I thought it over — that sickening phrase about gentlemen and common men. I felt a common man enough, I can tell you."

His lips were wrung with emotion, and the words came bitterly from them. He broke off with something between a laugh and a groan. But her face was full of a great tenderness.

"We are both of us very common people — you and I," she said softly, "compared with Owen Conroy."

His heart leapt suddenly within him, and he looked at her with a flash of gratitude. There was welcome and every kindness in her eyes. But he checked himself. All was not said yet.

"Conroy knows better than you. He sees what I never had the wit to see."

Then he looked at her face. The very boyishness of his impulsive generosity, and of his humiliation, filled her with a great tenderness. Younger in years, she was in that moment immeasurably older; she was the woman, and he the youth. And the fulness of her power shone on him as he gazed.

"I can see it now," he said very simply. "Is it not strange that another man should teach me to read your face?"

The trouble in his eyes wrought upon her, and the woman's impulse to comfort swept away the instincts of the girl.

"Do you mind so much?" she said softly; and she held out her hands calling him to her.

But he made a gesture as if to push her away. "No, I must finish telling you. I am ashamed to tell you of my blundering. I asked him for the picture."

The tenderness in her eyes suffused itself with laughter, but wise laughter, as if she laughed with all the kindly wisdom of ages at the ways of youth; and she shook her head.

"Oh, foolish, foolish! Well? What did he say? He was angry?"

"He was; and he said what made me angry. But when I came to think it over, I wondered if I had the right to be. I want to tell you what he said, for it is on my mind."

"Tell me," she said softly.

"He said that I could never understand what the picture meant, but that you would understand."

Her face clouded a little. The pleading eyes before her were for a moment forgotten; another voice began to echo in her ears — the voice of a man whose passion had such power that it could send this other man here, not to speak for himself, but to tell her of what he had seen.

Frank watched her closely, and the lines of pain began to accentuate themselves; his voice began to harden.

" He said more than that; he said words that are not clear to me. This is what he said. 'You may go to her and tell her that the word I said holds good, and that this that you have seen is here to make it good.' "

A new thought flashed across Millicent's mind. She remembered well — only too well — the imperious word that he had spoken. But she remembered also now, in a moment, many other things that shaped themselves into a conjecture. Anger began to rise in her. Frank had paused awkwardly.

" Go on," she said. " Tell me all of it. I have a right to hear."

Frank still hesitated. " Look here. You must not think I said anything that could mislead him, or give him the right to assume what he did. What he said was this, or like this, 'Let her marry you if she wish; but this is mine, mine and hers together. You have all the world for you; but all the world cannot keep the body from the soul, nor the soul from the body.' "

As he spoke he knew that her eyes were far away, that her thoughts were not of him. He could not read her face; only it seemed more and more certain that she was slipping away from him. And, indeed, there was a conflict within her to which he was a stranger. Her nature rose in revolt against the claim that Conroy's words asserted; she told herself that there was no truth in it, she knew that, by a means which she not dimly guessed at, he was trying to bend her to his will. She was too angry to laugh; she resented it almost as a physical indignity. Impotent and pitiable as his folly was, it had dashed her hour of happiness.

Frank's voice broke in on her. He had watched her in silence with growing trouble.

"I have told you what I had to say. I do not understand what he meant. But I thought you should hear."

Her thoughts were still of regret for the shattered moment — the meeting long looked forward to.

"I wish you had not told me. Why did I ask you to go to him?" Her voice was still dreamy and far away, and all the bitterness in Frank's heart broke bounds.

"Can't you see? How could I not tell you? I have asked you nothing. But will you never understand? Can you not see what I want to know — what I must know?"

His sudden outburst broke in on her with a shock of surprise. She forgot all else as she turned and looked at him, and saw the trouble and anger in his face.

"Oh, oh, oh!" she cried in self-reproach, and the note of her voice was sweeter than all music. "I am never kind to you."

In an instant he was by her side, holding her hands.

"My answer," he said. "Give me my answer. I have waited long."

Her eyes met his, full, unfearing, unflinching, and for a moment they looked at each other. But something in her held her back — an instinct telling her that a challenge had been thrown down, and she must meet it. And the pain was gone from his face, and there was no doubt in his eyes.

"You have waited," she said. "And you may have your answer now, if you like. But you have told me things that have surprised me and hurt me. And I would like to clear up everything before — I give you your answer. I would rather give it you in Donegal."

"Donegal!" he repeated, in a kind of bewilderment. "But this is the winter. Am I to wait six months more?"

Her eyes filled with laughter again as she looked at him.

"Are there no trains in the winter, then? I thought of going — perhaps next month."

"Why not next week?" he said.

But she only laughed at him. The reaction was strong upon her; she was a girl again.

" Promise," he urged.

" No — I promise nothing. There, you needn't hold my hands."

His face was a little overcast, and she saw it.

" Ah, don't get angry again. You mustn't. We aren't going to be serious to-day. Come and be introduced to my mother."

CHAPTER XXIII

Once more Millicent was on her bicycle, traversing the familiar road along the river, and her wheels sped swiftly over the frost-hardened surface. She had left Donegal with a standing invitation to return to Ballinderry when and how she pleased; but her letter asking for leave to come had made a great flutter in the establishment. There was no mention of Frank in it, but the little ladies were wonderfully quick at putting two and two — or one and one — together; and the colonel openly derided them, and said it was early days to be talking of wedding presents. And when Millicent came they had kissed her with effusion, and the colonel had wagged his head and expressed a conjecture that he would soon be entitled to that same privilege; and if Frank preferred to travel two days later instead of having such good company on that long journey, he could only say that the ways of young people nowadays were past finding out.

What the colonel would have said if he had known Millicent's destination on this afternoon, can only be conjectured; and, indeed, Millicent herself was inclined to think her conduct a little extraordinary. It was a week now since the day when Frank had come to see her in her studio, and day and night she had been meditating over the sense of Conroy's words. She could not be certain. But she remembered only too distinctly his assertion of a power over her in the stormy moment when they parted; she remembered how at their very first meeting, talk had turned on the possibility of affecting a person through the image, and how Conroy had plainly refused to dismiss the belief as an idle fancy; and how, again, when she had questioned him whether his strange gifts endowed him with power to affect the actions of other creatures, he had indignantly disclaimed not the power, but the will to do so. And, in any case, she knew less by inference than by intuition, that his words to Frank Norman had been spoken in passion as a threat that would reach to her. Millicent did not like to be threatened, least of all when the threat roused in her heart a suspicion of fear.

It was not that she feared the spell, if spell there was. On the contrary, supposing herself right — and she knew herself right — it was a confession of weakness, a resort to power not native to the man's own personality. And it was only his personality that she felt bound — if not to fear, at least to convince herself that she did not fear.

For, in the months that had gone by, while she was regaining the equipoise of her nature, she had come to recognize how strong a ferment had been thrown into it by her association with this man. He had coloured her life; she had learnt to see things, in a measure, with his eyes; he had called out powers in her that hastened in a few days her growth from girl into woman. And she knew moreover how, if he had chosen then to make his appeal merely to her compassion, to her desire to help, to her unwillingness to wound, that she could have refused him no help that he might claim. But he had been too clear-sighted not to see, and he had rejected compassion; coming to her fresh from a triumphant exhibition of his power, he had thought to sweep her victoriously out of her own control, to absorb her life in his.

And now, it seemed, in his infatuation, in his mad desire not merely to touch her heart and her imagination, but to subject her will, he had overstepped, perhaps, the bounds that divided sanity from madness, and certainly the limit between fair dealing and unfair, as he himself conceived them. He was obstinate to assert over her a supremacy, and her spirit was as proud as his. She was going to face him, and outface him; to shatter an illusion that seemed an insult to her freedom; to know herself and prove herself free. It seemed to her that he had presumed strangely upon her compassion, and, for the moment, there was no compassion in her heart.

A visit to Margaret had been the ready pretext for an excursion along the Killydonnell road. And now that Millicent was nearing the end of Margaret's lane, she was touched with apprehensions, for if she were seen to pass without entering, she knew well that she would be sadly fallen from grace in Margaret's eyes. But the thing in hand had to be got over, and Margaret's greeting would be a pleasant relief when it was done.

The luncheon hour at Ballinderry might be later one day than another, but never earlier; and light was failing fast before Millicent reached Conroy's cottage. She leant her bicycle against the hedge, and, carrying her head high, stepped to the door and knocked. An unreasonable tremor seized her. She feared the sight of old Ellen, and the thought almost unnerved her; so that she fairly gasped for relief when the door opened, and she saw the figure of Conroy.

But the relief was only for a moment. Against the darkness of the interior his face showed dead white, and there was a wild gleam of triumph in his eye. For an instant Millicent was afraid; it was like the face of a madman.

"I was looking for you to come," he said. "I knew your knock." There was a feverish exultation in his voice.

"How did you hear I was in the country?" asked Millicent.

But he only laughed with the same wild note of triumph.

"I am always looking for you. It has been long. Come in."

Millicent hesitated for an instant, then she stepped across the threshold. The clay-floored kitchen was only lit by a peat fire, and as the girl entered, a dark crouching figure shuffled out of a corner, and huddled stealthily up the short stair, vanishing into blackness. Millicent felt a wave of aversion sweep over her as the old woman passed. The atmosphere seemed all dark, uncanny, superstitious.

Conroy drew a chair for her to the fire. He seated himself opposite her, and stirred the sods till the blaze lit up their faces. He looked at Millicent with an unnatural lustre in his eyes; they were bloodshot and feverish, she noticed, no longer clear and cool; and her anger was mingled with repugnance. She met his glance, and the wild gaze rested on hers for a moment, then strayed back, as if automatically, to the fire. Instantly all trace of fear vanished from her. She knew or divined that he was flying from the truth to his delusion.

But a low sob of laughter shook him. "So you have come!" he said, still looking at the flames.

"Yes," she answered simply; "I have come."

"Is it not strange?" he said, and his voice was filled with the same low, jubilant laughter. "I never doubted of this hour! I saw you come — so many times. I knew by your eyes, when they looked at me from the fire, that you were coming. Day by day they drew nearer. And, now you are come, I am feared to look at you."

"That is not strange," she answered, with a chilling inflection.

It was as if she had struck him with a whip. He turned suddenly and faced her as she sat there erect and angry. As he looked at her she saw an expression of bewilderment — despairing bewilderment — steal into his eyes. He was like one who, waking from a dream, should suddenly doubt of his existence.

"But you have come!" he repeated. "You are here!"

He clung now to the tangible — to the testimony, not of the spiritual vision, but of his bodily senses. It was a cry of anguish; but she hardened her heart against it.

"Ask yourself why I am here?" she retorted.

A gleam of comprehension shot into his eyes, and he flushed a dull red.

"You have understood?" he questioned, and the sign of shame was perceptible on his forehead.

"Yes," she answered; "I understood — all."

There was an ominous significance in her tone, and he could no longer avoid the doubt. Yet she could see his will concentrate itself, as if to push away from him the truth too evident to his eyes, and already she knew herself the victor. Resentment was gone from that instant; but she had a work to accomplish, and pity was not yet awake.

"It is you who do not understand," she said, with deliberate emphasis.

He raised his hand to his eyes and covered them as he spoke.

"You have been long away. You are newly come. I cannot see yet."

"It is not that. You have looked too long at fancies. You see, but you cannot believe what you see."

Again he bent his eyes on her fiercely, with an effort; and more than ever she felt her mastery, and determined to assert it.

"Mr. Conroy, I want to see the picture that I heard of."

Her eyes were imperious now, as well as her tone, and he rose and obeyed. He came back from the other room bringing it, with a lamp in his hand. He set the lamp on the table, and she rose and went over to it, and looked gravely at the picture, holding it in her hands. Then she set it down.

"It is fine," she said coldly. "The best drawing you have done, by far. You have learnt a great deal." Then she came and sat down again, facing him. There was an instant's pause before she spoke again, with an entire change of tone. She had dropped her affectation of dispassionate scrutiny. "Do you know what I see in it? I see yourself — not me."

His answer leapt out passionately. "You see my need of you! All the longing of all my life!"

"And what of my life?" she retorted.

He made no answer, and she fixed reproachful eyes on him as she went on.

"Look! I know your belief. I will talk your own language to you. My will was not yours, and you set snares to force me to your will? Is that not true? That thing, then — that drawing — was not simply honest work, was it? You thought it would be a spell to force me to your will. I could laugh at the folly of it, if I were not too angry. Is that how you think to win a woman?"

He groaned, and hid his face in his hands; but she went on pitilessly, her anger rising as it found vent in words.

"Was it fair? I ask you that. I treated you as a friend, and you tried to make a slave of me! That ends all between us. I am free, and free I will be. Body and spirit — if they are two or one — I give myself and I withhold myself, as I choose. You tried to make me something not myself — a chattel of yours, a part of you!"

Under the sting of her fierce words, he lifted up his head and glared at her.

"And what will you be with him — with that other? You say you could laugh. I could laugh myself to think I gave in to such foolishness, but there would be little comfort in that laughter. I am stronger than he. What magic is there in it that he has power over you and I have none?"

The despair in his voice smote on Millicent's heart, and she answered in a softened tone.

"There is no magic. My way lies with his, that is all I know."

"And whose way with mine?" he questioned.

Once again the strange note of solitariness, as if of a cry uttered among echoing rocks that only enhance the loneliness, touched her as it had done on the first day when he began to speak freely in her presence. Something of the old pity began to come back to her, but with a new understanding.

"Is it so hard to be alone?" she said. "Before I knew you — were you unhappy?"

"I was happy," he answered, "like the cattle in the fields."

For a moment her voice faltered. "I meant only kindness." Then she paused. "No, it was not that. I meant nothing. It just happened. It had to be. Somehow or other, pain had to come into your life. Only — I wish it had not been through me."

He looked up at her, and, as she looked, she saw that the unnatural brilliancy had gone out of his eyes.

"Maybe you are right," he said abruptly, and turned away his face.

But she would not let him slip from her influence. It was her hour, and she knew it.

"Mr. Conroy," she said, almost pleading, "I was angry when I came. There is no anger now between us. We are beginning to understand, you and I. I want you to look at me. There is nothing in my heart that I would not have you see."

He lifted his head, and fixed on her the gaze that she knew so well.

"Yes," he said, after a moment; "I see you now. Your face is as kind as heaven; but it is as far away. My way lies lonely."

"I do not know," she said. "It goes far, and it rises high, I think. It is not so lonely but that you can help others. You are beginning to be yourself again. I think that all these months you have been trying to be some one different — some one not so good."

Again he turned away from her, and hid his face in his hands.

"Look!" she went on. "I want you to think what you have been doing. You have been shutting yourself in a prison-house of your own making. You have been losing touch with all that used to enter into your nature. Have you forgotten the mountains, and the rivers, and the fields, and the people that live in them? You have shut out all that used to reflect itself in your soul. You have lost care for your art and for your work." Then she paused for an instant, and a new note of appeal came into her voice. "Do you think I do not care?" she said.

"What is it you want of me?" he asked sadly. "What is it to you?"

"But it is so much," she said vehemently. "Can you not see? You have altered life for me. I shall never be the same. I shall always be worth more — much more — for having known you. And you will be changed too; but you will be yourself. Only come out of this darkness that you have built up about you. Give up trying to see what does not exist and never can exist, and let the real things come back to you. This has all been a sickness."

He looked up at her. "It has been delirium, and I am wakening. I know it, because I feel the pain."

She bent her head silently.

"You will not take notice of what a man said or did when he was delirious," he said, with a strange, painful smile. "Is there more to say?"

She paused for a moment and caught her breath. Then she rose and went over to the table and took the drawing.

"This here," she said, "this is part of the last months. It is a pity; oh, such a pity; but —"

He made no gesture, but his gaze was still on her, and her thoughts were evident to him. Again the same sad ghost of a smile flickered about his lips.

" Yes," he said; " it is best so. Flame to the fire. Throw it in."

She bent forward and moved the sods; a blaze leapt up and on it she laid the drawing in its wooden frame. He never took his eyes from her, but she watched, with tears streaming down her face, the cardboard shrivel and flare, and the wood catch.

" It is done," she said, with a sob, turning to him. Then she rose and held out her hand. " Good-bye. You were right about the mirror and the image. Nothing that ever hurts you will be quite without power on me. I am leaving part of my life here."

He took her hand silently, then ushered her out into the night. The little trivial business of getting her bicycle and lighting the lamp made a welcome relief and transition. When it was done, he spoke again with a strange mixture of tenderness and irony.

" It is your way that lies lonely," he said. " But it leads home. Good-bye."

She could make no answer, but for a moment her hand was crushed in his before she sped away through the dark.

CHAPTER XXIV

A BARGAIN had been struck at the house in Bayswater that Millicent should have two clear days at Ballinderry to accomplish whatever she might choose. After that, Frank might use his discretion as to the moment of arrival.

Now, since Millicent's errand was ended on the evening of the first day after her coming, it followed that there was a whole twenty-four hours at her disposal. As is the way in Irish houses, she found herself entirely her own mistress. No one endeavoured to entertain, no one mapped out her time. If she liked to sit and talk to the kind little ladies, she was welcome; if she liked to read, no one thought it a strange taste; and when she wandered out by herself to roam about the grounds, no one felt bound to accompany her. It was an easy place to dream in, and she had many dreams to dream. But in a day there are many minutes; and though in brooding over things past, these slip away as quickly as the ripple from under a boat that runs in light weather before a fair wind, yet when the time goes in dreaming of something vague and sweet that has to come, the current of life carries the dreamer to fulfilment no swifter than a barge is borne on the canal. It seemed to Millicent that in every hour of that day there were many thousand minutes.

She fled to Margaret as a resource, and she fled from Margaret with cheeks unreasonably pink; and when she got back to Ballinderry, and the colonel waved at her a telegram from Frank announcing his arrival the next morning, matters were little mended.

"Well, well, Miss Carteret, it's a pleasure to see you. I always said the Ballinderry air was better than any doctor. Here's a poor young lady that came away from London because the fogs were going to kill her, and look at her now, with a colour like a fine young peony."

But the little ladies came to the rescue, and ruffled up their plumes, and rebuked their uncle for the indiscretion of personal remarks, and he retired, laughing.

And at last the day ended and even the dragging night; and Millicent was dressing herself when she heard the wheels of a car on the gravel drive. She was not going to look out of the window, not even from behind a curtain. One thing was fixed in her mind; whatever happened she was going to be late for breakfast.

There are punctual households in Ireland, but there are also households which are not punctual;

and in these to be late for meals is not impossible, only, to accomplish it, you must be to the manner born. Millicent listened to the gong sounding, and she waited for a time that seemed to her interminable. Then she went downstairs. But when she emerged into the big bare hall which divided dining-room from drawing-room, there stood a young man in front of the blazing fire of logs.

She stopped, and she looked round so obviously for some shelter that he fairly laughed as he caught her hands.

"Nobody is down," he said. "Cousin Cassy was here a little while ago, but she has vanished on some of her usual errands. Come into the drawing-room."

And so it came to pass that, after all, Millicent was really late for breakfast; and when a hue and cry was raised after the traveller by the old butler David, and he was tracked down to the drawing-room, the secret was, it is to be feared, very much a piece of public property.

"You have never given me my answer," said Frank.

This was after breakfast, when the household had vanished from the drawing-room, not without meaning glances.

"You took it," Millicent answered, with a little fluttering laugh.

"No, but seriously. I am glad you waited. I wanted to play fair. I wanted you to be quite sure — of your choice."

She turned her eyes full on him, in a kind mockery. "Foolish person. I had no choice. That is just the injustice."

Perhaps it was half an hour later — perhaps it was an hour and a half, for these young people had lost count of time, that Millicent looked out of the window and said the sunshine was a reproach to them. Frank jumped at a notion.

"Yes," he said; "come out. Come down into Strathmore. You haven't been there since — one day last summer, was it not? Do you remember?"

And whether the little ash tree bears initials cut inconspicuously on its stem, or whether Frank and Millicent decided that such a proceeding would be quite too early Victorian in sentiment, can only be ascertained by a visit to the spot. But there is no question that the matter was discussed, amid a great deal of other foolishness, which is early Victorian too, but has never gone completely out of fashion. These young people took their happiness laughing, and it is not clear that they were any the less wise. For there are some whom nature teaches through laughter, and there are more ways than one of winning to the old knowledge which is at the root of all knowledge — a knowledge of the power and the mystery and the beauty of the human soul.

HENRY BOURLAND

THE PASSING OF THE CAVALIER

BY

ALBERT ELMER HANCOCK

Cloth. 12mo. $1.50

"Mr. Hancock has written a telling piece of history in fictional form. There is a realism almost brutal about his style in the main narrative, but this is lightened by the romantic touch which he gives to the love element, most charmingly introduced, and the humor that he infuses into the political phases of the Reconstruction. This portion of the story, incidentally, throws some accurate sidelights on the politics of the times, and contains more than one graphic character portrait. But the dominant note is tragic, and this tragedy — the decay of the American cavalier — makes 'Henry Bourland' a convincing human document." — *The North American.*

"The love scenes, of which there are several, show the skill of a true artist. No one who had not a fine insight into human nature could have written them. . . . The author must have made a very thorough study of the political and social conditions that prevailed in the South during the Reconstruction period, as well as of the purposes of political parties at that time. Otherwise he could not have produced a novel that would come anywhere near meeting the approval of those who were actors in the Reconstruction drama. The fact that the truth is approached so closely adds greatly to the interest and value of the book.

"The author has a superb command of the English language, which he uses with fine effect when there is a chance for the display of eloquence or a call for descriptive writing or moralizing. . . . The book is a timely one, and being strongly written, is likely to make a profound impression, North and South." — *Morning News* (Savannah).

"The pictures of Reconstruction, and the woes that came from the rule of the freedmen and the carpetbagger, are painted with an artistic hand. The book is a valuable study of Reconstruction times."

— *The Nebraska State Journal.*

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

66 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK

ARROWS OF THE ALMIGHTY

BY

OWEN JOHNSON

Cloth. 12mo. $1.50

"There are new forces and tactics in Mr. Owen Johnson's novel. . . . The material is so rich that the interest does not lag. . . . All told it is a strong story." — *The Herald* (Boston).

"By the grandeur of its principles, the sympathy that it invokes, and the seriousness of thought to which it is influential, 'Arrows of the Almighty' *is one of the important books of the time.*" — *The Courier* (Boston).

"It is easy to see at a glance that the book cannot fail to be one of the most popular stories of the season."
— LILIAN WHITING in *The Times-Democrat* (New Orleans).

"A deep sense of the dignity of life, the triumph of beauty over ugliness, the sweetness of the moral struggle, the benefit of the spiritual in all things." — *The News* (Baltimore).

"A narrative of force and vigor, attractive atmosphere and a rare group of figures. . . . Thoroughly readable, thoroughly entertaining." — *The Times* (Louisville).

"Lofty and pure in tone, strongly human in its characters, admirable in its literary style and finish — a novel, in short, of exceptional worth." — *The Tribune* (Chicago).

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
66 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK

O-nvd

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
A 000 031 672 9