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[Frontispiece: Joan]

KENNY

By

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Author of

Diane of the Green Van

The Lovable Meddler

Illustrated by

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Joan . . . . . Frontispiece

He was sailing across, to romance he hoped, and surely to mystery

"'Tis Samhain, Adam," said Kenny, "the summer ending of the druids"

"I love you better than my life," Joan said, "and I may—may never—say it again"

KENNY

CHAPTER I

BRIAN REBELS

"You needn't repeat it," said Brian with a flash of his quiet eyes. "This time, Kenny, I mean to stay disinherited." Kennicott O'Neill stared at his son and gasped. The note of permanency in the chronic rite of disinheritance was startling. So was something in the set of Brian's chin and the flush of anger burning steadily beneath the dark of his skin. Moreover, his eyes, warmly Irish like his father's, and ordinarily humorous and kind, remained unflinchingly aggressive.

With the air of an outraged emperor, the older man strode across the studio and rapped upon his neighbor's wall for arbitration.

"Garry may be in bed," said Brian,

"And he may not." It was much the same to Kenny.

He was a splendid figure—that Irishman. His gorgeous Persian slippers curled at the toes and ended in a pair of scarlet heels. The extraordinary mandarin combination of oriental magnificence and the rags he affected for a bathrobe, hung from a pair of shoulders noticeably broad and graceful. If he wore his frayed splendor with a certain picturesque distinction, it was the way he did all things, even his delightful brogue which was if anything a shade too mellifluous to be wholly unaffected. What Kenny liked he kept if he could, even his irresponsible youth and gayety.

Time had helped him there. His auburn hair was still bright and thick. And his eyes were as blue and merry now as when with pagan reverence he had tramped and sketched as a lad among the

ruined altars of the druids.

He had meant to wither his son with continued dignity and calm. The vagaries of Irish temper ordained otherwise. Kenny glanced at the fragments of a statuette conspicuously rearranged on a Louis XV table almost submerged in the chaotic disorder of the studio, and lost his head.

"Look at that!" he flung out furiously.

Brian had already looked—with guilt—and regretted.

"I broke it—accidentally," he admitted.

"Accidentally! You flung a brush at it."

"I flung a brush across the studio," corrected Brian, "just after you went out to pawn my shotgun."

"Damn the shotgun!"

"I can extend that same courtesy," reminded Brian, "to the statuette."

Things were going badly when the expected arbitrator rapped upon the door, and losing ground, Kenny felt that he must needs dramatize his parental right to authority for the benefit of Garry's ears and his own pride.

"Silence!" he thundered, striding toward the door. He flung it back with the air of a conqueror. His stage play fell rather flat. Garry Rittenhouse, in bathrobe and slippers, confronted the pair with a look of weary inquiry. He sometimes regretted that as a peacemaker he had become an institution. Nobody said anything. Garry hunted cigarettes, cleared a chair and sat down.

"It may or may not interest you two to know that I was in bed," he began irritably. "I wish to Heaven you'd fight in union hours."

Brian was sorry and said so. Kenny, however, took immediate advantage of Garry's attitude to sidetrack what he considered the preposterous irrelevance of the shotgun, the one unessential thing in the studio, and point with rising temper to the statuette. It had, alas! been a birthday present from Ann Marvin, whose statuettes, fashionable and satiric, were famous.

It was like Kenny to have a grievance. He was hardly ever without one. But justification was rare indeed and he made the best of it. He said all that was on his mind without restraint as to duration or intensity, thunderstruck at Brian's white-hot response. For twenty minutes of Irish fire and fury, Garry listened in amazement, sensing an unaccustomed stubbornness in Brian's anger.

"Just a minute," said Garry, dazed. "Let's get down to brass tacks. Who and what began it?"

They both told him.

"One at a time, please!" he begged. "I gather that you, Kenny, in need of petty funds, went out to pawn Brian's shotgun. And you, Brian, losing your temper, flung a brush across the studio and smashed a valued statuette—"

Kenny chose indignantly to tell it all again and overshot the mark, bringing Garry down upon him with a bark.

"Now, see here, Kenny," he interposed curtly, "that's enough. Brian's usually sane and regular. It's by no means a criminal offense for him to pick a row with you about his shotgun. And he didn't mean to smash the statuette."

He waited for the voice of thunder in which Kenny, at a disadvantage, would be sure to disinherit his son and, waiting, glanced a trifle wryly at the littered studio. What Brian lost by chronic disinheritance lay ever before the eye, particularly now when Kenny, in one of his periods of insolvency, was posted downstairs for club debt and Mrs. Haggerty's insular notions about credit had driven him to certain frugal devices with the few handkerchiefs he owned, one of which was spread upon the nearest window pane to dry.

Garry's disgusted inventory missed nothing: a prayer rug for which Kenny had toured into the south of Persia and led an Arabian Nights' existence with pursuing bandits whom, by some extraordinary twist of genius, he had conciliated and painted; an illuminated manuscript in Gaelic which he claimed had been used by a warrior to ransom a king; chain armor, weapons of all kinds, climes and periods; an Alpine horn, reminiscent of the summer Kenny had saved a young painter's life at the risk of his own; some old masters, a cittern, a Chinese cheng with tubes and reeds, an ancient psaltery with wires you struck with a crooked stick that was always lost (Kenny when the mood was upon him evolved weird music from them all), an Italian dulcimer, a Welsh crwth that was unpronounceably interesting (some of the strings you twanged with your thumb and some you played with a bow); Chinese, Japanese, Indian vases, some alas! sufficiently small for utilitarian purposes, Salviati glass, feather embroidery, carved chairs and a chest.

A prodigal display—Kenny in his shifting periods of affluence was always prodigal—but there had never been cups enough with handles in the littered closet, Garry recalled, until Brian inspired had

bought too many bouillon cups, figuring that one handle always would be left; Kenny could not remember to buy a teapot when he could and made tea in a chafing dish; and he had been known to serve highballs in vases.

Garry glanced expectantly at his host and found him but a blur of oriental color in a film of smoke. As usual, when he was in a temper or excited, he was smoking furiously. But the threat of disinheritance was not forthcoming. If anything, the disinheritor was sulking. And the eyes of the disinheritee were intelligent and disconcerting.

"Well?" said Garry, amazed.

"I've already been disinherited," explained Brian dryly. "Twice. And I'm leaving tonight—for good."

Garry sat up.

"You mean?" demanded Kenny coldly.

"I mean," flung out Brian, "that I'm tired of it all. I'm sick to death of painting sunsets."

Garry's startled glance sought and found a mediocre sunset on an easel. Brian went in for sunsets. He said so himself with an inexplicable air of weariness and disgust. He knew how to make them.

Kenny's glance too had found the sunset. It stood beside a landscape, brilliant and unforgettable, of his own. Both men looked away. Brian smiled.

"You see?" he said quietly.

"Sunsets!" stammered Kenny, perversely taking up the keynote of his son's rebellion literally. "Sunsets! I warned you, Brian—"

"Sunsets," said Brian, "and everything else you put on canvas with paint and brush. I can't paint. You know it. Garry knows it. I know it. I've painted, Kenny, merely to please you. I've nothing more than a commonplace skill whipped into shape by an art school. Aerial battlefields—my sunsets—in more ways than one. I paint 'em because they happen to be the thing in Nature that thrills me most. And when I fire to a thing, most always I can manage somehow. You yourself have engineered for me every profitable commission I've ever had. What's more, Kenny, if ever once you'd put into real art the dreadful energy I've put into my mediocrity—"

"You mean I'm lazy?" interrupted Kenny, bristling.

"Certainly not," said Brian with acid politeness. "You're merely subject to periodic fits of indolence. You've said as much yourself."

It was irrefutable. Kenny, offended, brought his fist down upon the table with a bang.

"I know precisely what you're going to say," cut in Brian. "I'm ungrateful. I'm not. But it's misdirected generosity on your part, Kenny. And I'm through. I'm tired," he added simply. "I want to live my own life away from the things I can't do well. I'm tired of drifting."

"And to-night?"

Brian flung out his hands.

"The last straw!" he said bitterly.

"You're meaning the shotgun, Brian?" demanded Kenny.

"I'm meaning the shotgun."

"What will you do?" interposed the peacemaker in the nick of time.

"I've done some free-lance reporting for John Whitaker," said Brian. "I think he'll give me a big chance. He's interested." His voice—it had in it at times a hint of Kenny's soft and captivating brogue—was splendidly boyish and eager now. "Foreign perhaps or war. Maybe Mexico. Anything so I can write the truth, Garry, the big truth that's down so far you have to dig for it, the passion of humanness—the humanness of unrest. I can't say it to-night. I can only feel it."

Alarmed by this time, Kenny came turbulently into the conversation and abused John Whitaker for his son's defection. Brian, it was plain, had been decoyed by bromidic tales of cub reporters and "record-smashing beats." He contrasted art and journalism and found Brian indifferent to his scorn.

"It isn't just Whitaker and the sunsets and the desire to exchange the sham of my 'art' for the truth of something real," said Brian. "It's everything. It's the studio here and things like—like the shotgun. I hate the brilliant, disorderly hand-to-mouth sort of Bohemia, Kenny, in which you seem to thrive. Either we have a lot of money or a lot of debts—"

Garry nodded.

"I suppose," went on Brian wearily, "that my nature must demand an orderly security in

essentials. Plebeian, of course, but comfortable. I mean, money in sufficient regularity, chairs you can sit down on without looking first—" he shrugged.

Further detail and he would be drifting into deep water. Life with Kenny, who borrowed as freely as he gave, entailed petty harassments that could not be named.

"Things," finished Brian. "that are mine without a lock and key."

He had meant not to say it. Kenny struck his hand fiercely against the table.

"You hear that, Garry?" he demanded with an indignant bid for support. "You hear that? By the Lord Harry, Brian, it's damnable and indecent to harp so upon the shotgun after smashing the statuette."

The circle was complete. They were back to Kenny's grievance. Brian sighed.

"I wasn't thinking of the shotgun," he said. "There have been times, Kenny, when I hadn't a collar left—"

"He's right," put in Garry with quick sympathy. "It's not just the shotgun—"

"Garry, you shut up!" snapped Kenny, sweeping the fragments of Ann's statuette into the table drawer and closing it with a bang.

"Please remember," reminded Garry, coldly, "that an established privilege of mine, since I undertook this Hague stuff, is absolute frankness."

"Br-r-r-r—"

"Who rapped for me?"

"Kenny did," said Brian.

"Any man," retorted Kenny bitterly, "may have a—a moment of lunacy. I thought you were impartial."

"You mean," said Garry keenly, "that when you rapped you'd been hypnotized by the justice of your own case and felt a little reckless."

Kenny drew himself up splendidly and glared at Garry through a cloud of smoke.

"Piffle!" said Garry. "No stately stuff for me, Kenny, please. It's late and I'm tired. I'll referee this thing in my own way. I repeat—it's not just the shotgun. It's everything he owns."

"What for instance?" inquired Kenny, dangerously polite.

"His money, his clothes and his girls!" enumerated Garry brutally. "You even pawned his fishing rods and golf clubs."

"I sent him a fern," said Kenny, affronted. "Did he even water it? No!"

"I think I paid for it," said Brian.

"Has he ever given me the proper degree of respect. No! He calls me—Kenny!"

Garry laughed aloud at the wrathful search for grievance. It was not always easy to remember that Kenny had eloped at twenty with the young wife who had died when his son was born; and that his son was twenty-three.

"Go on," said Kenny. "Laugh your fool head off. I'm merely stating facts."

"As for his tennis racquet," reminded Garry, and Kenny flushed.

It developed that of studio things the racquet and the shotgun had seemed the least essential. And the need had been imperative.

"Nevertheless," interposed Garry, "they and a number of other things you pawned were Brian's."

Moreover, reverting to the fishing rods and golf clubs, Kenny would like to have them both remember that it had been winter and one can redeem most anything by summer. He'd meant to. He honestly had.

"But you didn't," said Garry.

"Great God," thundered Kenny, "you're like a parrot." Fuming he searched afield for cigarettes and found them at his elbow. A noise at the open window behind him brought him to his feet with a nervous start.

"What's that? What's over there?" he demanded petulantly.

"Oh, it's only H-B," said Garry. "He's come down the fire-escape. Mac's likely forgotten to chain him."

The honey-bear, kept secretly in a studio upstairs and christened "H-B" to cloak his identity—for the club rules denied him hospitality—came in with a jaunty air of confidence. At the sight of the three men he turned tail and fled. Kenny speeded his departure with a bouillon cup and felt better.

As for clothes, Kenny began with new dignity, he must remind them both that he had more than Brian, if now and again he did forget a minor essential and have to forage for it. He added with an air of rebuke that Brian was welcome to anything he had, anything—to borrow, to wear and to lose if he chose.

Brian received the offer with a glance of blank dismay and Garry with difficulty repressed a smile. Kenny's fashionable wardrobe, portentous in all truth, had an unmistakable air of originality about it at once foreign and striking. There were times when he looked irresistibly theatric and ducal.

Kenny repeated his willingness to lend his wardrobe.

"Of course you would," said Garry. "Though it's hardly the point and difficult to remember when Brian is in a hurry and has to send out a boy to buy him a collar."

In the matter of money, to take up another point, Kenny felt that his son had a peculiar genius for always having money somewhere. Brian had of necessity been saved considerable inconvenience by a tendency to economy and resource. As usual, if anybody suffered it was Kenny.

"For 'tis myself, dear lad," he finished, "that runs the scale a bit. Faith, I'm that impecunious at times I'm beside myself with fret and worry."

Brian steeled himself against the disarming gentleness of the change of mood. It was inevitably strategic. Wily and magnetic Kenny always had his way. It was plain he thought to have it now with every instinct up in arms at the thought of Brian's going.

"I've less genius, less debt and less money," conceded Brian, "but I've a lot more capacity for worry and I'm tired of always being on my guard. I'm tired of bookkeeping—"

"Bookkeeping!"

"Bookkeeping lies!" said Brian bluntly. "I've lied myself sometimes, Kenny, to keep from denying a lie of yours." The nature of the thrust was unexpected. Kenny changed color and resented the hyper-critical word. To his mind it was neither filial nor aesthetic.

"Lies!" he repeated indignantly, regarding his son with a look of paralyzed inquiry. "Lies!"

"Lies!" insisted Brian. "You know precisely what I mean."

"I suppose, Kenny," said Garry fairly, "that a certain amount of romancing is for you the wine of existence. Your wit's insistent and if a thing presents itself, tempting and warmly colored, you can't refuse it expression simply because it isn't true. You must make a good story. I've sometimes thought you'd have a qualm or two of conscience if you didn't, as if it's an artistic obligation you've ignored—to delight somebody's ears, even for a moment. Perhaps you don't realize how far afield you travel. But it's pretty hard on Brian."

It was the thing, as Garry knew, that taxed Brian's patience to the utmost, plunged him into grotesque dilemmas and kept him keyed to an abnormal alertness of memory. Always his sense of loyalty revolted at the notion of denying any tale that Kenny told.

Now Kenny's hurt stare left Brian unrepentant. He lost his temper utterly. Thereafter he blazed out a hot-headed summary of book-keeping that made his father gasp.

Kenny's air of conscious rectitude vanished. In an instant he was defensive and excited, resenting the unexpected need of the one and the distraction of the other. The sum of his episodic rambling on Brian's tongue was appalling. He was willing to concede that his imagination was wayward and romantic. But why in the name of Heaven must a man—and an Irishman—justify the indiscretions of his wit? Well, the lad had always had an unnatural trend for fact. Kenny remembered with resentment the Irish fairies that even in his childhood Brian had been unable to accept, excellent fairies with feet so big that in time of storm they stood on their heads and used them for umbrellas!

Staggered by Brian's inflexible air of resolution, Kenny, his fingers clenched in his hair, began another circle. He reverted to his grievance. The quarrel this time was sharp and brief. Brian hated repetitions. Hotly impenitent he flung out of the studio and slammed his bedroom door, leaving Kenny dazed and defensive and utterly unable to comprehend the twist of fate by which the dignity of his grievance had been turned to disadvantage.

Garry glanced at the gray haze in the court beyond the window and rose.

"It's nearly daybreak," he said. "And I've a model coming at ten. She's busy and I can't stall."

He left Kenny amazed and aggrieved at his desertion. Certainly in the grip of untoward events, a

man is entitled to someone with whom he can talk it over.

Wakeful and nervous, Kenny smoked, raked his hair with his fingers and brooded. Brian had been disinherited much too often to resent it all at once to-night. As for the shotgun, that dispute or its equivalent was certainly as normal a one as regularity could make it. And he had related many a tale unhampered by fact that Brian had simply ignored.

"What on earth has got into the lad?" he wondered impatiently.

Ah, well, he was a good lad, clean-cut and fine, with Irish eyes and an Irish temper like his father. Kenny forgot and forgave. Both were a spontaneity of temperament. Brian and he would begin again. That was always pleasant.

He strode remorsefully to Brian's door and knocked. There was no answer. He knocked again. Ordinarily he would have flung back the door with a show of temper. Penitential, he opened it with an air of gentle forbearance. The room, which gave evidence of anger and hurried packing, was empty, the door that opened into the corridor, ajar.

Brian was gone.

White and startled, Kenny unearthed the chafing dish and made himself some coffee.

Brian, of course, would return in the morning, whistling and sane. He would call something back in his big, pleasant voice to the elevator man who worshipped him, and bang the studio door. The lad was not given to such definite revolt. Besides, Brian, he must remember, was an O'Neill, an Irishman and a son of his, an indisputable trio of good fortune; as such he could be depended upon not to make an ass of himself.

CHAPTER II

THE UNSUCCESSFUL PARENT

Kenny slept as he lived, with a genius for dreams and adventure. He remembered moodily as he rose at noon that he had dreamed a kaleidoscopic chase, precisely like a moving picture with himself a star, in which, bolting through one taxi door and out another with a shotgun in his hand, he had valiantly pursued a youth who had, miraculously, found the crooked stick of the psaltery and stolen it. The youth proved to be Brian. That part was reasonable enough. Brian was the only one who could find the thing long enough to steal it.

It was not likely to be a day for work. That he felt righteously could not be expected. Nevertheless, with hurt concession to certain talk of indolence the night before, he donned a painter's smock and, filled with a consciousness of tremendous energy to be expended in God's good time, telephoned John Whitaker.

Yes, Brian had been there. Where he was now, where he would be, Whitaker did not feel at liberty to divulge. Frankly he was pledged to silence. Kenny willing, he would be up to dinner at six. He had a lot to say.

Kenny banged the receiver into the hook in a blaze of temper, hurt and unreasonable, and striding to the rear window flung it up to cool his face. There were bouillon cups upon the sill. Bouillon cups! Bouillon cups! Thunder-and-turf! There were bouillon cups everywhere. Nobody but Brian would have bought so many handles. A future of handles loomed drearily ahead. Brian could talk of disorder all he chose. Half of it was bouillon cups. Bitterly resenting the reproach they seemed to embody, stacked there upon the sill, Kenny passionately desired to sweep them out of the window once and for all. The desire of the moment, ever his doom, proved overpowering. The cups crashed upon a roof below with prompt results. Kenny was appalled at the number of heads that appeared at studio windows, the head of Sidney Fahr among them, round-eyed and incredulous. Well, that part at least was normal. Sid's face advertised a chronic distrust of his senses.

Moreover, when Pietro appeared after a round of alarmed inquiry, Kenny perversely chose to be truthful about it, insisted that it was not accidental and refused to be sorry. Afterward he admitted to Garry, it was difficult to believe that one spontaneous ebullition of a nature not untemperamental could provoke so much discussion, frivolous and otherwise. The thing might grow so, he threatened sulkily, that he'd leave the club.

As for the immediate present, Fate had saddled him again with an afternoon of moody indolence. Certainly no Irishman with nerves strung to an extraordinary pitch could work with Mike crawling snakily around the lower roof intent upon china remnants whose freaks of shape seemed to paralyze him into moments of agreeable interest. Kenny at four refused an invitation to tea and waited in growing gloom for Reynolds, a dealer who, prodded always into inconvenient promptness by Kenny's

needs, had promised to combine inspection of the members' exhibition in the gallery downstairs with the delivery of a check. There were critical possibilities if he did not appear.

Mike disappeared with the final fragment and Reynolds became the grievance of the hour. Kenny, fuming aimlessly around the studio, resorted desperately at last to an unfailing means of stimulus. He made a careful toilet, donned a coat with a foreign looking waist-line, rather high, and experimented with a new and picturesque stock that fastened beneath his tie with a jeweled link. As six o'clock arrived and Reynolds' defection became a thing assured, his attitude toward John Whitaker underwent an imperative change. It would be impossible now to greet him with hostile dignity. He had become a definite need.

When at ten minutes past six the studio bell tinkled, Kenny, opening the door, stared at Whitaker in tragic dismay and struck himself upon the forehead.

"Mother of Men!" he groaned. "I thought of course it would be Reynolds. He's bringing me a check."

John Whitaker looked unimpressed. He merely blinked his recognition of a subterfuge.

There was a parallel in his experience, a weekend arrival at Woodstock when Kenny, farming in a flurry of enthusiasm, had come riding down to meet his guest on a singular quadruped whose area of hide had thickened strangely. Brian called the uncurried quadruped a plush horse. Kenny, remembered Whitaker, had searched with tragic eyes for an invited editor who had recklessly agreed to pay in advance for an excursion of Kenny's into illustrating, ostensibly to pay for a cow. And Kenny's words had been: "My God, Whitaker! Where's Graham?" Moreover he had struck himself fiercely on the forehead and Whitaker had grub-staked his host to provisions until Graham arrived.

"Can't we eat in the grill?" asked Whitaker. "It's raining." Kenny regarded him with a look of pained intelligence.

"I'm posted," he said.

"Then," said Whitaker, "I'll go out and buy something. I'd rather eat in the studio. What'll I get?"

Kenny capriciously banned oysters.

"If you want a rarebit," he added, "we have some cheese."

He was still searching excitedly for the cheese when Whitaker returned.

"Reynolds," he flung out vindictively, "is positively the most unreliable dealer I know. He's erratic and irresponsible. A man may work himself to death and wait in the grave for his money. Do you wonder poor Blakelock met his doom through the cupidity of laggard dealers? Here am I on the verge of God knows what from overwork—"

Whitaker spared him disillusion. Painting with Kenny was an occupation, never work. When it slipped tiresomely into the class of work and palled, he threw it aside for something more diverting.

"The cheese in all probability," suggested Whitaker mildly, "wouldn't be under the piano. Or would it? And don't bother anyway. I took the liberty of buying an emergency wedge while I was out."

Kenny wiped his forehead in amazed relief and piously thanked God he hadn't wasted his appetite on middle-aged cakes.

"If you hadn't come when you did," he said, "I'd likely had to eat 'em, thanks to Reynolds. Now I'll send 'em up to H. B." He peered disgustedly into the bag and removed an irrelevant ace of spades. Its hibernation there seemed for an instant to annoy him as well it might. There had been a furore in whist about it barely a week before. Then he used it irresponsibly for an I.O.U. and impaled it upon a strange looking spike that seemed to pinion a heterogeneous admission of petty debt.

Together they made the rarebit. Whitaker waited with foreboding for the storm to break. But for some reason, though he was constrained and impatient and feverishly active, Kenny avoided the subject of Brian. He lost poise and patience all at once, pushed aside his plate and challenged Whitaker with a look.

"Why did you want to eat in the studio?"

"I came to talk."

"Whitaker," blustered Kenny, "where's Brian?"

"Working."

"On your paper?" "No. Brian's left New York. He's driving somebody's car. And I found the job for him through my paper. When he has money enough he plans to tramp off into God's green world of spring to get himself in trim. Says he's stale and tired and thinking wrong. In the fall he's going abroad for me and that, Kenny, is about all I can tell you."

"You mean," flared Kenny, rising with a ragged napkin in his hand, "you mean, John, it's all you will tell me!"

"Sit down," said Whitaker, toasting a cracker over the alcohol flame. "I prefer a sensible talk without fireworks."

Surprised and nettled, Kenny obeyed in spite of himself.

"Now," went on Whitaker quietly, "I came here to-night because I'm Brian's friend and yours." He ignored the incredulous arch of Kenny's eyebrows. "Where Brian is, where he will be, I don't propose to tell you, now or at any other time. His wheres and his whens are the boy's own business. His whys I think you know. He won't be back."

"He will!" thundered Kenny and thumped upon the table with his fist.

Whitaker patiently reassembled his supper.

"I think not," he said.

"You're not here to think," blazed Kenny. "You're here to tell me what you know."

"I'm here," corrected John Whitaker, "to get a few facts out of my system for your own good and Brian's. Kenny, how much of the truth can you stand?"

Kenny threw up his hands with a reminiscent gesture of despair.

"Truth!" he repeated. "Truth!"

"I know," put in Whitaker, "that you regard the truth as something sacred, to be handled with delicacy and discretion. But—"

Kenny told him sullenly to tell it if he could.

"I don't propose to urge Brian back here for a good many reasons. In the first place, he's not a painter—"

"John," interrupted Kenny hotly, "you are no judge of that. I, Kennicott O'Neill, am his father."

"And more's the pity," said Whitaker bluntly, "for you've made a mess of it. That's another reason."

Kenny turned a dark red.

"You mean?"

"I mean, Kenny," said Whitaker, his glance calm and level, "that as a parent for Brian, you are an abject failure."

The word stung. It was the first time in his life that Kenny had faced it. That he, Kennicott O'Neill, Academician, with Heaven knows how many medals of distinction, could fail at anything, was a new thought, bewildering and bitter. This time he escaped from the table and flung up a window. Whitaker, he grumbled, never toasted crackers without burning them. Whitaker brought him back with a look.

"Sit down," he said again. "I don't propose to talk while you roam around the studio and kick things."

Kenny obeyed. He looked a little white.

"I've tried to think this thing out fairly," said Whitaker. "Why as a parent for Brian you're a failure —"

"Well?"

"And the first and fundamental cause of your failure is, I think, your hairbrained, unquenchable youth."

Kenny stared at him in astounded silence.

"I remember once around the fire here you told a Celtic tale of some golden islands—Tirnanoge, wasn't it?—the Land of the Young—"

Might have been, Kenny said perversely. He didn't remember.

"Ossian lived there with the daughter of the King of Youth for three hundred years that seemed but three," reminded Whitaker. "Well, no matter. The point is this: The Land of the Young and the King of Youth always make me think of you."

"It is true," said Kenny with biting sarcasm, "that I still have hair and teeth. It is also true that I am the respectable if unsuccessful parent of a son twenty-three years old and I myself am forty-four."

"Forty-four years young," admitted Whitaker. "And Brian on the other hand is twenty-three years old. There you have it. You know precisely what I mean, Kenny. Youth isn't always a matter of years. It's a state of being. Sometimes it's an affliction and sometimes a gift. Sometimes it's chronic and sometimes it's contagious enough to start an epidemic. You're as young and irresponsible as the wind. You've never grown up. God knows whether or not you ever will. But Brian has. There's the clash."

"Go on," said Kenny with a dangerous flash of interest in his eyes. "You've an undeniable facility, John, with what you call the truth."

"It's an unfortunate characteristic of highly temperamentalized individuals—"

"Painters, Irishmen and O'Neills," put in Kenny with sulky impudence.

"That they frequently skirt the rocks for themselves with amazing skill. I mean just this: They don't always shipwreck their own lives."

Was that, Kenny would like to know, an essential of successful parenthood?

"I mean," he paraphrased dryly, "must you wreck your own life, John, to parent somebody else with skill?" The wording of this rather pleased him. He brightened visibly.

Whitaker ignored his brazen air of assurance. It was like Kenny, he reflected, to find an unexpected loophole and emerge from it with the air of a conqueror.

"People with an over-plus of temperament," he said, "wreck the lives of others. Brian has just stepped out in the nick of time."

"You mean," flashed Kenny with anger in his eyes, "you mean I've tried to wreck the life of my own son? By the powers of war, John, that's too much!"

"I didn't say you had tried. I mean merely that you were accidentally succeeding. The sunsets—"

"Damn the sunsets!" roared Kenny, losing his head.

"It was time for that," agreed Whitaker.

"Time for what?"

"You usually damn the irrefutable thing. Why you wanted Brian to paint pictures," went on Whitaker, ignoring Kenny's outraged sputter, "when he couldn't, is and always has been a matter of considerable worry and mystery to me—"

"It needn't have been. That, I fancy, John, you can see for yourself. I worry very little about how your paper is run."

"But I think I've solved it. It's your vanity."

"My God!" said Kenny with a gasp.

"You wanted to have a hand in what he did. Then you could afford to be gracious. There are some, Kenny, who must always direct in order to enjoy."

There was a modicum of enjoyment with Whitaker around, hinted Kenny sullenly.

Whitaker found his irrelevant trick of umbrage trying in the extreme. He lost his temper and said that which he had meant to leave to inference.

"Kenny, Brian's success, in which you, curiously enough, seem to have had a visionary faith, would have linked him to you in a sort of artistic dependence in which you shone with inferential genius and generosity."

It hurt.

"So!" said Kenny, his color high.

"It may be," said Whitaker, feeling sorry for him, "that I've put that rather strongly but I think I've dug into the underlying something which, linked with your warm-hearted generosity and a real love for Brian, made you stubborn and unreasonable about his work. Of the big gap in temperament and the host of petty things that maddened Brian to the point of distraction, it's unnecessary for me to speak. You must know that your happy-go-lucky self-indulgence more often than not has spelled discomfort of a definite sort for Brian. You're generous, I'll admit. Generous to a fault. But your generosity is always congenial. It's never the sort that hurts. The only kind of generosity that will help in this crisis is the kind that hurts. It's up to you, Kenny, to do some mental house-cleaning, admit the cobwebs and brush them away, instead of using them fantastically for drapery."

Whitaker thanked his lucky stars he'd gotten on so well. Kenny, affronted, was usually more capricious and elusive.

"Whitaker," said Kenny, his eyes imploring, "you don't—you can't mean that Brian isn't coming

back?"

Whitaker sighed. After all, Kenny never heard all of anything, just as he never read all of a letter unless it was asterisked and under-lined and riveted to his attention by a multitude of pen devices.

"Kenny, have you been listening?"

"No!" lied Kenny.

"Brian," flung out Whitaker wrathfully, "isn't coming back. I thank God for his sake."

His loss of temper brought a hornet's nest about his ears. Kenny swung to his feet in smoldering fury. He expressed his opinion of Whitaker, editors, Brian and sons. The sum of them merged into an unchristian melee of officiousness and black ingratitude. He recounted the events of the night before with stinging sarcasm in proof of Brian's regularity. He ended magnificently by blaming Brian for the disorder of the studio. There were handles everywhere. And Brian in an exuberance of amiability had broken a statuette. Likely Whitaker would see even in that some form of paternal oppression.

"Whitaker," flung out Kenny indignantly, "Brian plays but one instrument in this studio and we have a dozen. Wasn't it precisely like him to pick out that damned psaltery there with the crooked stick? I mean—wasn't it like him to pick out something with a fiendish appendage that could be lost, and keep the studio in an uproar when he wanted to play it?"

Whitaker laughed in spite of himself. The psaltery stick was famous.

Moreover, Brian—Brian, mind you, who talked of truth with hair-splitting piety—Brian had that very day at noon forced his father to the telling of a lie.

"But he wasn't here," said Whitaker, mystified. "He lunched with me."

"The fact remains," insisted Kenny with dignity. "I myself told Garry Rittenhouse he'd gone up to Reynolds to collect some money. And Garry, thinking he had come back, believed it."

"Kenny," said Whitaker, his patience quite gone, "are you mad? How on earth did Brian force you into that lie?"

"By not coming home," said Kenny sulkily. "If he'd come home as a lad should, I needn't have told it. You can see that for yourself."

Whitaker dazedly threw up his hands.

Having successfully baffled his opponent with the brilliancy of his unreason, Kenny enlarged upon the humiliation he must experience when Garry learned the truth. At a familiar climax of self-glorification, in which Kenny claimed he had saved Brian from no end of club-gossip by his timely evasion of the truth, Whitaker lost his temper and went home.

He left his host in a dangerous mood of quiet.

It was a quiet unlike Kenny, who hated to think, and presently he flung his pipe across the studio, fuming at what seemed to him unprecedented disorder. It was getting on his nerves. No man could work in such a hodge-podge. Even inspiration was likely to be chaotic and futuristic. Small blame to Brian if he resented it all. To-morrow, if Reynolds deigned to appear with his check, he would summon Mrs. Haggerty, and the studio should have a cleaning that the mercenary old beldame would remember. Kenny vaguely coupled Mrs. Haggerty with the present disorder and resented both, his defiant eyes lingering with new interest upon a jumble of musical instruments in a corner.

With a muffled objurgation he fell upon the jumble and began to overhaul it. The object sought defied his fevered efforts to unearth it and with teeth set, he ransacked the studio, resentfully flinging a melee of hindrances right and left.

The telephone rang.

"Kenny," said Garry's patient voice, "what in Heaven's name are you doing? What hit the wall?"

"I'm hunting the stick to that damned psaltery," snapped Kenny and banged the receiver into the hook, one hand as usual clenched frenziedly in his hair.

Later, with the studio a record of earthquake, he found it under a model stand and wiping his forehead anchored it to the psaltery for good and all with a shoestring.

Horribly depressed he thumped on the wall for Garry, who came at once, wondering wryly if Brian had come in and the need again was mediation.

"You might as well know," began Kenny at once, "that Brian didn't go up to Reynolds for me this noon—"

Garry stared.

"It was a lie," flung out Kenny with a jerk, "a damnable, deliberate, indecent lie. Whitaker says

he's gone for good." His look was wistful and indignant. "Garry, what's wrong?" he demanded. "What on earth *is* it? Why couldn't things have gone on as they were, without God knows how many people picking *me* for a target? As far as I can see I'm merely maintaining my usual average of imperfection and all the rest of the world has gone mad."

"I suppose, Kenny," began Garry lamely, "you must be starting a new cycle. Jan could tell you. He talks a lot about the cycle of dates and the philosophy of vibrations—"

"I know that I regard the truth as something sacred, to be handled with delicacy and discretion," began Kenny with bitter fluency. "I'm an unsuccessful parent with an over-supply of hair and teeth, afflicted with hairbrained, unquenchable youth. I'd be a perennial in the Land of the Young and could hobnob indefinitely with his Flighty Highness, the King of Youth. I'm forty-four years young and highly temperamentalized. I've made a mess of parenting Brian and I'm an abject failure."

Garry looked at him.

"Just what are you talking about?" he asked.

"I know," pursued Kenny elaborately, "that it's unfortunate I haven't wrecked my own life when I'm an accidental success at wrecking Brian's. I'm full of cobwebs. I damn irrefutable things and I've forced Brian to a profession of sunsets to gratify my vanity. Can you personally, Garry, think of anything else?"

"Sit down!" said Garry. "You're about as logical as a lunatic—"

"Tell Whitaker, do," begged Kenny. "There's one he missed. Garry, what's back of all this turmoil? What's the real reason for Brian's brain-storm? I'm sick to death of Whitaker's wordy arabesque and abuse. I want facts."

"Brian said it all last night," reminded Garry. "It's just another case of a last straw."

"You honestly mean that the ancestors of the straw are the sunsets, the disorder here—the—the —" He thumped the table. "Garry, I don't lie. I swear I don't. I hate a liar. I mean a dishonorable liar. A lie is an untruth that harms. That's my definition. Any man embroiders sordid fact on occasion."

"On occasion!" admitted Garry.

Kenny, with his eye upon the fern in the window, missed the significance. It had registered his sincere regret—that fern—at the need of pawning Brian's fishing rods and golf clubs. Like Brian! He had failed utterly to comprehend the delicacy of the tribute.

Finding this point upon which he dwelt with some length equally over-nice for Garry's perception, Kenny in a huff sent him home, watered the fern, without in the least understanding the impulse, and went to bed. And dreaming as usual, he seemed to be hunting cobwebs with a gun made of ferns. He found them draped over huge pillars of ice, marked in Brian's familiar sunset colors. Truth. And when panting and sweating he had swept them all away with a wedge of cheese he seemed to hear Whitaker's voice—calling him a failure.

Kenny felt that he had been visited by Far Darrig, the Gaelic bringer of bad dreams.

CHAPTER III

IN THE GAY AND GOLDEN WEATHER

Spring came early and with the first marsh hawk Brian was on the road, his eager youth crying out to the spring's hope and laughter. Everywhere he caught the thrill of it. Brooks released from an armor of ice went singing by him. Hill and meadow deepened verdantly into smiles. A little while now and the whole green earth in its tenderness would dimple exquisitely, with every dimple a flower. Mother Earth, moistening the bare brown fields for the plough with a capricious tear or so for the banished winter, was beginning again. And so was he. Hope swelled wistfully within him like song in the throat of the bluebird and sap in the trees. With the sun warm upon his face and the gladness of spring in his veins, he sang with Pippa that "God's in his Heaven, all's right with the world!"

Well, New York, thank God, lay to the back of him, veiling her realities and truth in glitter, defying nearness. Every human thing that made for life lay there as surely as it lay here in God's quieter world, but you never came close to it.

So he tramped away to green fields and hills and winding quiet roads, spring riding into his heart, invincible and bold.

An arbutus filled him with the wonder of things, a sense of eternity, a swift, inexplicable

compassion, a longing for service to the needs of men. His ears thrilled to the song of the earth and the whistle of the ploughman turning up the fresh brown earth. He filled his lungs with the wind of the open country, drank in the enchantment of the morning and the dusk, his nostrils joyously alive to the smell of the furrowed ground and a hint of burgeoning wild flowers.

But the first robin brought misgivings and remorse. Brian remembered Kenny's legend of the thorn ("worst of them all it was," said Kenny gently, "and prickin' deepest!") and the robin who plucked it from the bleeding brow of Christ. So by the blood of the Son of Man had the robin come by his red breast.

The legend filled Brian with yearning. He softened dangerously to the memory of a sketching tramp with Kenny fuming at his heels, his excitement chronic. Adventure had endlessly stalked Kenny for its own, waylaid him at intervals when he passionately proclaimed his desire for peace, and saddled Brian with the responsibilities of constant guardianship.

Brian stubbornly put it all behind him. Kenny, frantic with tenderness and resolution, could sweep him credulously back into bondage if he kept to the siege. His promises were fluent always and alluring. Only by the courage of utter separation could Brian make his longed for emancipation a thing assured.

So he tramped the highway, lingering by fence and rail to talk with men, living and learning. For the highway meant to him the passion of life. Hope and sorrow traveled it day and night in homely hearts.

And often his thoughts harked wistfully back to the words of a modern poet which Kenny with his usual skill had set to music:

"And often, often I'm longing still,
This gay and golden weather,
For my father's face by an Irish hill,
And he and I together."

In the gay and golden weather things were going badly with the unsuccessful parent. For weeks now his life had been in ferment, his moods as freakish as the wind. What little regularity his life had known departed to that limbo that had claimed his peace of mind. That he felt himself abnormally methodic lay entirely in the fact that he watered the fern each day. It had for him a morbid fascination. Incomprehensible forces were sapping his faith in himself and the future; and viciously at war with them, he nursed his grievance against Brian only to find that it was less robust than any grievance should be. At any cost he wanted Brian back.

"He's taken care of me," remembered Kenny sadly, "since he was a bit of a lad."

As ever, the thing withheld, Kenny ardently desired. That thing was Brian's presence. Any Irishman, he decided fiercely, would understand his terrified clinging to the things of the heart that belonged to him by birth. It was part of his race and creed. He hated to be alone. And Brian was all he had. How lightly he had prized that one possession until it became a thing denied, Kenny, sentimentalizing his need, forgot.

Studio gossip, having concerned itself with Brian's going, almost to the disruption of the Holbein Club, took up in perturbed detail the glaring problem of Kenny's tantrums. He was keeping everyone excited.

"Of course," mused Garry, "you could earn your living as a moving picture actor—"

"Adams owes me five thousand dollars for his wife's portrait," sputtered Kenny. "But I can't get it. He's been sick for weeks. Typhoid."

"And in the meantime?"

The shaft went home. Kenny sent for a model—and sent her home.

"She was too ornamental and decidedly sympathetic," he explained gloomily to Garry. "I'm just in the mood to make a colossal fool of myself. She was the sort of girl you'd invite to tea to meet your brother's wife."

"Kenny!"

"She was!" insisted Kenny.

"Any number of models are and you know it. And that girl is Jan's cousin."

"I make a point of never losing my head over a model," declared Kenny with an air. "It's a hindrance to work. You concentrate on a type and every picture you do advertises your devotion. Suppose I married her!"

"Heaven help her!" snapped Garry, and went out, slamming the door.

Kenny offended, followed him home. He felt aggrieved and talkative.

If Kenny had succeeded in propelling himself into one of his nervous ecstasies of inspiration, thereby normalizing his existence to some extent, if Reynolds had not appeared and simplified the painter's credit to a point where he made no further search for unsympathetic models. Fate, weaving the destiny of two O'Neills, would have changed her loom. As it was, sick with brooding and pity for himself, Kenny abandoned all pretense of labor and rushed on blindly to his fate. The spring was in his blood. What form of midsummer madness lay ahead of him depended now upon the hairtrigger of impulse. A wind, a sketch, the perfume of a flower, and he would be off wherever the reminiscence called him. He whistled constantly. That, as Jan pointed out, was always a bad sign with Kenny. It meant that he felt perilously transient and would rocket up in the air when a spark came that pleased him. He had been much the same, Fahr remembered, the summer he embarked for Syria upon a tramp steamer—to the captain's frantic regret.

In the end, feeling absurdly sorry for him, Garry unwittingly sent the spark in by Pietro.

It was a letter from Brian.

"Tavern of Stars
Open Country
God's Green World of Spring

"Dear Garry:

"The purpose of this letter is primarily a favor. Therefore without pretense I'll have done with it at once. You'll find in the studio a scrapbook of clippings which represent my ebullitions in print. Whitaker wants them, I believe, for purposes of conference. It will save him running through his files.

"I've been on the road for weeks, tramping myself into blessed weariness at night. More often than not I sleep in the open. I'm writing this with the aid of a pocket searchlight. Mine host, old Gaffer Moon, smiles down upon the ashes of my camp fire, full-faced and silver. An excellent host! Never once has he grumbled about light or pay and he grants me a roof without question. Ah! it's a blessed old Tavern of Stars, Garry! Ramshackle enough in all faith, for there are gaps in the tree-walls and Dame Wind's a-sweeping night and day, but luckily I've a blanket I carry by day and need by night.

"I've a road-mate. I think in time he'll be my friend, though he isn't yet. And thereby hangs a tale.

"I camped to-night in a wood by a river and turned in early, feeling tired. Voices drifted hazily into my slumber after a while and I awoke to find the moon riding high above the wood. My fire was out, my room in the Tavern of Stars still carpeted in shadow. Beyond in the moonlight two people had halted, a boy who was denouncing someone in a hard and bitter voice and, clinging to his arm, a girl in a cloak, whom I judged to be his sister. Her eyes were like pools of ink and tragic with imploring, Laughter would have made her lovely. As it was, with her lashes wet I could only think of Niobe and a passion of tears. I have rarely seen in a woman's face so much of the right kind of sweetness. It was an exquisite vigor of sweetness, not in the least the kind that cloys.

"They were much alike, save that the boy's face was angry and rebellious. He was the younger of the two, seventeen or so, and would have been in rags but for an unbelievable amount of mending.

"When I awoke, he had, I think, been urging his sister to go with him and she had refused. Before I could even so much as make them aware of my nearness, things came to a climax. The boy with a curse pushed her away. The hurt in his heart perhaps had made him rough. But the girl shrank away from him with a sob and ran back up the hill. He watched her climb to a hill-farm near the river, with shame and agony in his eyes, and I thought he would follow. Instead he plunged most unexpectedly in my direction and finished his tragedy in comedy by stumbling over me. We both scrambled to our feet a shade resentful.

"He realized instantly that I had overheard and blazed out at me in a passion of temper. Running away had plainly given him an arrogant conviction of manhood. Garry, old dear, I had to thrash him for the good of his soul and my Irish temper—he was so offensively independent and unjust.

"It was a pretty job of thrashing but it did him good. He threw himself on the ground and sobbed like the kid he is. While he was pulling himself together, I built up the fire and made him some coffee.

"The blaze of the fire worried him—he was afraid his sister would see it and come back. But he drank the coffee and when I had damped the fire to ease his mind, I explained to him just why I'd felt the need of thrashing him. For one thing I hadn't cared for the way he spoke to his sister. And for another I hadn't cared at all for his insults to me. He listened sullenly to the facts of my eavesdropping and apologized. When he found that I was disposed to be friendly he blurted out his justification for running away: an eccentric old invalid uncle who in all probability is not so evil as the boy claims.

"I had an odd feeling as we talked that he stands at the parting of the ways. Chance will make or mar him. And therefore I told him that if he insisted upon running away, he might as well tramp with me and think it over.

"I don't quite know yet why I said it.

"He reminds me of Kenny somehow, save that Kenny's more of a kid. Both of them have an overdose of temperament and need a guardian with an iron hand. And both have a way about them.

"Likely, after the wind was so pitifully out of his sails I could have dragged him up the hill home but if he has the notion of escape in his head, he'd go again.

"After a good deal of talk, friendly and otherwise, we took turns at the searchlight and wrote, each of us, a letter to his sister, I in a sense seeking to guarantee a respectability I do not look or feel since I am a truant myself with an indifferent amount of worldly goods. However, I couldn't help thinking how she'd worry and I promised to see him through.

"He's asleep now under my blanket, catching his breath at intervals like a youngster who's carried heartbreak into his sleep. Poor kid! I suppose he has. I've promised him to be on the road before daybreak.

"He'll have to work his way, but that, of course, will be good for him. What pennies I have I'm obliged to count with a provident eye. I've added to 'em from time to time along the road. So far I've been intermittently a rotten ploughman, a fair fence-mender and a skillful whitewasher. My amazing facility there I attribute to an apprenticeship in sunsets. Once, during a period of rain, I lived in a corncrib for three days at an average of seven cents a day. I've reduced my need of kitchen equipment to a can-opener. A can of anything, I've discovered, provides food as well as a combination saucepan and coffee pot.

"I miss Kenny but I dare not write to him. Garry, you know how it is. Unless I brace myself with a lot of temper, he can twist me around his finger. Even his letters are dangerous. I can't—I won't go back to sunsets.

"I often think these days of Kenny's wood-fire tales of the shrine of Black Gartan where St. Columba was born. Colomcille, old Kenny called him around the wood-fire, didn't he? Colomcille, Kenny said, having been in exile, knew the homesick pangs himself and therefore could give the good Irishmen who journeyed to his shrine strength to bear them. I'm not in exile but there are times when I should be journeyin' off, as Kenny says when the brogue is on him, to Black Gartan. The curse of the Celt! Kenny swears there's no homesickness in the world like an Irishman's passionate longing for home and kin. Not that I long for the studio. God forbid! Kenny's the symbol for it all.

"I've had some black minutes of remorse. After all I had no earthly right to blaze out so about the shotgun. And you can't imagine how the statuette upset me.

"Say hello to Kenny for me, won't you? Tell him I'm brown and lean already, and that I like the fortunes of the road."

It hurt of course that the letter was Garry's. Nettled at first, Kenny had half a mind not to read it. Later, why it was Garry's, gave him a sense of power. Brian was homesick and repentant. And with the fire of his temper spent he was always manageable. Kenny cursed the miles between them.

He read the letter again and the poetry of the open road filled his veins with the fire of inspiration. Tavern of Stars! Old Gaffer Moon, full-faced and silver! Tree-walls and Dame Wind a-sweeping! Why, the lad was a poet—a poet like his father. And the big-hearted kindness of him, thrashing the runaway into sense. Irish temper there! Kenny felt a passionate thrill of pride in his offspring. Yes, Brian was like his father, thank God, even to the Celtic curse of homesickness.

"But to think of him," he marveled in a wave of tenderness, "living in a corncrib on seven cents a day!"

Again and again he read between the lines, finding sanity and sense, compassion and humor. The inherited charm of Brian's personality filled him with intense delight.

"Always," Kenny remembered, "he must be taking care of someone."

It gave him a sharp pang of jealousy that that someone was a stranger.

But the thrill of penance was in his blood. If Brian was big enough to see himself in the wrong, no less was Kennicott O'Neill, his unsuccessful father. And he had driven Brian forth upon the road. For that he must atone.

That the solution of everything now lay at hand, Kenny never doubted. Already he had rocketed sentimentally into inspiration. If a certain vagueness of detail sent him roving abstractedly around the studio with the letter in his hand, the inspiration in itself was amazingly clear. Yes, he would fare forth and find Brian. He would tramp every mile of the road as Brian had done. He would find the farmhouse, the wood and the river! There happily would be some clue or other that he needed. And Kenny, in rags and penitential, his feet blistered by the hardships of the road, would overtake his son and apologize for everything. Nay, more, he would promise anything. After that the rest would be easy. Brian had written it there in a letter. Kenny could wind his son around his finger. Yes, it was all quite clear. And Brian helpfully would be shocked and thrilled at the sacrificial tribute of penance. Kenny pursed his lips and nodded. He would even concede the sunsets. That, after John Whitaker's

cold-blooded misinterpretation, was necessary to his own self-respect—and Brian's happiness.

Ah, love was the only thing in the world that counted, love and art. Not the love of woman, which was after all but an intermittent intoxicant, but the love of one's own.

Kenny pitied in foretaste the ragged parent who would come upon the camp fire of his son, picturesque and repentant, and dramatized the meeting, a lump in his throat. Emotionally it was complex to be actor and audience both. Thank God, he reflected, as he opened a closet door, dragged forth a battered multitude of bags and suit cases and began an impatient upheaval of bureau drawers, he was a man of action. When Garry entered a half hour later he found the studio floor littered with preparation.

"I'm off, this morning," he explained. "In an hour now. Garry, how can I possibly reduce this mass to packing possibility?"

"Stop running around in circles!" commanded Garry, thunderstruck. "What's it all about? Where are you going?"

"I'm going," said Kenny with his chin out and his eyes defiant, "to hunt Brian."

Garry stared blankly at the packing litter and the tall Irishman in the center of it wearily mopping his forehead. It was impossible to locate the crags he must have leaped to reach his spectacular decision. They were shrouded in mystery.

"You mean," said Garry after a while, "that you will tour vaguely off, seeking a farm on a hill, a wood, a river, a youngster in patches and Brian's trail of camp fires?"

"Precisely," said Kenny with detestable confidence. "See, even you mark the clues with perfect logic."

"A farm on a hill," exclaimed Garry, "is of course a clue with absolute individuality. So is a wood and a river."

"So," supplemented Kenny with the calm, unhurried air of one who scores an unexpected point, "is a postmark on a letter."

Startled, Garry reached for the envelope. Kenny put it in his pocket.

"An obscure village in Pennsylvania," he explained with dignity, "where your wood and your river will likely have definite individuality. I shall go there."

Garry scented danger and considered the outcome in horrified dismay, regretting his rash flurry of sympathy. It had become a boomerang. What if Brian's protégé in a fit of remorse saw fit to keep his sister posted? Kenny would indeed find clues. The possibility filled him with foreboding.

"Kenny," he said with some heat, "I consider that you have absolutely no right to take advantage of my letter to hunt Brian down. I'm sorry I sent it in. If he wanted you to know where he is, he'd write you. I wish to Heaven I'd thought of that postmark!"

"I shall tramp every inch on foot!" swore Kenny proudly. "Brian will appreciate the spirit of the thing if you do not."

There was relief at least in that. Garry drew a long breath. If Kenny tramped his way, another inexplicable factor in his lunacy, by the time he reached the farmhouse Brian would be well on ahead. And Garry was bitterly familiar with Kenny's incapacity for steadiness of any kind. Kenny, it developed, was thinking in similar vein.

"I take it there will be an interval of waiting before remorse will lead the kid to write to his sister," he said. "Otherwise I'd proceed to the farmhouse at once in a flying machine."

The romance of this seemed to strike him strongly for an interval. Then, mercifully, he repeated his intention of tramping.

"And then?" said Garry.

"Then," said Kenny with the utmost optimism, "I'll pick up his trail at the farmhouse and from there I'll travel night and day until I overtake him."

"And then?"

"The lad will come home with me."

"And then?"

"Good God, Garry," thundered Kenny, "I never knew anybody with such an 'And then?' sort of mind as you seem to have. There's an 'And then?' doubt after every glorious climax. He'll be home. That's sufficient."

"What about the scrapbook?"

"I've already sent it."

Garry glanced hopelessly at the melee on the floor.

"I suppose," he said coldly, "that you plan to go sagging along the highway with a suit case in each hand and a bag or two on your back?"

"I plan," retorted Kenny, "to depart from here with one suit case which will eventually become a knapsack. The problem now is entirely one of elimination. Have you anything to do, Garry?"

"I have," said Garry distinctly.

Kenny looked hurt.

"I'm sorry," he said. "Because you're a jewel at eliminatin'. I mind me of the sketching trip we took together. You did all of the packing then in a marvelous way."

Hopelessly uncertain what he ought to do, Garry lingered. If by a word he could restrain this madcap penitent from roving off in a fit of sentimentality it must be spoken forcibly and at once.

"Brian," he said, "will never forgive me."

"Brian," said Kenny, "is a jewel for sense. He'll love you for it."

Garry flung himself into a chair with a muttered imprecation.

"Now, Kenny," he said, "I want you to tell me precisely what you plan to do."

Nothing loathe, Kenny obeyed. He liked to talk. Garry found his plans indefinite and highly romantic. It was plain the notion of footsore penance had taken vigorous hold of his imagination and his love of adventure. Characteristically, since the actor on the highway was himself, he saw no chance of failure. To Garry's curt "ifs" he turned a deaf ear and sulked.

In the end they quarreled badly. Garry, raging inwardly, went home in despair; and Kenny, after a tumultuous period of indecision, eliminated a floorful of luggage. In the rebound he took less than he should. He was ready to go when the door opened and the head of Sidney Fahr appeared. Instantly his round eyes bulged with inquiry.

"Lord Almighty, Kenny," he said. "You—you're not off for anywhere, are you?"

"I am," said Kenny.

Sid came in and closed the door.

"I—I can't believe it!" he sputtered.

"Don't!" said Kenny. He was out of sorts. Garry, talking of honor and letters, had given him a bad interval of indecision and guilt.

"It—it's amazing!" went on Sid. "You were all right at breakfast—"

Kenny wheeled furiously.

"Sid," he snorted, "you're amazed when it rains. You're amazed when it snows. You're amazed when the sun's out and amazed when it isn't. Thunder-and-turf! you're always amazed!" Whereupon he stalked out with his suit case and slammed the door.

Sid pursed his lips and shook his head, his gaze riveted upon the door panels in round-eyed incredulity. To him Kenny was an incomprehensible source of turbulence.

"The spark!" said Sid. "Wonder what it's been?"

Then sharing the club-feeling of guardianship where Kenny was concerned, the good-natured little painter embarked upon a tour of inspection, locked the studio windows and trotted upstairs, still amazed, to tell Jan all about it.

Thus Kenny departed from the Holbein Club, forgetting Fahr almost at once. He had recalled the tale of the Irish piper who added a phrase to some fairy music he heard below him in a hill; and the fairies, bursting forth in delight, had struck the hump from his back in reward.

Kenny himself had the same feeling of relief that the piper must have had thereafter. He too had lost his hump of worry.

CHAPTER IV

GOD'S GREEN WORLD OF SPRING

At a country inn the suit case became a knapsack. Kenny went forth into a world of old houses, apple blossoms and winding roads, likening himself to Peredur who had gone in search of the Holy Grail. The Grail in this case was the holy boon of his son's forgiveness.

He went with the break of day at a swinging stride, his penitential inspiration in the full flower of its freshness. If misgiving claimed him at all, it was merely a matter of shoes. They were the kind, built for walking, likely to be in a state of unromantic preservation at his journey's end. Kenny found in them a source of discontent and speculation.

For the passion of life which to Brian's fancy haunted the highway, Kenny had delightful substitute, fairies quaffing nectar from flower-cups of dew or riding bridle paths of cloud on bits of straw. In everything he chose to find an augury, from the night of birds to the way of the wind, the curl of smoke or the color of a cloud. Thirsty he longed for the drinking horn of Bran Galed or better still of Finn, for Finn's horn held whatever you wanted. And for a pattern in moments of diversion, there was always the fairy Conconaugh, who made love to every pretty shepherdess and milkmaid he met. Many a farmer's daughter smiled and blushed at the gallant sweep of Kenny's cap.

So he tramped, peering delightedly under bushes for the green suits and red caps of the Clan Shee, and every cleft of rock became the portal to a fairy dwelling. At sunset he discovered a fairy battle in the clouds and when the moon rose, silhouettes, fairy-like and frail, scudded mystically across the face of it. Old Gaffer Moon, full-faced and silver!

Brian's world of spring had been the world of men and women; Kenny's world held Puck and Mab and Una. He called her Oonagh. If once he remembered with longing that Oonagh's jovial fairy husband, King Fionvarra, went to his revels on the back of a night-black steed with nostrils aflame, he dismissed it as disloyal. Brian too had been tired, though he called it "blissfully weary." That depended something on the viewpoint.

When at last beside the embers of his camp fire, he spread his oilskin and drew a blanket over him, the night sounds of the forest, a-crackle with mystery, became the woodland spirits of King Arthur's men, blowing their ghostly horns by the light of the moon. Likely the wee folk would come and dance beside the embers of his camp fire.

"By the powers of wildfire!" cried Kenny drowsily, "it is good to be alive!"

In the morning there was mist and rain and Kenny tramped the sodden world in a mood of sadness. Melancholy dripped from the wet white blossoms along the way. The drenched green of the meadows brought tragic thoughts of Erin and her fate. Never a maid peeped over an orchard fence. Kenny bolstered his spirits again and again with some lines of Wordsworth which as a picturesque part of his road equipment he had copied into his notebook.

"I roved o'er many a hill and many a dale,
. . . . in heat or cold,
Through many a wood, and many an open road,
In sunshine and in shade, in wet and fair,
Drooping or blithe of heart, as might befall,
My best companions now the driving winds,
And now the 'trotting brooks' and whispering trees—
And now the music of my own sad steps,
With many a short-lived thought that passed between
And disappeared."

Never before had the words failed to thrill him with the romance of the road. Now as the rainy twilight threatened with never an inn in sight, he lingered on the final lines: "The music of my own sad steps!"

Sad steps indeed that postponed his meeting with Brian! Did he not owe it to his son to travel with all possible speed to the farmhouse instead of plodding belatedly along the highway in rain and gloom and twilight? Had he after all a right to indulge his passion for tramping and footsore penance when already word might have come to the sister with the ink-pool eyes? The runaway was young. His remorse would come the quicker. For every day he, Kenny, lingered in selfish penance on the road, he must pay in a widening of distance between Brian and himself. Kenny quickened his sagging foot-steps. Drenched and hungry, he felt himself better able to see the thing in sane and unpoetic light.

It came to this: Would Brian prefer the rags of romantic loitering to the speed, train or otherwise, of eager affection? Surely not! He must not be selfish. Foot-sore or foot-fresh, his remorse would be the same. With Brian it would be the inner things that counted.

At twilight Kenny found a thrifty farmer who agreed to take him in. He dried his clothes by the kitchen fire, hating the woolly smell of the steam. Later he slept in the haymow and lay awake far into the night, listening in doubt and despair to the drip of the rain on the roof. Nothing ever went quite right. He must read again in Brian's letter about the Tavern of Stars. Beldame Rain seemed bent upon a housecleaning. Kenny, dreaming, departed from the barn in a flying machine made of lilacs. Its planes, he regretted, seemed merely sheets of rain, specked foolishly with pine-needles.

He awoke to a subdued noise of voices in the barn below and wondered disapprovingly if the farmer was just getting home. It appeared that he was getting up. Horribly depressed and sorry for him, Kenny went to sleep again. When he awoke the sun was laughing iridescently from meadow trails of rain. The fragrance of wet pine came in through the barn window. The lilac in the garden was ready to flower. Kenny longed to be off. Nevertheless he breakfasted at some length in the farm kitchen and paid so handsomely in coin and grace that there was talk of him for days.

Already the sun was warm. It lay in a blanket of bright gold everywhere. Cloud shadows deepened a meadow here and there to coolness. The air was tonic, deliriously wine-sweet and heady. Kenny thought of honey and bees and clover and tramped and brooded.

The sun he hoped would presently abate its unromantic fervor. Meantime he must think. Penance or the tribute of impatience? Which should it be?

It remained for an abandoned corncrib to plunge him into his original fever of inspiration and remorse. Brian had lived in a corncrib for seven cents a day. Brian had ploughed and Brian had mended fences. He had even dabbled in whitewash. No, by the powers that be! It was a thing for penance after all. Always at the farmhouse the trail would be waiting. What if he arrived there and the runaway had failed to write? What would he do then? Rags and blisters and a bit of corncrib penance for himself! It was the only way. It would give his need of Brian invincible weight.

Kenny climbed a fence and entered the corncrib by a flight of rickety steps. It was something of a wreck and unspeakably dusty. Sneezing violently he sat down and ate his supper of bread and cheese with profound discontent. Each tasted monotonously of the other. Instead of two articles of diet he appeared to have something heterogeneously one in flavor. The smell of cheese he hoped wouldn't attract rats and remembered vaguely that a corncrib was architecturally immune from rodents. Well, no rat with discrimination would select a corncrib abode anyway. He'd fall through the floor slats.

Oppressed by the general air of slatty insecurity and the sight of a basket of ancient cobs in one corner, Kenny wished passionately that he hadn't always hated spiders, killed one with a shudder and pensively watched the sunset through the corncrib bars. It made him think of flamingoes in flight. One saw that best in India, flocks and flocks of them in the sky like an exquisite flame of clouds. Ah, India! No, on second thought he'd rather he in Iceland.

It sounded cooler.

When the moon etched silver bars upon the corncrib floor he went to bed, regretting the preposterous fanlike spread of the corncrib walls. Nothing walled should be smaller at the floor than it was at the top. It gave one a hopeless feeling of constriction. The feeling colored his dreams. Kenny found himself hazily adrift in an inquisitorial corncrib made of bars of moon-plated silver. They pressed in upon him ever tighter and tighter until with a mighty sweep of his arms he burst them all asunder.

He awoke at an undesirable hour, convinced that another farmer was getting up. The world was a mournful gray. At the end of the corncrib a head was peering in. Kenny turned his searchlight on it and had a moment of doubt. The man was facially endowed for anything but virtue. He was likely getting in—not up.

"Hum!" said Kenny suspiciously. "Are you coming in, my good friend, or are you going out?"

"I'm comin' into my own corncrib, damn you!" shouted the farmer with unexpected malevolence, "and you're going out!"

Kenny, resistant, knew instantly that he was not. He sat up.

"The acoustics, Silas," he said with cold disapproval, "are excellent. Therefore—"

It was impossible to finish. The farmer, finding the name offensively rustic, roared into the corncrib that Kenny was a hobo without future hope of heaven. He and the corncrib, it seemed, knew the genus well. Indeed, he looked in the corncrib for hope-lorn hoboes with the same regularity that he looked in the hay for eggs.

He added some infuriated statistics about early rising.

"Come out of that!" he yelled.

Thoroughly out of patience Kenny flung the basket of corncobs at the farmer's head. An instant sputter of cobby profanity and the sound of a backward scramble gave him grim delight.

"When I leave any bed at this hour," he called with terrible composure, "it will be because I

haven't a fist to explain a gentleman's habits. It's of no earthly interest to me if fool farmers are getting up all over the dawn. So are the roosters. Let 'em!"

But the basket of cobs had been persuasive. Kenny saw beyond in the dimness cobs and an empty basket. The farmer was gone. He lay down again in deep disgust, merely reaching a pleasant stage of drowsiness when the sound of voices near the corncrib roused him again.

This time he sat up with a jerk.

"Silas," he thundered, "is that you again?"

It was. It was moreover a Silas arrogant and cautious who peered in through the bars and stated profanely that he had a marshal with him, a marshal with a badge.

Kenny considered the new complication with a startled frown. It either spelled retreat in a harrowing dawn with the marshal and Silas at his heels or a temporary sojourn in a village jail. And Kenny detested any form of humiliation or discomfort.

"Silas," he said wearily, "this is a rotten corncrib. It's sprained and spavined and Lord knows what. It's full of bugs and ants and spiders and dust and passé corncobs and it's architecturally incorrect, but if you and the marshal will hike off somewhere else and brag about his badge, I'll buy it. I've got to sleep."

Speechless, Silas stared through the slats and continued to stare until his stupefied face became a source of irritation. Kenny lost his temper. He raised his voice.

"You petrified lout! I said I'd buy it."

The marshal, whose bravery seemed less in evidence than his badge, summoned Silas to a point of safety. They conferred in a murmur. Kenny viciously killed a spider and strained his ears in vain to hear the purport of the consultation.

After an interval of heated debate Silas returned and with an air of scepticism demanded twenty-five dollars. When Kenny, who never questioned the price of anything, argued the point from motives of pure antagonism, he called the marshal. The marshal was conservative. He dallied with the need of coming. Kenny took advantage of a dispute among the enemy to count out the bills in concessional disgust and shove them through the slats. Silas, turning, brushed them with his nose and leaped back in terror. Then his hand shot upwards in an avaricious clutch. The amazed pair counted the bills and departed, ever after confusing Kenny's identity with that of a famous lunatic addicted to escapes.

Having detected all forms of degeneracy in the farmer's face Kenny barricaded the door with a loose plank from the upper step, made sure it would fall easily with a clatter, examined his revolver and had his sleep out, thanks to the fact that the day proved cloudy. He awoke to flies and disillusion. His head ached. His back ached. There was a spider in his hat. He wanted water. He wanted a brook equipped with a shower-bath and he wanted the luxury of eating what he chose. Never, never would he eat cheese again unless the hand of famine gripped him. Perhaps not then. The sum of his discontent plunged him into a black temper in which he rehearsed the details of his morning's misadventure with growing spleen and wished sincerely that Silas would appear again and roar at him. And, then, gingerly descending the rickety steps, Kenny remembered that the corncrib was his.

His … and not his. For he could not take it with him. It was a tantalizing thought. Not that he wanted it. God forbid! Ever after he would hate the sight of a corncrib. He simply resented the notion of leaving it behind for the vocal entertainment of Silas, who would likely get up again with the roosters and roar into it at "hoboes." Yes, the corncrib would revert to Silas, from whom he had merely rented it for one night at a most appalling price. The improvidence of it shocked him. Kenny retraced his footsteps in a blaze of indignation and made a bonfire on the corncrib floor to which in a reckless spasm of disgust he consigned the remainder of his supper. The crazy structure caught at once, with a smell of cheese.

Five minutes later Kenny's corncrib was a mass of flames and Silas had appeared at the end of the field roaring incomprehensible profanity. Kenny, waiting, whistled softly with a defiant air of calm. The corncrib was his. He had a perfect right to burn it. He meant to tell Silas this in a quiet voice, but lost his temper and thundered it instead. Then in a fury he advanced to meet the disturber of his morning sleep and made him pay in full for the disillusion of his days upon the road.

He thrashed Silas into a mood of craven apology and left him with his head in his hands. To Kenny's disgusted glance he was like the Irish Grogach of folk lore, who tumbles around among the hills with a good deal of head and a lax body without much hint of bones. Well, Brian had thrashed somebody too. There were times when it couldn't be helped. And Brian had lived in a corncrib at seven cents a day. Kenny whipped out his notebook.

"One day in a corncrib:" he wrote grimly. "Twenty-five dollars!"

Brian and he were maintaining their customary scale of contrast.

The highway he abandoned almost at once and struck off through the forest, reflecting with a frown that Silas would doubtless look up the marshal and demand a warrant for his arrest. Fate was at

his heels again obsessed by a mania for disturbing the peace of mind he craved. He might even be hunted by a village posse. And bloodhounds! The adventurous side of this rather pleased him. It simply narrowed down to this—it behooved him to loiter no longer in the green world of spring. Penance or no penance he must now try penitential speed. How on earth had he ever managed to blunder into a country all trees and no rails?

He found a druid of a brook chanting paganly to trees and moss. Ordinarily Kenny would have found its music and its shadows infinitely poetic. Now, wretchedly out of sorts, he plunged his face and hands into a shady pool with a sigh of vast materialistic content, longed to linger and cursed the village posse he fancied at his heels. The first romance of his flight from justice was waning rapidly. With a groan he plunged on, horribly full of aches and hunger. Always now he would understand the Gaelic legend of Far Goila, the gaunt Man of Hunger who goes touring up and down the land in times of famine bringing luck to those who feed him. Even his taste for cheese was returning. The holocaust of the morning filled him with bitter regret. As for his feet, they felt shapeless and huge and fungus-like and full of burning needles. Oh, for the sandals of power of Fergus Mac Roigh!

At noon in utter desperation he bought a mule.

The mule brayed temptation at him from the fence of a forest shanty. A negress stood in the doorway. Kenny, in no mood for haggling, recklessly offered what he thought the mule was worth. It looked incredibly sturdy. His voice evoked a ragged husband who came up out of a cellar doorway eating a dwarfed banana. The sight of the banana made Kenny dizzy with emotion.

He demanded one at any price and bought six, ate them one after the other without the pretense of a halt and moodily shied the last skin at a sparrow, realizing then with a shock that the negro had already untied the mule from the picket fence. The precipitancy of it all made him slightly uncomfortable. Either the negro was too lazy to bargain or the offer was out of all proportion to the mule's repute. Kenny asked.

"He's got a powahful sight of appetite fo' a po' man," explained the darky fluently. "I's glad to see him go. Dat mule, sah, even eats de pickets on de fence."

Kenny felt sincerely that he could understand.

"Just give him his haid, sah," called the negro as he climbed aboard, "and he'll find de road outside fo' yoh."

Mule and rider disappeared with a sort of plunge. Kenny's spirits soared. Substance and speed here enough for any man. He remembered in the first moment of his uplift that Cuchullin, foremost champion of the Red Branch, had had a magic steed that rose from a lake. Its name was Leath Macha.

Very well, he would christen this amazing beast of sinews with the compass nose, Leath Macha, and make him a gift of his head as the darky advised. Leath Macha—Kenny later found less poetic names he liked better—developed a sylvan taste for roving and lost himself in no time, pursuing elusive glints of greenness. He seemed always seeking food. It came over his rider with a sickening wave of apprehension and disgust that the unscrupulous negro, taking advantage of his plight, had sold him what the southern darky calls an ornery mule, a mule that charged forward with fiery snorts and halted only when it pleased him, kicked backward when he did stop and plunged forward immediately afterward with a horrible air of purpose.

Kenny groaned. He was between the devil and the deep sea. The prospect of staying lost in a world of trees filled him with hungry foreboding. But he dreaded the open highway and pictured himself John Gilpining through town and village, a thing of ridicule and helpless progress. Puck in the guise of a hairbrained mule! He would pound onward into the night and throw his rider with the dawn.

At dusk the mule came out unexpectedly upon a turnpike and halted with a snort. Perfectly convinced that he was planning something or other spectacular and public, Kenny slid instantly from his back and grabbed his knapsack. He left Leath Macha in an attitude of hairtrigger contemplation, apparently about to begin something at once. When Kenny looked back the dusk or the forest had engulfed him. Likely the latter. Trained for the purpose, he decided in a blaze of wrath, Leath Macha had returned to the negro and a diet of pickets.

Kenny, swinging down the turnpike in the vigor of desperation, felt no single pang of penance. His mood was primitive and pertinacious. He went forward with bee-like undeviation until he found an inn where he bathed and shaved and ate. He slept until midnight and ate again. He slept through the night and the morning and ate again, still with the mental monotony of a cave-dweller. Then he found a railroad and rode. Not until he reached the town postmarked upon Brian's letter did he trouble himself with anything but the primitive needs of primitive man. Here, however, he permitted himself the luxury of a brief but wholly satisfactory interval of summary. The fortunes of the road had forced him into the prodigal acquirement of a corncrib and a mule when he had meant to please Brian by his economy. He had burned the one and abandoned the other, wholly necessary irregularities. He had thrashed a farmer. A fugitive from justice he had suffered hunger and thirst and every form of bodily torment. And he had tramped through a day of rain with sodden shoes and steaming garments.

Glory be to God! he had infused enough penance into his four days upon the road to last an ancient martyr a lifetime. Happily he had always had a gift for concentration.

CHAPTER V

AT THE BLAST OF A HORN

The village was old and depressing. Kenny, a conspicuous guest at the one hotel, awoke at noon to less imaginative interest in the wood, the farmhouse and the river than he'd known for days. He had walked into his picture. Now with perspective gone, he felt uncertain and vaguely alarmed. Well, any quest that led to an inn like this, he felt, must in itself be preposterous.

The innkeeper proved to be a mine of general information. He knew nothing at all specific but evinced a candid willingness to overcome this by acquiring facts from Kenny. Nobody he knew had run away from an uncle. Why was Kenny seeking uncles? ... Hum ... Joel Ashley's boy had run away but the uncle there had been a stepmother. Was the runaway boy anybody's long lost heir? A pity! One read such things in the papers. Years back there had been a scandal about a girl who ran away to be an actress. Kenny interrupted him long enough to order anything vehicular in the village that would go. The innkeeper shouted to a boy outside with a bucket and asked Kenny how far the "rig" would have to travel.

"I'm going," Kenny told him shortly, "to find a river. I'll keep going until I find it."

The innkeeper after an interval of blank astonishment identified the river at once. Kenny felt encouraged. Pressed to further detail, however, he admitted a confusing plentitude of woods, hills and farmhouses. Dangerously near the state of mind Garry called "running in circles," Kenny fumed out to wait for the hotel phaeton and climbed into it with a shudder of disgust. It had a mustard colored fringe.

But the phaeton creaked away into a wind and world of lilacs. Kenny forgot the inn. He forgot the village. Another gust of warm, sweet wind, another shower of lilac stars beside a well, another lane and he would have to paint or go mad.

He neither painted nor lost his reason. He came instead to the river and began again to fret. The road that but a moment before had made a feint of stopping for good and all at a dark and hilly wall of cedars, swept around a rocky curve and revealed the glint of the river. After that by all the dictates of convenience it should have curved again and continued its course to Kenny's destination, pleasantly parallel with the bends of the river. Instead it crossed the river bridge and went off at a foolish tangent, disappearing over the crest of a hill. Wild and wooded country swept steeply down to the river edge. Kenny, who had made a vow of penitential speed, must continue his search on foot. The prospect filled him with dismay.

He dismissed the phaeton at the bridge and stared up and down the river in gloomy indecision. Upstream or downstream? Heaven alone knew! Whichever way he elected to go would be the wrong way. Fate, who had saddled him with Silas and the mule, would see to that.

Then, having resentfully put his mind to it, he evolved some logic. Brian, leaving the wood by the river, would not go back the way he had come. He would travel upstream and mail his letter when he found the village. Kenny conversely had found the village first. Therefore he must travel downstream to find the wood; downstream through a disheartening tangle of bush and tree and brier and maybe snakes and marshes.

With a groan he plunged into the wood, keeping well up the slope to avoid the lower marshes. He must spur himself to the start or he'd never finish. But his mind was in ferment. What if the boy had written to his sister? Must he vagabond forth again with the morning into a world of bucolic dawns, alarm-clock farmers, roosters, corncribs and mules? By the powers of wildfire, no! He would buy a motorcycle. On tires or toes he could wind Brian around his finger and he would!

In a flurry of bitter abstraction, he floundered into a marsh and emerged mud-spattered and indignant. Briers tore at him. Below the sun-mottled river glided endlessly on in sylvan peace. The other shore looked better. There the wind-bent shag of trees was greener save when, with a hint of rain, the breeze turned up an under-leaf ripple of silver. He met no one; no one but a madman, he reflected, would explore the tangled banks of a hermit river.

At sunset, after seven slow weariful miles downstream in the brooding quiet of a hot afternoon murmurous with birds and the sound of the river, he came to the end of his journey—a wood, stretching steeply up a cliff to a farmhouse lost in trees and ivy. It was on the other side of the river and there was no bridge.

Kenny, who believed all things of Fate when the pet or victim was himself, refused absolutely to credit her crowning whimsy. In a fury of exasperation he clambered down to the water's edge and washed his face; moodily mopping it with his handkerchief he stared across the water.

The sun in a last blaze was going down behind the higher line of trees. Roof peaks and chimney lay against a mat of gold. Crows winging toward the forest to the south speckled the sky behind the chimney. To Kenny's ardent fancy, the old house, built of gray and ancient stone, became a rugged cameo set in gold and trees. Whatever arable land belonged to the hill-farm lay away from the river. North and south loomed only a primitive maze of trees.

A path wound steeply down to the river's edge and to a boat. Kenny stared at it in some resentment.

Well, if he must hunt a bridge he would rest there first beneath the willow. The sun had made him drowsy. He might even camp on the river bank and if ever a foot came down the path and toward the boat, he would fire his revolver into the air and demand attention. The prospect pleased him. He went toward the willow.

Fate having toyed with Kenny tossed him a rose and smiled.

There was a battered horn upon the willow and below a wooden sign:

Craig Farm Ferry
Please blow the horn

A battered horn of adventure! What might it not evoke? Woodland spirits perhaps, romance, a ferryman! Thank God the tree was old, the horn battered and the willow naiadic in its grace. A trio of blessing!

Kenny whistled softly in amazed delight and blew the horn. Its blast startled him and the wooded hills seemed to fling the echo back upon him. In better humor he flung himself down beneath a tree to wait for the ferryman—and went peacefully to sleep.

St. Kevin had once fallen asleep at a window with his arms outstretched in prayer; a swallow had made a nest in his hand and the saint had waited for the swallow's young to hatch. Kenny, with the legend dimly adrift in his brain, dreamed that he too must wait until a ferryman grew up. He grew up on the further shore to a youth in patches and then all at once the dream became a beautiful delight. The youth by a twist of woodland magic turned to a maid in a glory of old brocade. Such a maid might have stepped from an ancient tapestry to come in search of a knight of old.

"Mr. O'Neill!"

Kenny did not stir. He must keep the dream to the end. If he moved now the maid would vanish.

"Mr. O'Neill!" A hand touched his shoulder.

A haze of old brocade golden in the sunlight retreated and then loomed persistently ahead. The dream if anything became a shade more clear. Well, if a man must dream, let him dream thus, vividly, turning the clock back to maids unbelievably quaint and winsome in old brocade. Sweet as an Irish smile, the face of this one, and as haunting. And beyond, an old flat-bottomed punt and a river, a real river—

Scarlet with confusion, Kenny sprang to his feet. Queen of Heaven! the girl was real. She had stepped from the page of an old romance into life and laughter, wearing for the mystification of chance beholders, an old-time gown of gold brocade! The mystery of her gown, the river setting, the laughing sweetness of her face, rooted him to the spot in wonder and delight. He knew every subtlety of her coloring in one glance. Her soft exquisite eyes were brown. Tragic, they might very well seem pools of ink. Her hair? In the sun there was bronze, deep and vivid, in the shadows brown. And the sun had deepened her skin to cream and tan and rose. Thank God he was a Celt, an artist and an aesthete!

He did not mean to keep on staring nor could he stop. He was horribly disturbed. For he knew the signs as the traveler knows the landmarks of an old, familiar road. Heaven help him, one of his periodic fits of madness was upon him! It could not be helped. He was falling in love again. And he was tragically sorry. Brian would get so far ahead.

Standing there with lunacy in his veins and his head awhirl Kenny looked ahead with foreboding and foresaw days of delicious torment. He knew with the profound and sorrowful wisdom of experience that it would not, could not last. Almost he could have forecast to the day the sad descent into sanity, reactive, monotonous, unemotional, inevitable as the end of the road. But even with his conscience up in arms, he welcomed his surrender. Besides, rebellion, as he knew of old, was utterly futile. He must let the thing run its course.

The thought of flight from a peril of sweetness he banished instantly. To run away was to deny himself the fullness of life men said he needed as an artist. It was unthinkable. Nay, it was unscrupulous, for the greatness of his gift Kenny regarded as an obligation. Besides, Kenny denied himself nothing that he wanted, having considered his wants in detail and found them human, complex and delightful, and sufficiently harmless.

Passionately at war with the new complication in his quest for Brian, Kenny in frantic excitement blamed everything but himself. He blamed the girl. A girl with a face like that had absolutely no right to be loitering in a spot of such enchantment. He blamed the mystery of her gown. Mystery always did

for him. He blamed the river and the sylvan wildness all around him and went on staring.

"Please say something!" The girl's laughter had changed to shyness, then to mystification.

Kenny brushed his hair back with a sigh. No fault of his if Fate grew prankish and set the stage with gold brocade and an ancient boat and such a ferryman. He had evoked romance and mystery with the battered horn and he could not escape. All of it had fairly leaped at him and caught him unawares.

"I—I beg your pardon," he said.

"For sleeping?" The girl smiled a little.

"For staring! First," he said, his Irish eyes laughing back at her with the frank charm of a boy begging her to like him, "first I thought you had stepped from a tapestry into my dream—"

The rich hint of rose in her skin deepened. She glanced at her gown.

"Don't tell me about it!" begged Kenny impetuously. And long afterward she was to recognize in that eager gallantry the finest of tact. "It's a delight just to be wonderin'! You called me Mr. O'Neill!" he added blankly.

"Some letters had tumbled from your pocket."

Kenny's brow cleared.

"Besides, whenever the horn blew lately I thought it might be you."

This was too amazing. But the girl's eyes were beautiful, ingenuous and wholly sincere. Dumfounded, Kenny turned away and gathered up his letters.

"Mystery," he said, shaking his head, "is the spice of delight. But I like it diffused. A bit more and I'll be knowing for sure that I'm dreamin'."

"It's as simple as the letters," said the girl, smiling. She drew a letter from the pocket of her gown and held it out to him. He read the address with frank curiosity. Well, thank Heaven, that was settled. Her name was Joan West.

The handwriting was Garry's.

"For the love of Mike!" said Kenny, staring.

"Please read it," said Joan. "It makes everything so simple."

Kenny obeyed.

"Dear Miss West:

"It was like Brian to write so splendidly of his father in an effort to guarantee his own respectability as a suitable friend for your truant brother and fix his identity for the sake of your peace of mind. And I'm glad he told you to write to me.

"Though at this particular minute I would like best to thrash Kennicott O'Neill into work and sanity, I might just as well admit the fact that I'm merely in the chronic state of all men who love him and pass on cheerfully to a pleasant task. All that Brian has said of his father is true. As for Brian himself, he's a lovable, hot-headed chap with a head and a heart and too much of both for his own peace of mind. And he's so darned level-headed and unaffected he needs a Boswell. I hope I've made good.

"The O'Neills, in short, are a splendid pair of fellows with a rush of Irish to the head. They give each other more admiration and affection when they're apart and more trouble when they're together than any two men I have ever known. Personally I think they're miserable apart and hopeless together. However, I'm no judge. Five minutes of concentration on their present problems fuddles my brain beyond the point of intelligent logic.

"I must warn you that O'Neill senior is roving Heaven-knows-where in search of your uncle's farm. Knowing him fairly well I am convinced that he'll rove most of the way in a Pullman, though he distinctly said not. He hopes to find at your farm a letter from your brother that will furnish a clue. Whereupon, I take it, he'll rove forth again to seek his son and patch up a regular ballyhoo of a quarrel that almost disrupted the Holbein Club. You see, everybody insisted upon taking both sides, with terrifying results.

"I pray Heaven that O'Neill senior may not find O'Neill junior, but from now on I shall have a nervous conviction of the pair of them quarreling all over the state of Pennsylvania. In view of a certain sentimental indiscretion of mine in permitting O'Neill to read his son's letter to me and find the postmark, I feel guilty and apprehensive.

"Your brother, I should say, is just a little safer with Brian than he would be anywhere else in the confines of the universe.

"I enclose a newspaper article on Kennicott O'Neill, written just after he had acquired one of the medals that fly up at him wherever he goes. It's fairly accurate.

"Sincerely,

"Garry Rittenhouse."

With the girl's soft eyes upon him, Kenny felt that he could not be expected to read each word of the letter. He never did that anyhow. He blurred through now with amazing speed, catching enough to gratify and upset him. The letter, reminiscent of his penitential quest for Brian, roused voices that he did not want to hear. Nor did he hear them for long. Joan was holding out the clipping, her slender arm in its fall of yellowed lace a thing to catch the eye of any Irishman whom Fate for the good of the world of art had made a painter.

Kenny took the clipping to insure his future peace of mind. Yes, Garry had displayed better judgment than, in the circumstances, might have been expected. The article he saw at a glance was an excellent one and truthful. He particularly liked the phrase "brilliant painter" and hoped Garry had troubled to read the thing through himself before he sent it. It might inspire him to quotation in the grill-room.

Nevertheless, Kenny, with the clipping in his hand, had a picturesque moment of confusion.

"It—it's just the sort of thing we call a 'blurb,' Miss West!" he protested.

"It says in print," said the girl, her eyes wide and direct, "what your son wrote in his letter."

The heart of the lad! Kenny had a bad minute. Until with his quest upon the back of him he remembered Peredur and felt better. Peredur had gone in quest of the Holy Grail. And he had found fair ladies. History, romance, legend, call it what you please, was merely repeating itself with the hero again Celtic and chivalrous.

With Peredur for precedent Kenny laughed softly, his eyes a-twinkle.

"Ah, well," he said with a hint more of brogue than usual, "we've an Irish saying that there never was a fool who hadn't another fool to admire him! Trouble is," he added, saving himself and Brian with a whimsical air of loyalty, "the lad is no fool!"

"It's helped so," said Joan, "to know that Don is with someone like your son. I cried a great deal the first night but the next day there was Brian's letter and Don's. And later this letter and you."

Kenny understood. Brian could thank him for arriving in time. The mere sight of him had certified Brian's respectability and guaranteed the runaway's welfare.

And now—he cleared his throat—now he must ask if the brother had written later and supplied a clue. It was utterly essential. If he had—Well, if he had, he had. That's all there was to it! And he must do some thinking afterward, some painful thinking of the kind that drove him mad. He wondered for a moment, with his fingers by force of habit traveling through his hair, if it really was dishonorable for him to take advantage of Garry's letter to hunt his son to earth. There was a subtlety there in which Garry might be right.

Inwardly in turmoil Kenny took the plunge.

"And you—and you've heard from your brother!"

"No," said the girl sadly. "Not since."

"Mother of Men!" said Kenny softly and drew a long breath. The next step in his quest became all at once amazingly clear. And Kennicott O'Neill was no man to shirk a duty, let John Whitaker say what he chose. He was an unsuccessful parent, please God, trying to make good.

"And I," said Kenny, "tramping the footsore, weary miles always with the hope of a letter and a clue!"

"I'm sorry," said Joan, her brown eyes gentle. "It would have been wonderful if I could have sent you straight to your son and Donald."

"Wonderful!" repeated Kenny with a vague air of enthusiasm. But he rather wished she hadn't said it.

"What will you do?"

"I shall find an inn," said Kenny firmly, "and stay here until you do hear."

"There is no inn."

"Then," said Kenny irresponsibly, "I shall camp here under the willow, buying beans. I have a can opener."

He caught in Joan's eyes a glint of gold and laughter and glanced wistfully across the river at the house upon the cliff. It was undeniably roomy.

"If only your house had been an inn!" he said. "An old, old ramshackle inn, quaint and archaic like the punt yonder and your gown! It's such a wonderful spot."

Joan met his eyes and made no pretense of misunderstanding. She could not.

"Your uncle!" exclaimed Kenny with an air of inspiration and then looked apologetic.

The girl's face flamed. Oddly enough she looked at her gown. Kenny wondered why. He found her distress and the hot color of her face mystifying and lovely.

"I—I know he would!" said Joan in a low voice and looked away. "The house is large. Rooms and rooms of it. And only Uncle and I, save Hughie and his family. Hughie works the farm and lives yonder in the kitchen wing."

Kenny reached for his knapsack and started toward the boat.

"Thank Heaven, that's settled!" he said pleasantly. "You saw for yourself what Garry said about work. Honestly, Miss West, I ought to work. I ought to put in a summer sketching. I can sketch here and wait."

The punt, flat-bottomed and old, he proclaimed a delight. When the girl did not answer he turned and found her staring. She seemed a little dazed.

"I'm thinking," said Joan, her eyes round and grave with astonishment, "how you seem always to have been here."

He laughed, his color high. His face, Joan thought, was much too young and vivid for anybody's father. Their eyes met in new and difficult readjustment and Kenny, his heart turbulent, turned back to the punt.

It was in his mind gallantly to scull the thing across. The announcement brought Joan to the edge of the water in a panic.

"You'd scull us both into a rock!" she exclaimed. "The river is full of them. I know the best way over."

"Professional jealousy!" retorted Kenny, his eyes droll and tender. "I suppose you belong to the ferryman's union." He dropped his knapsack into the boat and busied himself with the painter. "If the boat had two oars," he told her laughing, "or I one arm, I know I could manage. As it is, one oar and two arms—"

"It's much better," said Joan sensibly, "than two oars and one arm. Please get in."

She went to the stern and stood there, waiting, one hand upon the oar. Fascinated, Kenny climbed in.

What a ferryman! he mused as Joan sculled the punt from shore. What a gown and what a background! The old brocade, flapping in the wind, was gold like the afterglow behind the gables and the soft, haunting shadows in the girl's eyes and hair. What an ecstasy of unreality! Boat and ferryman seemed some exquisite animate medallion of another age.

Garry could have told him it was the way he saw his pictures, romantic in his utter abandon, but Garry was not there and Kenny with his head in the clouds rushed on to his doom. The punt was a fairy boat sailing him over a silver river to Hy Brazil, the Isle of Delight. Ah! Hy Brazil! You saw it on clear days and it receded when you followed. It was a melancholy thought and true. The madness never lasted.

There are those for whom the present is merely anticipation of the future or reminiscence of the past. Kenny had the supreme gift of living intensely and joyously in the present and the present for him shone in the soft brown eyes of the ferryman in the stern. Past and future he shrugged to the winds. For he was sailing across to romance, he hoped, and surely to mystery. Yes, surely to mystery! Mystery enough for any Celt in the battered horn, the ferry and the ferryman yonder in the old-time gown.

He was sailing across, to romance he hoped, and surely to mystery.

[Illustration: He was sailing across to romance, he hoped, and surely to mystery.]

"It was down there," said Joan, nodding, "where the river bends, that Brian had his camp."

Brian's name was a shock. Kenny came to earth for an instant. Only for an instant. The monochrome of gold behind the gables was drifting into color. Here between the wooded heights where the river ran, already there was shadow. Twilight and afterglow! Kenny in poetic vein told of the Gray Man of the Path. The Path was in Ireland, a fissure in the cliff at Fairhead. If you climbed well you could use the Gray Man's Path and scale the cliff. Kenny himself had climbed it. Joan, busy with the single oar, lost nevertheless no single word of it. She was eager and intent.

"I suppose," said Kenny, "that the Gray Man is the spirit of the mists of Benmore. But to me he's always Twilight. Twilight anywhere."

The girl nodded, quick to catch his mood.

"And to-night," she said, "his path is the river. He's coming now."

Kenny's Gray Man of the Twilight was stealing closer when they landed.

With the feeling of dreams still upon him he followed the girl up the path. It wound steeply upward among the trees, with here and there a rude step fashioned of a boulder, and came out in an orchard on a hill.

Kenny stood stock-still. Fate, he told himself, needed nothing further for his utter undoing. And if she did, it lay here in the orchard. He had come in blossom time.

Well, thanks to the crowded fullness of his emotional life, he knew precisely what it meant. He had adventured in blossoms before to the torment of his heart and head. In Spain. He had forgotten the girl's name but it began with an "I." Now in the dusk he faced gnarled and glimmering boughs of fleece. The wind, fitful and chill since the sunset, speckled the grayness beneath the trees with dim white fragrant rain and stirred the drift of petals on the ground. Stillness and blossoms and the disillusion of intrusive fact!

Joan, lovelier to Kenny's eye than any blossom, seemed unaware of the romance in the orchard. She was intent upon a man coming down the orchard hill. Kenny sighed as he turned his eyes from her.

"It's Hughie," she said. "He's watched for you too since the letter came. We all have. Hughie! Hughie!"

Hughie came toward them, sturdy, middle-aged and unpoetic for all his head was under blossoms.

"Hughie!" called Joan. "It's Mr. O'Neill. He must have some supper. Tell Hannah. And I'll go speak

to Uncle Adam."

Romance flitted off through the twilight with her. Hungry, Kenny embarked upon a reactive interval of common sense and followed Hughie, who seemed inclined to talk of rain, to the kitchen door. It was past the supper hour. Beyond in a huge, old-fashioned kitchen, yellow with lamp light, Hughie's daughter, a ruddy-cheeked girl plump and wholesome as an apple, was washing dishes. Kenny liked her. He liked the shining kitchen. The wood was dark and old. He liked too the tiny bird-like wife who trotted to the door at Hughie's call. Her hair was white and scant, her skin ruddy, her eyes as small and black as berries.

Kenny made her his slave. He begged to eat in the kitchen.

Joan found him there a little later with everything in the pantry spread before him. His voice, gay and charming, sounded as if he had liked Hannah for a very long time. And Hannah's best lamp was on the table. There was a pleasant undercurrent of excitement in the kitchen. Joan found her guest's engaging air of adaptability bewildering. He seemed all ease and sparkle.

At the rustle of her gown in the doorway, he sprang to his feet.

"Please sit down," she said, coloring at the unaccustomed deference. "I've a message from Uncle Adam. He understands about your son. He said you may wait here as long as you choose. In any room."

Trotting flurried paths to the pantry and the stove, Hannah at this point must needs halt midway between the two with the teapot in her hand to tell the tale of Kenny's considerate plea for supper in the kitchen. Though it had been largely a matter of old wood and lamp-yellow shadows, Kenny wished that a number of people who had never troubled to be just and call him considerate could hear what she said. Thank Heaven his self-respect was returning. These simple people were splendidly intuitional. They understood. An agreeable wave of confidence in his own judgment filled him with benevolence. He was to lose that confidence strangely in a little while. It came to him sitting there that he felt much as he had felt in the old care-free past before Brian had deserted, plunging him into abysmal despair.

"Perhaps to-night," Joan said, "you'd better sleep wherever Hannah says. And then tomorrow you can pick a room for yourself."

She slipped away with the grace of an elf. Spurred to pictures by the old brocade, Kenny wished he had some velvet knickerbockers and a satin coat. The thought of his knapsack wardrobe filled him with discontent. Hum! To-morrow he must prevail upon someone to conduct him to the nearest village in wire communication with the outside world.

To Garry two days later came a telegram from Craig Farm. It covered three typewritten pages and read like a theatrical manager's costume instructions to a star.

Garry stared.

"Oh, my Lord!" he groaned. "The sister's pretty!"

After a dazed interval, however, he found comfort in the thought that the postmark had been harmless. It had served no other purpose than to lead the penitential lunatic to Craig Farm. He would likely get no further.

"The ties in Brian's bureau," read Garry, thunderstruck at the wealth of detail. "My white flannels. Have cleaned. No place here. Had to ride seven miles with a milk-man to send this—"

Garry ran his eye over the rest and groaned again at the hopeless task ahead. Very well, he decided, reaching for the telephone, if he must invade the O'Neill studio, excavate and pack, Sid could help and Mac and Jan. Waiting, he read the telegram again. With Kenny's usual sense of values there was one brief sentence relative to some materials for work. He left the responsibility of selection there to Garry.

"Work, hell!" exclaimed Garry, provoked. "He wants work so he can fill his time thinking up ways to evade it."

CHAPTER VI

IN THE GARRET

Rain came with the dawn. Kenny, waking hours later with a nervous sense of some unknown delight ahead, found the eaves and orchard dripping. The valley the old house faced was lost in mist.

The blossom storm! So Hughie had called the rain he promised. Kenny liked the name. Out there in the orchard gusty cudgels of wind and water were beating the blossoms to earth. It was a fancy rife with poetic melancholy.

The smell of wet lilac sweeping in from a bush beneath his window made him think somehow of Joan. He wondered in a wave of tenderness if she ferried the river too in storm and, glancing at his watch found the hour disturbing. Unfortunately in a wing remote from Hannah's trot and bustle where save for the monotonous music of the rain, the brush of dripping trees or depressing creaks, there was no noise at all, he had as usual slept too long. And one could never tell. Silas's singular notion of a rising hour might prevail here. Best perhaps to go down a little later and combine his breakfast with his lunch. Meantime he would avail himself of Joan's permission to pick a room for himself.

The house was big and old and abandoned for the most part to creaks and dust and cobwebs. Kenny peered into room after room with a fascinated shiver, reading mystery in every shadow. Thank fortune the room he had was linked to the fragrant life of blossoms and lilacs.

A stairway he climbed came out delightfully in a garret musical with rain and the plaintive chirping of wet birds huddled under dripping eaves. Unlike the rooms he had left below it was swept and clean. There were trunks in one corner, a great many, and a cedar chest. There should be a cedar chest. It was as essential to an old garret like this as violets in spring or sweetness in a girl's face. The chest was open. With a low whistle of delight Kenny peered inside and thought of the ferryman in her quaint brocade. The chest was full to the brim of old-time gowns, glints of faded satin and yellowed lace, buckled slippers and old brocade.

"Mr. O'Neill!"

Kenny wheeled, his face scarlet with guilt and confusion. Joan was beside him, her startled eyes dark with reproach. Even in his stammering moment of apology he was dismayed to find that her gown was commonplace, old and mended.

Joan caught his glance and colored.

"It's the dress I wear to Uncle," she said hurriedly. "I—I meant you never to see it. He doesn't know. Everything there in the cedar chest he hates. All of it belonged to my mother. He wouldn't like me to wear her gowns."

"In the name of Heaven," demanded Kenny, shocked, "why not? It's a beautiful thing—like the play-acting of a dryad!"

"My mother," said the girl in a low voice, "was on the stage."

Her challenging eyes, big and wistful, fanned his chivalry into reckless flame. The need of the hour was peculiar. There was little room for fact. In a moment of wayward impulse he had slipped up a stairway and blundered on a shrine. He must not make another mistake. The girl beside him was as timorous and defensive as a doe scenting an alien breath in the wood of wild things. A wrong step and in spirit she would bound away from him forever.

"Odd!" said Kenny gently. "So was mine." And he thought for a tormented minute of Brian and Garry and John Whitaker. Not one of them would understand. He wanted only to be kind and in tune.

Joan caught her breath. The softness and faith in her eyes hurt.

"You're not ashamed of it!"

"No," said Kenny, looking away, "Certainly not. Are you?"

"No," said Joan steadily. "But Uncle is."

In this second interval of readjustment, yesterday seemed aeons back. They had traveled far. The peace and peril of the moment were ineffably sweet.

"You can be yourself anywhere," said Joan clearly, taking from the chest an exquisite old lavender gown for which she seemed to have come. "And if your self is bad, the—the where doesn't matter."

Her insight rather startled him. Often afterward he was to find in her that curious ability to detach herself from custom and tradition, skiff away the husks of cumulative prejudice and find the kernel of truth for herself.

Joan went toward the stairs; he followed her with a troubled sigh. The stage mother bothered him. With her he had bridged a gulf it would have taken weeks to span, but the trust in Joan's eyes still hurt. If only he could have begun upon a rock, Brian's rock of fact and not the shifting sands of his own errant fancy! It would have been a glory to live up to the faith in the girl's wistful eyes.

He was sorry he had climbed the stairway, sorry he had solved the mystery of the brocade gown, sorry he had lied, sorry, frenziedly sorry that whatever new thing slipped into his life, no matter how simple and beautiful it seemed, took on the familiar complexity fatal to his peace of mind.

But he was passionately grateful for the tense moment when Joan had seemed to turn to him for

sympathy, a wild and lonely dryad of a girl in a mended gown.

CHAPTER VII

THE BLOSSOM STORM

At nightfall, with his telegram to Garry depressingly linked with a memory of winding, sodden, lonely roads, dripping woods and the clink of milk-cans, Kenny was summoned to the sitting room of Adam Craig.

A fire burned in the open fireplace. Lamp-light softened the shabbiness of the old room and shone pleasantly on dark wood and a great many faded books. Later Kenny knew that every book in the farmhouse was here upon his shelves. Adam Craig sat huddled in a wheelchair. Kenny thought of the runaway who hated him. He thought of Joan. He thought of the bleak old rooms that seemed one in spirit with the man before him. A wrinkled, evil old man, he told himself with a shudder, with piercing eyes and a face Italian in its subtlety.

Adam Craig looked steadily at the Irishman in the doorway and found his stare returned. The gaze of neither faltered. So began what Kenny, when his singular relations with the old man had goaded him to startled appraisal, was pleased to call a "friendship that was never a friendship and a feud that was never a feud."

"I sent you a message," said Adam Craig.

"Your niece brought it."

The old man tapped with slender, wasted fingers upon the arm of his chair.

"What was it?" he asked guilelessly.

"As I remember it," stammered Kenny in surprise, "you were good enough to say that I might stay here as long as I chose."

"Like all women and some Irishmen," said Adam Craig, "she lied. I said you could stay as long as you were willing to pay."

Kenny changed color. The invalid chose to misinterpret his interval of constraint.

"So," he said softly, "you don't always pay!"

The random shot of inference went home. It was the first of many. Kenny fought back his temper. Affronted, he crossed the room and laid a roll of bills upon the table. Craig counted them with an irritating show of care.

"That, Mr. O'Neill," he said, "will guarantee my hospitality for the space of a month!"

He put the roll of money in the pocket of his bathrobe and Kenny fancied his fingers loathe to leave it.

The drip of the rain and the gusty noise of wind that by daylight had been no more than a melancholy adjunct to the poetry of wet blossoms, became suddenly sinister and tragic and irresistibly atmospheric. Kenny stared with new vision at the dreadful old man in the bathrobe. One by one Kenny was fated to solve his mysteries when he wanted to keep them. He knew now in a flare of intuition why the old rooms had been abandoned, why Joan ferried folk from the village in the valley to the village across the river, why her gown of the morning and the rags of the runaway had been pitifully patched and mended. And he remembered the mystery of her color, when, questing an inn, he had glanced at the house on the cliff and hinted that her uncle might consent to be his host.

"I know he would!" Joan's low voice rang in his ears again with new meaning.

Adam Craig was a miser.

He shrank at the thought. Annoyed to find the old man's eyes boring into him again, he cleared his throat and looked away.

"So," said Adam Craig, "you are a famous painter!"

"I am a painter," said Kenny stiffly.

"With medals," purred Adam.

"With medals."

A fit of coughing seemed for an interval to threaten the old man's very life.

"Yonder in the closet," he said huskily, "is a bottle and some glasses. Bring them here."

Kenny obeyed.

"Sit down."

With the old man's eyes upon him, hungry and expectant, as if he clutched at the thought of companionship, Kenny reluctantly found a chair for himself and sat down. Pity made him gentle. Year in and year out, he remembered with a shiver, Adam Craig sat huddled here in his wheel-chair listening to wind and rain, sleet and snow, the rustle of summer trees and the wind of autumn. It was a melancholy thought and true.

Smoothly hospitable, the invalid poured brandy for himself and his guest and chatted with an air of courtesy. Kenny found himself in quieter mood. Reminiscence crackled in the wood-fire. Nights in the studio by the embers of a log many a Gaelic tale had glowed and sparkled in his soft, delightful brogue for the ears of men who loved his tales of folk lore and loved the teller.

Ah, Ireland, dark rosaleen of myths and mirth and melancholy. The thought of it all made him tender and sad.

Well, he would give this lonely man by the fire an hour of unalloyed delight. He would tell him tales of Ireland when brehons made the laws and bards and harpers roved the green hills. Kenny made his opportunity and began. He told a tale of Choulain, the mountain smith who forged armor for the Ultonians. He told a lighter tale of three sisters whom he called Fair, Brown and Trembling. With the brogue strong upon him he told how Finn McCoul had stolen the clothes of a bathing queen and he told in stirring phrase the exploits of Ireland's mighty hero, Cuchullin.

He had never had a better listener. Adam Craig fixed his piercing eyes inscrutably upon the teller's face, drank glass after glass of brandy, and remained polite, intent and silent. Kenny, with his heart in the telling, went on to the tale of Conoclach and the first harp. Conoclach, he said, hating Cull, her husband, had run away from him toward the sea. There upon the sand lay the skeleton of a whale and the wind playing upon the taut sinews made sounds low and soothing enough to lull her to sleep. And Cull, coming up, marveled at her slumber, heard the murmuring of the wind through the sinews and made the first harp. Kenny liked the tale and he liked the way he told it.

Adam Craig nodded.

"Lies!" he said, springing the trap it had pleased him to bait with an air of courtesy, "All lies."

Kenny flushed with annoyance. The sacrilege of doubt when the tale was Irish jarred.

"Lies!" said Adam Craig again, "adapted centuries ago by some Irish word-thief."

"You are pleased to be humorous," said Kenny, glancing coldly at his host.

"I am pleased," said the old man insolently, "to be truthful, not being Irish. Fair, Brown and Trembling!" he added with a sneer. "Word for word, it's the tale of Cinderella."

"The pattern for Cinderella!" corrected Kenny with a shrug.

Adam Craig glanced at him with narrowed eyes.

"And Finn McCoul and the bathing queen. I can find you the German tale of a stolen veil from which it's—borrowed."

"You can find me likely the name of a German who chose to delve into Gaelic for his plot."

"You've a ready tongue."

"There are times when it's needed."

"As for the first harp," snapped Adam Craig, nettled, "there's a Grecian lyre tale yonder on the shelf like it."

"Liar tale," said Kenny purposely misunderstanding. Hum! The Greeks, he remembered regretfully, were clever adapters.

His air of assurance incensed the old man.

"As for that fool of a Cuchullin," he rasped, coughing a little, "where is he different from Achilles?"

"A little different," said Kenny. "Achilles, poor old scout, was much the inferior of the two."

Again in fury Adam Craig coughed until it seemed that his life must end. Again he drank. Kenny knew by the flurried brightness of his eyes sunk deep in the yellowed gauntness of his face that he was drunk. He shuddered and rose. Already the old man's head was drooping toward his chest in a drunken stupor. With an effort he roused and leered.

"Cinderella, damn you!" he said. "Cinderella and Achilles!"

"Cinderella," repeated Kenny pityingly. "Cinderella and Achilles."

He stood uncertain what to do while Adam Craig slipped down in his chair. Drunk, perverse and cruel! With the rain beating at the windows Kenny thought of Joan, compassion in his heart, and rang for Hughie.

"I—I'm afraid he's drunk," he whispered with a sense of guilt when Hughie came. "Perhaps I shouldn't have given him the bottle."

Hughie glanced at his watch.

"It's nine o'clock," he said. "He's late."

"You mean?"

"Every night," said Hughie. "The doctor gave up fightin' long ago."

Kenny went to his room filled with pity and disgust.

Gusts of wind and rain battered at the orchard blossoms the next day and the next. Kenny found a tuning outfit in a closet and spent his days with Joan tuning the Craig piano. He was grateful in the gloom of dark wood and dust for the fantastic thing of lavender she wore. It was like a bit of iris in a bog, he told her, and was sorry when he saw her glance with troubled eyes at the dust and cobwebs.

The river ran high and brown. The horn beneath the willow was silent. Each night Adam Craig sent for his guest. The rain, he said, made him lonesome. Each night in a hopeless conflict of pity and dislike Kenny went, rain and wind and Adam Craig getting horribly upon his nerves.

He was glad when the sun came and filled the valley, panoramic from the farmhouse ridge, with a glory of light. Milk-white clouds capped the western hills. Nearer, dotted peacefully with farms, red barns and dark, straggling clumps of evergreen, the rolling valley stretched unevenly among intersecting lines of trees. At the foot of a hill rose the spire of the village church. To the south a crystal blaze of sun showed water.

A world of lilac and dogwood and a few late apple blossoms clinging bravely through the storm to sunshine. And the world held Joan with shadows of the sun in her hair and eyes and shadows of the past in her gowns.

Ah, truly, it was good to be alive!

CHAPTER VIII

JOAN

Thus, warm and fragrant, the summer came with Kenny in the house of Adam Craig, drifting pleasantly he knew and cared not where; with Brian on the road with Donald West.

And Joan? To her summer came with a new incomprehensible delight. Out of the void a bright spirit had roved into her world, sweeping her, eager and unresistant, into youth and life and laughter. He came from an immensity of romantic experience, holding out his hands to her, with tender eyes and a look of youth and charm and understanding in his vivid face.

She had fought through drab and solitude to dreams and formless craving, this girl of the hills. What things of vigor her life had known were cruel: a passionate shrinking from her uncle, a fear for the brother who had hotly rebelled at the meager life around him, a loneliness aloof from her kind and a vague hunger for some fuller, sweeter life beyond the hills. And with a blast of a horn the drab had vanished.

There were times when the girl's soft eyes opened wide in a panic of incredulity. He was a famous painter, this Irishman who had prevailed upon her in a laughing moment to call him Kenny; a famous painter with a personality as vivid as his face. And yet he chose to linger at her uncle's farm. The color, the gayety, the sparkle, he seemed miraculously to infuse into existence, left her breathless and startled. And he knew not one spot and one land. He knew many spots, some wild and remote, and many lands. Joan marveled at the twist of Fate that had brought him to the willow.

His individuality made its own appeal. But there were subtler forces working to the girl's surrender. One, a deep abiding gratitude to him and Brian. Though she ran down the lane each morning and peered into the letter box at the end for word of Donald, her disappointment now had nothing in it of terror. Donald, Kenny said, was with an O'Neill. He could not go wrong. She accepted

the statement, as she had accepted the stage mother, with utter faith and gladness.

And Kenny was kind to her uncle and to her; kind with an infinite delicacy of tact and feeling. He seemed to understand the instinct for beauty and adornment that sent her roving to her mother's trunks. He understood her dreams and her hunger. He understood the spirit that had led her to make the garret a sort of shrine to be swept and dusted, to be kept apart and precious. There was another force, subtle and exacting: the girl's burgeoning womanhood. Wistful for homage, she craved his gallant tenderness and wanted always to be with him. His frank glance of admiration and his boyish smile were always a tribute. So was his voice, deep, gentle, sonorous as a sweet-toned bell. Tones of it she knew were kept for her alone. The knowledge thrilled her. She did not know why.

By the time the old wistaria vine outside her window shook in the wind with a glory of purple, the over-crowded days were gliding one into the other like a rain of stars. Most of all, wakeful in the dark of her room, she remembered the hours by the river when Kenny wove for her high, peaked hats of rushes such as he claimed the Irish fairies wore, and told her tales of Ireland with a trick of eloquence that made her laugh and made her cry. Odd! unlike her uncle he understood tears too. A tear, he said, was always trailing an Irishman's smile. His sympathetic brogue, smooth and soft and instinct with drollery, held for her a never-ending fascination.

And always at the end of the day there was Kenny's Gray Man of the Twilight stealing up the river all too soon.

Joan was not the only one to whom the sparkle of the irrepressible Irishman's wit and humor was an energizing boon. There was Hannah and Hetty; and Hughie, too, though he stoutly denied it. Life on the Craig farm was no longer dull.

Kenny, at a loose end, kept the farm in ferment, evading the work Garry had sent him, by a conscientious effort to assist others. He was glad he could paint if the mood seized him. Denied the opportunity he knew he would have fretted. There was one singular, inexplicable thing about work. If there was work at hand, one could always find something else to do, attractive and absorbing. If there wasn't work to do, the sheer shock of it seemed to dull you into mental vacuity and loose ends of time came up and hit you in the face. Garry had written something or other like that sarcastically in a letter.

He helped Hannah churn and sang with a soft brogue, to her abashed delight, a song he called "The Gurgling of the Churn." He helped Hetty milk the roan cow and sang while Hetty's apple-cheeks bloomed redder, an exquisite folk tune of a pretty girl who milked a cow in Ireland. Later in the summer he even helped Hughie rake the hay and had a song for that. As Hannah said, he seemed to have songs for everything and what he couldn't sing he could play with dazzling skill on the old piano.

"There's 'lectricity," said Hannah, "in the very air."

"I wished," grumbled Hughie, "he'd put it in the ground instid. The air don't need it. Workin' a farm like this on shares is like goin' to a picnic behind old Nellie and startin' late. You just know you won't git there. What ground up here ain't worked out is hills and stones and hollers."

Hannah sighed.

Kenny knew with regret that he might have been a helpful factor in the work of the farm but for a number of unforeseen reasons. When he churned the butter never came. The roan cow disliked music and kicked over the milk-pail with inartistic persistence. The sun on the hay made his head ache.

As for a picturesque task for which he had no song—well, he had promised Joan to keep away from the punt when the horn beneath the willow blew for a ferryman. He had sculled the old white-haired minister into a rock with delight to no one but Adam Craig, who had spent a whole evening cackling about it. He must always remember that it had not been his fault. The rock had merely scraped the punt while he was listening with politeness to why the old man had "doubled up" his charge and had a church on either side of the river. And if Mr. Abbott had not risen in gentle alarm and begun to teeter around, Kenny in an interval of frantic excitement would not have been forced to fish him out of the stream by his coattails. He considered always that he saved the old man's life. Nor had he meant to dab at him with the oar, thereby encouraging the unfortunate old chap to duck and misinterpret his obvious intention to save him.

But Joan had understood. That was the chief essential. Always Joan was there upon the horizon of his day. Whatever he thought, whatever he did, was colored by a passionate desire for the girl's approval. Her pleasure became his delight; her smile his inspiration. In that, he told himself, pleased to interpret all things here in the sylvan heart of solitude in the terms of romance and mystery, he was like the chivalrous warrior of old who found his true happiness in gallantly serving a beautiful maid. Joan was surely such a type as chivalry conceived. She filled his Celtic ideal and aroused all his gladness as a woman should. And she was as shy and beautiful as a wild flower and as unspoiled. He blessed the old gowns that quaintly framed her loveliness anew from day to day. But they had been his undoing. He felt that he might have kept his head a little longer but for the blaze of the gold brocade in the last light of the sun.

Laughter made her lovely. Ah, there Brian had been right. But then, he reflected sadly, Brian was always right. That, he could surely concede, when Fate had put an end to his quest and doomed him to linger here in the home of a miser, waiting, waiting, yes, waiting in impatience for word of his son.

Well, perhaps he was not impatient, but at least he was waiting. And Brian had found in Joan's face the vigor of sweetness, not the kind that cloys. Kenny liked the words.

It was inevitable, with songs for everything, that he would have songs, like the tenderer tones of his voice, that he kept for Joan alone, songs that came softly to his lips when Nature stirred his fancy and Joan was at his side in an old-time gown.

A lone pine, a wild geranium, a lark or Joan's garden where the heliotrope grew; they were sparks to a fire of inspiration that came forth in song.

There was one song he sang most often.

"What is it, Kenny?" Joan asked one sunset when Kenny on the farm porch was finding the subtleties of color for her in the darkening valley below them and the western sky above the hills.

"What's what, Arbutus, dear?" he asked with guile.

The "dear" didn't bother her. It was frequently "Hannah, dear!" and "Hetty, dear!" and Hughie was often "Hughie, darlin'."

"Why," asked Joan, "do you call me Arbutus?"

"Because you're like one," he said gently.

"And what was the song?"

"'My Love's an Arbutus,'" said Kenny demurely. He knew at once that he must not step so far ahead again. She looked a little frightened. Kenny instantly called her attention to a gap in the range of hills to the west.

"Like the Devil's Bit in Ireland," he said. "There the devil, poor lad, bit a chunk out of a mountain and not liking the morsel over well, treated it as you and I would treat a cherry pit."

Joan laughed.

"True." said Kenny, "every word of it. I myself have seen the chunk he threw away. Tis the Rock of Cashel. He's been bitin' again over there, I take it. To-morrow you and I will go down into the valley, seek the unappetizin' rock he rejected and look it over."

"I think most likely," said Joan, "the farm's built on it."

And then the sound of the horn came over the water and Joan ran.

Kenny as usual cursed the horn.

With the valley filled with the first haze of twilight and the hills still aglow, Kenny sat on the farm porch and brooded. He had not meant to frighten her. The Arbutus gallantry he had considered strategic and poetic. There was the baffling thing about her that kept him piqued. She was always shy and elusive. Of convention she knew nothing at all; yet like the shrine in the garret she kept herself apart and precious. Always she seemed fluttering just ahead of him, like a will-of-the-wisp. If he touched her hand ever so gently she drew it away. The caresses most girls he had known would have understood and accepted as part of the summer idyl, he knew, instinctively, would be evaded.

Ah! the truth of it was she was an incomprehensible torment of delight. For she roamed the fields and woods with him gladly, lunched in glens remote it seemed from everything but the call of that infernal horn, yielded to the enthusiasm of his maddest moods, romped with him like a kitten or a child—and kept miraculously the poise and reticence of a woman. She talked freely of her brother; never of her uncle.

He was quick and impressionable, this gifted Irishman, with a trace of the melancholy of his race and all of its cheer. Melancholy was the one mood in which Joan did not seem to flutter just ahead. Always then she followed, gentle, compassionate and shyly tender. He was quick to find it out and wily enough to feign it when in reality his heart was as light and buoyant as a feather.

Save for the call of the horn beneath the willow, the girl was as free to come and go as an oriole in the orchard; for that he was grateful. But whether Adam Craig's attitude was one of trust or cold indifference, he could not fathom. With Hughie and Hannah it was different. They loved Joan and trusted him. That trust, he resolved, should not be futile. He could justify it and he would. Joan, of course, was foredoomed to know the delirium of the heart that had come to him that day beneath the willow. Fate could not deny him requital. She never had. Equally, of course, Joan's delirium, like his own, would not last. It could not. The thought hurt his vanity a little.

It remained for him who had aroused it to linger here at the farm until the fancy had run its course and she was quite herself! Even if, long before, his own madness had waned. That was apt to happen, for he was handicapped by an earlier start. Yes, he would linger. And he would be scrupulous and honorable and kind. Joan was young and a woman. She would nurse the shadows of her summer's idyl long after the idyl was gone, and would mistake them for reality. There with his wider experience and the sad memory of much ebb and now he could be helpful.

Kenny shivered and refused to dwell upon a phase of life that was like autumn and sere and drifting leaves. It bothered him that the thought of Hannah and Hughie had driven him to think it out. He liked best in heart things to think back, not too far, and never forward.

"Kenny!" It was Joan's voice in the dusk.

Kenny forgot the sadness of his wisdom and foreboding. He forgot the future. The thing to do always was to live in the present and now Joan's voice, joyous and young, filled him with tenderness.

"Yes, Joan."

"The Gray Man of the Twilight's here. See, he's climbed up from the valley and he's coming down the walk."

From the Gray Man's misty robes came the fragrance of syringa.

CHAPTER IX

ADAM CRAIG

Joan, Kenny called his torment of delight in days that were exquisite intaglios. Adam Craig was a torment of another caliber. He claimed the evenings of his guest.

Kenny knew too well for his own peace of mind the pitiful diversions of the old man's day. It sapped his powers of resistance. In the morning there was the doctor, a weary little man, untemperamental and mercifully impervious to insult, who chugged up the lane in a car that needed but one twist of the crank to release a great many clattering things. All of them Kenny felt should be anchored more securely. There was an occasional hour in the open. At nightfall he sent for Kenny and by nine he was drunk.

Again and again, wrought to a high pitch of resentment by the traps the invalid baited with an air of courtesy, Kenny cursed his own weak-kneed spasms of pity and surrender and resolved to break away. Always when Hughie rapped at his bedroom door he remembered the melancholy drip of the blossom storm at Adam's windows, the invalid's hunger for news of the outside world and the Spartan way he bore his pain. Whatever the nature of the disease that had wasted his body and etched shadows of pain upon his subtle face, he never spoke of it. Nor did he speak of Donald or Joan, whom Kenny felt despairingly he hated and taunted into secret tears. If he resented the runaway's rebellion, he kept it to himself.

One evening when he seemed to be quiet and in pain, and was taking, Kenny noticed, the medicine that marked vague periods of crisis, Adam said pensively that he had not meant to impugn the Gaelic folk lore. He liked it. It reflected the warm, poetic soul of a people. Brandy, alas, always made him quarrelsome and undependable of mood. When the rain came again and he had to have a fire, they would have more tales of the Dark Rose Kenny loved. Ireland, the Dark Rose! The name was like her history. Yes, folk lore went with the crackle of a log and the mournful music of rain upon a roof. He could have his brandy later.

The rain came with its lonely patter and Kenny told him tales of Ireland, delighted at the sympathetic quiet of his mood. Unbrandied, the evenings, after all, might become endurable.

"You see," Adam said once a little sadly, "without the brandy—"

Kenny nodded his approval.

When the clock struck nine he was in splendid fettle, brogue and all.

"For Ireland's harpers," he was boasting with a reckless air of pride, "were better than any harpers in the world."

"Liars?" asked Adam blankly.

Kenny found his occasional pretense of deafness trying in the extreme.

"Harpers!" he repeated in a loud voice. "And you heard me before."

Adam nodded.

"What do you mean," demanded Kenny suspiciously, "that you did hear me or you didn't?"

"I did," said Adam suavely. "Both times. Go on with the story."

Somewhat nettled, Kenny obeyed. Conscious, the minute he began, of a muffled whistle, he glanced sharply at his host and found his glance returned with a guileless air of inquiry.

"Adam," he said, "are you whistling?"

"My dear Kenny!" protested Adam. "It's the wind. I hear it myself."

Somewhat suspicious, for he fancied now he read in the invalid's alertness a feline readiness to pounce, Kenny returned to the tale of the harper who proved the right of Ireland to lead the world. This time the insolent whistle, louder and a shade defiant, convinced him that his listener's mood had changed. Adam was resenting his guest's insistence upon the merits of his race by whistling "Yankee Doodle."

Kenny stopped and smiled, and the whistle rang out fiercely.

"A good old Irish tune, that, Adam," he said languidly. "It's 'All the way to Galway!' Funny how it came to be known as Yankee Doodle."

In a fury of exasperation Adam propelled himself in his wheel-chair the length of the room and back.

"You damned bragging Irishman!" he hissed. "I think you lie. You're Irish and you hate to be outdone. But I'll look it up."

His spirit was unconquerable, his ingenuity persistent and amazing. Often when the clash of wit was sharp he cackled in perverse delight. But composure maddened him. Again and again, inwardly provoked to the point of murder, Kenny threatened to break away from the goad of his tongue. Always then Adam appealed to his habits of pity and treacherously on the strength of it wheedled him into other tales of folk lore merely to refute them. And always he blamed the brandy. Kenny knew now that he lied. Drunk, the old man was stupid; sober, he was satanic in his cunning.

There was one tale of a fairy mill that, in startling circumstances, Kenny told without interruption. Fairies, in Ireland, said Kenny, had ground the corn of mortals without pay until someone stole a bag of meal that belonged to a widow. Then the fairies, shocked at the ways of men, abandoned the fairy mill forever.

He braced himself for the usual shaft of insolence, in a mood for battle. It did not come. Adam had fallen forward in his chair unconscious. Kenny rang for Hughie and stared at the huddled figure in the wheel-chair with eyes of new suspicion. Adam Craig, he remembered, with a sharp unbridled instinct for adding two and two, was a miser and he hated the children of his widowed sister. There could be a sinister reason.

CHAPTER X

A NOTEBOOK

It seemed that Adam too could add his two and two. In his quieter hours of pain, when every warmer instinct of his guest was uppermost, he was as curious as a woman. His questions, put with the sad, querulous courtesy of an invalid claiming privileges by reason of his pain, were sometimes difficult to answer.

"Paul Pry!" murmured Kenny to himself one night.

Adam's sharp eyes snapped.

"Paul Pry, eh?" he quivered. "You impudent devil!"

"A minute ago," reminded Kenny coldly, "when I told you you were drinking too much brandy, you said you were deaf to-night."

"It's an intermittent affliction," purred Adam with a chuckle. "You struck me in a minute of vacation."

But the careless sobriquet of Kenny's rankled in the old man's mind and bore a startling aftermath of fruit.

Kenny was Irish and conversational. He had as usual talked too much, unaware that Adam, with fiendish insight, was reading steadily between the lines, ready to pounce.

"Paul Pry!" repeated the old man at intervals. "Paul Pry! You are a selfish, hair-brained Irishman," he blazed suddenly, leaning forward, baleful and intense. "Some men feel and some men act. But you

act only when you have to. Life's a battle. Do you fight? No! You glide along and watch the others. That's the way you've kept your youth. You never linger on the things that prove unpleasant. You think life an individual adventure to be lived the way you choose. It isn't. It's a link in a chain that clanks. You can't escape. You won't escape. You're a play-actor with a gift for staging yourself and you're as hungry for the limelight as a circus girl in spangles. What you need is the hurt of sacrifice. You need to suffer and forget yourself. Damn you and your brogue and your folk lore. You're the most amazing liar I've ever met."

But Kenny heard no more. He stumbled out of the sitting room and slammed the door.

There was a lamp burning in his bedroom. Kenny walked the floor in anger and humiliation, his fingers clenched as usual in his hair. Back there in the studio with Whitaker's arraignment ringing in his ears, he had been conscious of a terror he refused to face, a curious inner crash of something vital to his peace of mind. And he had fought it back for days, plunging into the relief of penance with a gasp of hot content.

Now Adam, sitting in separate judgment, had reached out into the void and linked himself to Whitaker—to Brian, to Garry—and his barbs stung. That terror of misgiving, lulled into quietude here in the peace and charm of his life with Joan, stirred within him hydra-headed and drove the color from his face. Then he blazed into rebellion.

Failure! Vanity! Self! And Adam to-night had fused the verdict of the other three.

Whether or not these things were true was at first of little moment. The sting lay in the fact that someone had troubled to think them. The careless illusion, that what he thought of himself the world thought, lay at his feet pricked into utter collapse. It seemed to him as he walked the floor in a tumult of hurt pride, that the world must accept the man he knew himself to be, the man whose light-hearted existence he loved to dramatize, a brilliant painter with piquant imperfections, intensely human and delightful. He passionately demanded that it accept him so without question. Good God! No one had seemed to question until Brian in a burst of temper had brought the world about his ears.

Well, let the world misjudge him if it chose. He was big enough, he knew, to hold his head above it.

In a mood of lively irony he whipped forth a notebook and wrote a sarcastic summary of his shortcomings, his lips curled in hostile interest.

"Sunsets and vanity," he wrote with a flourish and lost his temper. Well, that phase in Brian's life was closed forever, thanks to Whitaker's meddling tongue. Never again would Kenny lay himself open to misinterpretation by seeking commissions for his son. Brian could write truth for Whitaker with a blue pencil and be damned!

"Hairbrained, unquenchable youth," he wrote next and added airily after this: "This is likely hair and teeth."

"Irresponsible."

"Failure as a parent." This he underlined.

"Need to suffer and learn something of the psychology of sacrifice."

"Romantic attitude toward the truth."

"Improvidence. Need for plebeian regularity in money affairs and petty debt."

"Disorder—chairs to sit down on without looking first."

"I borrow Brian's money and his clothes."

"Pawned shotgun, tennis racket, some fishing tackle and golf clubs."

"Note: Look over tickets."

"A tendency to indolence."

He had begun with an air of bored amusement; he finished grimly, read and reread. In the light of the Craig-and-Whitaker analysis, which dovetailed in the similarity of their venom, the details might, he fancied with a lifting of his brows, be classified under three general headings: youth, irresponsibility and a romantic attitude toward the truth.

The envious charge of youth he attributed instantly to the thinning of John Whitaker's grayish hair, and felt better. In irresponsibility he read, agreeably, needful temperament. And his romantic attitude toward the truth was merely a brilliant overplus of imagination without which life would be insufferably dull.

He read the list again with colors flying and drum beating victory. Though singly he could refute each item, an unguarded perusal when he felt complacent, brought the hot blood back to his face in a rush of mortification and dismay.

With a curse he flung the book across the room. Then unreasonably he went after it and wrote at the end: "Life is a battle. I do not fight. And life is not an individual adventure."

The final sentence startled him most of all.

Again he read it all and the memory of Brian, white, aggressive, desperately intent upon escape, came between him and his quest of self-content. It always bothered him. It had driven him to hunt the psaltery stick, repent his lie to Garry and water the fern. It had driven him out upon the road. Mocking voices rose now from the depths. Was it—could it all be true? The shock of the thought was cataclysmic and he longed for the self-respect and confidence in which he had basked that night in Hannah's kitchen. Must the world side with Brian? He was sorry about the shotgun. He was sorry about the sunsets. By the Blessed Bell of Clare, he was willing to be sorry about anything, little as he felt himself to blame. Was he to blame? Had he not paid for it all in his days of stormy penance?

Out of his white-hot revolt clear vision came to him, as it sometimes did, with incomprehensible, dart-like swiftness, and leveled him to the dust. Some of it he would not face but he saw his days upon the road with truth and shame. He had failed in his penance. Garry was right. He did everything by fits and starts. And he could justify whatever was most conducive to his comfort and his inclination. His pilgrimage had been farcical. He had fled from discomfort, magnifying pettiness into tragedy. And he had been disloyal to the son he loved. For there under the willow when his startled eyes had found Joan, he had passionately made up his mind to linger. Nay more, even then in the dim recesses of his mind, he had hoped there would be no clue to send him forth again in quest of Brian. And if there had been, Kenny faced the fact that he would not have gone. ... No, he would not have gone. ... And Adam Craig was a vulture preying upon the unrest in his heart that he had hoped to stifle.

He went downstairs with a shudder, craving stars and darkness, unbolted the front door and went out upon the porch.

The valley was black. Its lonely points of light vanished early. Up here on the ridge there was wind and quiet. He peopled the gulf of blackness ahead with things sinister and evil in spirit like Adam Craig and turned his back upon it with a shiver. There would be peace in the voice of the river.

The starlight, dim and soft, had a sense of silver in its indistinctness. To Kenny, walking through the orchard, ghosts of blossoms blew fragrantly above his head. The blossoms were gone like his peace of mind. He hungered for Joan.

In the velvet dimness the wistaria vine beneath her window loomed forth like a shower of shadow; a grotesque ladder of bloom warm to his mind with invisible color and yet darker to his eye than the night with its silver sheen of stars.

A ladder? Kenny caught his breath and stood still, quite still. It was a ladder. Some one was climbing down. Branch after branch the climber touched with unerring instinct and ran off noiselessly through the orchard to the south.

Kenny's heart throbbed with a ghastly fear.

It was Joan.

He knew what lay to the south beyond the orchard: woodlands and wildness, nothing else. The fields Hughie cultivated stretched to the north from the kitchen windows. There in the forest to the south where the river curved off at a tangent and flowed directly east, Brian had had his camp. On farther Joan had never cared to go. Where did she go now in the starlit darkness, climbing down the wistaria ladder with a cloak around her shoulders? To what did she venture through the solitude of whispering trees and the gloom of the pine forest?

A lover's tryst? Kenny sickened and choked. He could not follow her. He would not.

He turned back instead and went to bed to lie wakeful until dawn with something new and horrible gnawing at his heartstrings. Then he fell asleep and dreamed of monsters.

CHAPTER XI

THE CABIN IN THE PINES

He did not mean to go again. He did not mean to watch the wistaria vine. He went, he told himself wildly, to evade the summons that was sure to come from Adam Craig. But when the glimmer of wistaria swayed beneath a footfall, madness came upon him and he went stealthily through orchard and forest, stalking the flutter of a cloak.

The river turned. Joan followed the bend for a little way and struck off again into the thick of the

forest through the cloistered gloom of many pines. She came, after what seemed to Kenny a long, long time, to a rude cabin made of logs. There was a light in the window. Joan opened the door and disappeared.

If he had known definitely what he thought, he told himself with an Irish twist, the agony of his suspense would have been worse and less. The sharp intensity of the pain in his heart terrified him. Whatever lay in the cabin of logs was something apart from him. The night noises of the forest blared strangely in his ears. He was conscious of the odor of pines; conscious of a shower of pine-needles when he brushed back against a tree. And there were cones beneath his feet. But his madness would not bear him on to the cabin door. At intervals with fire in his brain he knew he heard the voice of a man.

In a vague eternity of minutes he waited until the door opened and lamplight streamed brightly over the sill. A man stepped forth. Something seemed to snap in Kenny's heart. Relief roared in his ears and rushed unbidden to his lips.

"Oh, my God!" he gasped.

It was the gentle, white-haired minister with a book beneath his arm.

Startled the old man drew back and peered uncertainly into the darkness. Kenny approached.

"I—I beg your pardon," he said, wiping his forehead. "I'm sorry."

Joan came to the door and stared.

"Kenny!" she exclaimed. And her voice had in it a note of distress. She glanced at Mr. Abbott, who glanced in turn at Kenny with an air of gentle inquiry. His confidence in Mr. O'Neill, never very robust, had waned that day upon the river. It was weakening more and more.

Tongue-tied and scarlet, Kenny stared into the cabin. Its single room with its raftered walls, books and a lamp, an old-fashioned stove, a work-basket, a faded rag-carpet and the trophies of childhood, boy and girl, was snug and comfortable.

"It's Donald's and mine," said Joan. "We've always studied here with Mr. Abbott."

"Mr. O'Neill," said the minister stiffly, "it—it has been a sort of secret. Mr. Craig was strangely opposed to the tuition I offered years ago. Joan settled the problem for herself."

It was evident all of it had lain a little sorely on the old man's conscience. It had been a singular problem, deception or the welfare of the two children suffering at the hands of Adam Craig; and the need of choice had driven him to prayer.

Kenny, glad at last to find his tongue, warmly commended his decision.

Joan blew out the light and locked the door.

"How did you find the cabin, Kenny?" she asked wonderingly. "It's off so in the wilder part of the forest. No one comes this way."

Kenny told fluently of walking toward a star.

It was like him. Joan smiled.

But the faith in her eyes upset him. He wanted to be truthful. Ah! if only Fate would let him!

"And I startled you!" marveled Mr. Abbott.

"Yes," said Kenny.

He walked back through the silence of the pines with remorse in his heart, paying little heed to Mr. Abbott's talk of vacation. The wistaria ladder, the cloister of pines, the lonely cabin where Joan spent truant hours of peace, were to him things of infinite pathos. And like the day in the garret, yesterday seemed aeons back. He wondered why, conscious of a subtle, unforgettable sense of change in himself. Something mysteriously had altered.

The memory of the pain and horror in his heart, he dismissed with a frown. As Adam said, he never dwelt upon the things that failed to please him. The pain was past. The peace of the present lay in his heart. It had even crowded out the memory of Adam and the notebook.

He was glad when Mr. Abbott said good night and took a footpath to the west. Well, it had been a mystery this time that he hadn't wanted to keep. But why, Oh, why, he wondered a little sadly, must all his mysteries end in anticlimax? Absurd, the little man in his frock coat trotting out of the cabin door!

"Joan, Joan!" he pleaded. "Why didn't you tell me? Am I then not your friend?"

"I'm sorry, Kenny." She laid her hand wistfully upon his arm. "Mr. Abbott asked me not to tell you."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

"You go there often?"

"Yes, at night. I sew there and read and study. To Donald and me it was always a little like a home. I used to patch his clothes there. He hated them so. You're not hurt?"

"Not—now."

"I'm glad."

At the wistaria ladder Kenny sighed.

"Must you?" he asked. "I mean, Joan, can't you steal in by the door?"

"It's better not," said Joan, one hand already on the vine. "Hughie would scold if he knew. For the wood is lonely. And he would talk so much of rain and snow. Now I can come and go as I please."

She caught her cloak up and fastened it to insure the freedom of both her hands.

"Good night, Kenny," she said shyly. "I hope you find your star."

"I did," said Kenny. "'Twas hiding in a cabin. Good night, dear."

CHAPTER XII

THRALDOM

Hughie met him at the door.

"He's been askin' for you, Mr. O'Neill," he said. "And he hasn't drank a drop all evening."

"I shan't go," said Kenny. "Depend upon it, Hughie, it's another trick."

"I don't know," said Hughie hopelessly. "It may be. It's not for me to deny, with all you take from him." Hughie looked ashamed of himself. "I—I'm sorry for him."

Kenny groaned and set his teeth.

"I think," said Hughie, "he wants to apologize. He wrote you a note this morning and tore it up. And when I put his brandy bottle on his chair to-night he flung it at my head."

"I'll go this once," said Kenny. "But, so help me Heaven, I'll never go again!"

He went dully up the stair, cursing the blossom storm. Its monotonous patter on the roof had inspired Adam Craig to his first plea of loneliness; it had left Kenny himself with a haunting memory of drab solitude, pain and melancholy that seeped with a dripping sound into his very marrow; and it had begun for him the singular thraldom, inspired by pity, that he could not bring himself to understand.

Hughie had left the door of Adam's room ajar. The invalid sat by the table in his wheelchair, a book upon his knees, likely one of the pirate tales in which he reveled. His face was drawn and haggard, his eyes closed. With the wine of his excitement gone, he seemed but a huddled heap of skin and bone. A death's-head! Kenny shuddered. Unspeakable pity made him kind. The old man yonder was off his guard; he had pride and spirit that compelled respect.

Kenny softly closed the door and rapped.

"Come in!" said Adam Craig. Almost Kenny could see him chirking up into insolence and the pertness of a bird. It was precisely as he had expected. When the door swung back, Adam was erect in his wheel-chair, electric with challenge. His eyes were once more bright and sharp.

"Kenny," he demanded with asperity, "where have you been?"

Kenny glanced at the faded books stacked upon the bookshelves; and with the cabin uppermost in his mind he swung back dangerously to the hostile mood of the night before. Adam Craig was a miser, cruel and selfish. He had driven Joan and Donald to a refuge in the pines.

"I said," repeated Adam in a louder voice, "where have you been?"

"Picking wild flowers," said Kenny.

"You lie!" said Adam. "It's your way of telling me to mind my own business."

Kenny did not trouble to deny it.

"You've been sulking."

"Very well, then," said Kenny evenly, making use of his one weapon of composure, "let's concede that I've been sulking."

He was sorry instantly.

Infuriated, Adam brought his fist down upon the arm of his wheel-chair and, coughing, propelled himself up and down the room.

Kenny walked away to the window, sick with remorse. For the old man had coughed himself into gasping quiet. What could he do?

A wayward Irish tune, ludicrously fitting, danced into his head and made him smile.

"What shall I do with this silly old man?" whistled Kenny softly at the window.

"What's that?" demanded Adam suspiciously.

The insolence in his voice struck fire again. Kenny remembered his notebook and the hour of accounting. Never again would the forces Adam had revived sink into the quietude of his first days here at the farm.

"What's what?" he asked perversely.

"That asinine tune you're whistling?"

"It's a song," said Kenny innocently, "about a wild flower. And it was very wild. It had thorns."

"I think you lie," said Adam, glaring. "But as I have no womanish repertoire of songs to prove it, you can whistle it all you want and be damned to you."

Kenny at the window availed himself of the privilege.

"What's the name of it?" snapped Adam after a while, ruffled by his guest's persistence.

"'What shall I do with this silly old man?'" explained Kenny with a grin.

"You impudent liar!" cried the old man in a high, angry voice. "Do you ever tell the truth?"

"Almost never," said Kenny. "Do you?" And he went on with his whistling.

Adam ignored his impudence.

"Well, then," he said, "it's time you began. You're young enough, God knows. But it's not a youth of years. It's a superficial youth of spirit. And you're old enough to tell the truth."

"How shall I learn?"

"Practice!"

Kenny wheeled. Adam's careless dart had struck deep and sharp and it rankled.

"Very well, Adam," he said, "I'll practice on you."

Truth! Truth! he reflected passionately at the window. Was the world mad about it? And what was the matter with himself? Why did the romantic freaks of his fancy always fill him now with vague worry?

"What," gasped Adam, staring, "did you say?"

"I said," flung out Kenny, "that I'd practice telling the truth and I'd practice on you. And by Heaven I will!"

He wiped his forehead with a shaky hand. The room was warm, the lamp flickering hotly in the summer breeze. He thought of Joan and the ferry. Did she scull the old, flat-bottomed punt back and forth, back and forth, when the winter wind was howling up the river? What did she wear when winter settled, sharp and bleak, upon the ridge? Kenny shivered. He pictured her vividly in furs, warm and rosy, and hated the lynx-like eyes of the miser in the wheel-chair who doled out grudging pennies for nothing but his brandy. There was much that he could say if he told the truth; much the old man must be told if later Joan with her secret tears was to be saved the brunt of his hellish torment. He would force Adam Craig to stop the ferry. He would force him to buy furs. He would force him to endorse Mr. Abbott and his kindness, force him to grant Joan her books and the right to study, if she chose.

Why in Heaven's name should she creep through rain and snow and shadows to the refuge in the pines?

He was dangerously excited with the fever of the old crusader in his veins. And then he thought of the trust in Joan's eyes when his tongue rambled, and went cold with shame. He must learn to tell the truth. He would practice for his own sake—and for the sake of Joan.

With a sense of shock he realized that he had been very far away. Adam was choking and wheezing and gasping himself into weakness.

"For God's sake," exclaimed Kenny with a feeling of guilt, "what's the matter? Are you laughing or choking?"

"I'm laughing," said Adam, shaking with mirth. "Kenny, I'm just laughing."

"Well," said Kenny huffily, "laugh your head off if you want to. I mean what I say."

The old man chuckled.

"I'd be disappointed," he said, "if you didn't."

Kenny stared at him in intense disgust. A perverse old lunatic! He would like his new diversion less perhaps as time went on.

"I want you to forget," Adam said abruptly, "about last night. I was—jealous. I hate your health. I—hate your straight legs—Oh, My God!" he whispered, shuddering, and closed his eyes. When he opened them his smile was ghastly.

"Kenny," he said with a pitiful air of bravado, "do you know a tune, an Irish tune called 'Eileen Aroon'?"

"Yes," said Kenny, clearing his throat. "Yes."

"Whistle it."

Kenny obeyed. His eyes were sympathetic,

"Well," said Adam in muffled tones, "it isn't Irish. It's Robin Adair and it came from Scotland."

But his voice was tired.

Kenny rummaged in the closet for his brandy.

"There are times," said Adam queerly, "when you've an open-hearted, understanding way about you. I believe you even know why I get drunk."

"Yes," said Kenny, "I think I do."

Adam dropped hack limply in his chair.

"It's because," he whispered, "I've—got—to—sleep!"

Startled at his manner, Kenny remembered the fairy mill and wondered.

CHAPTER XIII

KENNY'S TRUTH CRUSADE

Kenny began his truth crusade the next night.

"Adam," he said, halting on the threshold of the old man's sitting room with one hand carelessly behind him and his attitude expectant and determined, "I've often wondered why every book in the farmhouse is up here on your shelves."

Adam cupped his ear with his hand.

"Wh-a-a-a-t?" he asked blankly.

Kenny brought the hand behind his back forward. It held a megaphone.

"I said," he bellowed through it, "that I've often wondered why all the books in the farmhouse are here upon your shelves."

Adam sat up.

"For God's sake, Kenny," he said. "Close the door. Where did you get that thing?" he demanded with a scowl.

"It's Hughie's and the very sight of it was an inspiration."

"Give it to me!"

"On the contrary I intend to cure your deafness."

Adam stared.

"I mean just this: You can hear as well as I can. You pretend to be deaf when you don't want to hear."

"What?" snapped the old man with a glance like lightning.

"You told me to practice the truth," reminded Kenny, dropping into a chair. "I'm merely beginning. I've a lot to say. And the health of your hearing, Adam, is an indispensable adjunct to my practice hour and my peace of mind. I'm merely insuring myself against your refusing with a feint of deafness to hear what I have to say."

"For once," said Adam insolently, "you've scored. But if ever I get my hands on that damned megaphone, I'll burn it."

"You won't get your hands on it," retorted Kenny. "And if you do I'll buy a bigger one."

It was hard to begin but Kenny with his mouth set thought of Joan. He told Adam Craig he was a miser.

In the dreadful silence the tick of the old clock on the mantel seemed to Kenny's distracted ears a perpetuity of measured taps upon a death-drum. He thought of Poe and the pit and the pendulum. He thought of Joan and told himself fiercely that he did it all for her; for her he was winding around himself a chain foredoomed to clank. And he wondered why on earth the old man did not speak.

The suspense became intolerable. Intensely excited, Kenny swung to his feet.

"Well?" he said.

"Well!" said Adam and smiled a curious, inscrutable, twisted sort of smile. He had never looked so evil-eyed and subtle. "One of your greatest drawbacks, Kenny, is an Irish temper and a habit of excitement."

"A miser!" repeated Kenny with defiance. He must keep his feet upon the path. It was the prelude to all that he must say for Joan's emancipation.

"A miser!" said Adam, nodding. "Well, what of it?"

Kenny struck himself fiercely on the forehead, wondering if the word had pleased and not provoked him. The possibility shocked him into fresh courage. He said everything that was on his mind with deadly quietness and an air of fixed purpose. Then he picked up his megaphone and started for the door.

"Adam," he said, "I've told you the truth, so help me God, in an hour of practice. Now, you can practice facing facts."

And he was gone.

He was courageous and persistent, with the thought of Joan always spurring him to further effort. Night after night he played his game of truth and fought with desperation for the happiness of the girl whose eyes had committed him irrevocably to a vow of honesty and fact.

He could not see that he was making any headway.

Adam listened with baffling intentness while his strange guest practiced strangely the telling of truth. He refuted nothing. He accepted everything that Kenny said with a corroborative, birdlike nod of politeness. With the megaphone upon the floor by Kenny's chair, he made no further pretense of deafness. He said nothing at all and Kenny found his new inscrutable trick of silence unendurable. One singular fact loomed out above all others. Adam shamelessly accepted the word miser with a gloating chuckle. He seemed to like it. For Kenny, generous to a fault and prodigal with money, the word embodied all things hideous.

There were times when Kenny abandoned the hopeless battle and came at Adam's plea, reserved and sullen. Then with a solicitous air of virtue the old man urged him to renew it.

"Kenny," he demanded more than once, "have you got your practicing done? You lack application. If you're ever to learn truth at your stage of ignorance you'll have to have it."

The goad went home. He did lack application. And Joan must not suffer from that lack.

But in the end the old man tired him out; and the practice of truth became a boomerang.

Adam Craig smoothly demanded reciprocal privileges. Once more he told Kenny the truth about himself and drove the tormented Irishman again and again to his notebook. It had for him a morbid fascination. No matter how resolute the disdain with which he began to read it, he finished with his color high and his eyes incredulous and indignant. The barbs failed to lose their sting. They sank deeper and deeper. In a terror of defense Kenny returned to the fray with added vim. But Adam had a deftness with his barbs that his opponent lacked. Compassion drove the younger man to restraint. And Adam did not scruple to hide behind the bulwark of his own debility.

Night after night, mutinous at the glaring fact that in this singular battle of truth, Adam Craig was winning, Kenny rushed out into the peace and darkness of the night to seek Joan. It was inevitable that he should see in the wistaria ladder the means to starlit hours of delight. It was inevitable that Joan, to whom the vine was no more than an old, familiar stairway, would climb down to him with that shy oblivion of convention that was as much a part of her as her will-of-the-wisp charm.

They roamed in the dark silver of the star-light to the cabin in the pines and the hours that Joan had spent with Mr. Abbott or the books she loved, fell tinkling now with new melody into the lap of time. In the rude room, bright with lamplight and the trophies of childhood, the girl listened tirelessly to a musical Irish voice that read to her with brogue and tenderness enough to insure her interest in the reader no less than in his task. Kenny blessed the village congregation that had sent Mr. Abbott forth upon his needed month of recreation.

When the nights were cool enough, they built a fire of pine cones in the cabin stove and made tea and Kenny talked of Brian to ease his troubled heart. Joan listened wide-eyed to tales of the son Kenny said was all things in one.

"And you quarreled!" said Joan.

"Yes," said Kenny.

"So did Donald and I. How queer that is! Was it your fault, Kenny? Or was it Brian's?"

"It was my fault," said Kenny and lost his color. "But I know now that it wasn't the quarrel then that counted. It was the things that had gone before."

"How much you love him!" said Joan gently.

"Yes," said Kenny. "In this world of hideous complexities and uncertainty and—chains—of that at least I am sure."

"That," said Joan, "I like."

Mingled inextricably with this new fervor in his soul for truth, was the memory of the inspirational stage mother. The idle claim bothered him more and more. But there he was never brave enough to tell the truth.

Well, it was a queer world and he—Kennicott O'Neill—was thrall to a pitiful old fiend with the soul of a Caliban. He was unspeakably grateful for the relief of the hours when, with his conscience up in arms, he could talk to Joan of Brian and ease his misdeeds of the past by praise and appreciation.

A jewel of a lad! Everybody loved his humor, his compassion and his common sense.

CHAPTER XIV

IN SOMEBODY'S BOAT

The moon came silver in the valley and mingled with shadow among the trees. Owl's-light was nowhere, Kenny said, and the pines stood like shaggy druids in the silver dusk. The twilight of the moon he called it. Restless and poetic he begged Joan to help him find the lake down yonder in the valley. It was gleaming, to his fancy, with fairies' fire.

They found the lake and somebody's boat. Both were in a lonely glen. Kenny unwillingly conceded the existence of somebody with a claim upon the boat stronger than his own.

"But," he went on with an air of inspiration, "somebody is in the world or he wouldn't be somebody; and the world's my friend. Therefore by moon-mad deduction somebody's my friend and I may take his boat."

He released the painter, smiling up into Joan's face.

"Beside," he added, "he's either a young dub who doesn't know the moon is shining or an old cynic who doesn't care."

"Kenny!" said Joan, somewhat shocked by his inconsequent habits of acquirement. "I'm quite sure we shouldn't."

"Everything in the world you want to do," reminded Kenny, "you shouldn't. And everything in the world you shouldn't, you want to do!"

He flung his cigarette at a frog.

"The only thing to smoke on such a lake," he said, "is a fairy's pipe. Come, jewel machree, happiness is the aim of life. And my happiness for the moment, is to glide forth upon the bosom of that lake with you. Look, you can even see the gleam of silver shoes where the fairies dance upon the ripples."

He was indeed moon-mad in mood and irresistible. Joan smiled compassionately at the pleading of his eyes.

"But, Kenny," she said, holding back, "the aim of life isn't just happiness. That might be very dreadful. It's just happiness with the least unhappiness to others."

He stared at her a little startled. It was the sort of thing, he felt rebelliously, that he should write down in his notebook. Well, it was no night for notebooks. It was a night, a lake, a boat for lovers.

"Even granting that, girleen," he said, "it's not going to make somebody unhappy if we take his boat. For he won't know it. And therefore it will make us happy with the least possible unhappiness to anybody else. And, after all, it's more likely to be a fairy's boat, for it's made of quicksilver. Come, mavourneen, come!"

She climbed in unconvinced.

"Lordy! Lordy!" breathed Kenny in delight. "The lake is thatched with moonbeams!" And he thought of course of the legend of Killarney. "'Twas a valley like this, Joan," he said, "all rich with fields and pastures of green and there in the heart of it always was the fairy fountain covered with a stone to keep the water from rushin' out. And then came the knight."

His eyes pleaded. He was staging his legend and begging her to act.

"And then," said Joan smiling, "came the knight. I think his eyes were Irish."

"He saw a maid at the fountain," said Kenny, his eyes tender, "a maid with a pitcher and her skin was cream and her cheeks were rose and there were shadows of gold in her bronzy, nut-brown hair. I'm sure she wore a quaint old gown of blue and silver."

"Kenny!"

"And he liked her," said Kenny stubbornly. "You can't deny him that."

"No," said Joan gently. "And why should I deny it? For the blue and silver maid liked the knight."

Kenny's heart leaped to his eyes.

"They wandered on the hills and they wandered in the valley. And then the maid in blue and silver, who was all rose petals and sun shadows and the glory of autumn, ran back to the fountain. She had forgotten to cover it with the stone and the valley was flooded. There beautiful and calm stretched the lake of Killarney and I hope it was moonlight."

"And the knight and the maid?" Joan had forgotten their game of pretense. She was eager for the end of the story.

Kenny feathered his oars in silver spray and wondered impatiently why all love stories ended in an anticlimax. He had finished the story artistically and well. Luckily Joan had forgotten the stage and the actors.

"I suppose," he said gloomily, "that the knight married the maid and took her to dwell in a castle she must have hated. And they lived unhappily ever after."

Joan laughed. She saw in his words merely a perverse dislike for familiar endings and forgot it at once. The moonlit lake had aroused in her a yearning tenderness for the brother off somewhere in what, Kenny said, Brian called his Tavern of Stars.

"Oh, Kenny," she sighed, "I wish Donald would write!"

The wish jarred. Kenny frowned. How could he wish it too! And yet, not wishing was disloyal, disloyal to Brian. Upset, he turned, hurt and sulky. And presently as Joan, busy with thoughts of the truant brother, continued unaware of the melancholy in his mood that never failed to make its appeal

to her tenderness, he began to hum.

Joan looked up.

"What a queer, wild tune!" she exclaimed. "What is it, Kenny? I've never heard you sing it before."

"I never felt the need," said Kenny. "It's called the 'Twisting of the Rope.' Long, long ago, girleen, a harper's gallantry to a pretty maid angered her mother and she asked him to help her twist a straw rope. And he did. And twisting he had to back away and over the threshold and the mother slammed the door in his face. Faith, 'twas all to get rid of him!"

It was impossible to miss the point. Joan's face went scarlet.

"Oh, Kenny!" she said. "You knew—surely you knew I couldn't mean that."

It was a new delight to hear her say it.

"When Donald writes," reminded Kenny, "then I must go." And watching the girl's troubled face, he wondered with a thrill of triumph if at last the madness of the summer was upon her. Well, thank Heaven, he was honest and honorable. He would stay until the madness waned. Always he was fated to climb down out of the clouds first.

Ah! But what if Joan slipped back into sense and sanity first? The possibility filled him with panic. What on earth would he do?

CHAPTER XV

IN WHICH CALIBAN SCORES

It was a prospect doomed to haunt him more and more as the summer which had bade fail to be so full of peace, took on an indescribable atmosphere of complication. Where could he go, he wondered despairingly, that life would not instantly pour around him a distracting whirlpool of commotion? Was he fated to rush through life with his fingers clenched in his hair and his teeth set? Was he doomed, as Garry had once said, to run forever in circles of excitement?

Stumbling and tired, Kenny tried to keep his feet unswervingly in the path of truth, colorless and uninviting as it seemed; but the strategy of his practice hour in Adam's room he was forced to abandon, heartsick for Joan and the future. His battle for her he knew had been in vain. Useless further to bombard with truth that silent, inscrutable Caliban upstairs, whose fiendish power to drive him to his notebook when he chose in turn to tell the truth, seemed uncanny. And it was practice enough to tell the truth to Joan! God grant, in all sincerity, that he might come to justify the faith in the dear eyes of her.

He made one last heroic effort to break his chain of thraldom. After an interval of bitter insubordination which ended each night in surrender, he set his teeth and vowed by every sacred thing he knew that to-morrow night, summons or no summons, he would not go to the sitting room of Adam Craig. He would secretly leave the farmhouse at dusk with Joan and when Hughie knocked on his bedroom door, ready to say that the old man was lonely and in pain, he would be safe and serene in the cabin in the pines. Was it fated to be his refuge too?

Torrential rain woke him in the morning. Kenny stared out at the wet valley in tragic unbelief. It simply could not be; for he wanted a dusk flecked with stars. But the rain gave no promise of abating and late that afternoon he altered the detail of his rebellion. Fortunately there were other ways. When the dusk closed in and the old man watched the clock and waited, he would go boldly downstairs to the old piano and register his rebellion in music that Adam Craig could hear. He would spend his evening openly with Joan; he would go through fire and water; he would ride the whirlwind and direct the storm but what this time he would assure his emancipation.

Instinct had warned him to abandon, in his hours with Adam Craig, certain picturesque forms of attire in which he delighted. To-night, whistling with a feeling of gayety and unrestraint, he rummaged his trunks, selecting his clothing with fastidious attention to minor detail and held the lamp high at the end to afford a better glimpse of the handsome Irishman smiling back at him from the mirror in the bureau. No doubt of it, give a fashionable tailor disposed to be experimental, his head and enough money on account and he could create a dash and piquancy worth while. Always remembering that such a creative artisan was fortunate to find a suitable contrast of shoulder and hip to wear his inspiration.

Kenny in the best of spirits went downstairs. The lamp in the parlor was already lighted; soft yellow shadows lay upon the faded walls; dust and cobwebs had long ago surrendered to the siege of Hannah's broom. Kenny drew the curtains to close out the splash of rain upon the window panes and

went to the piano. Even the noise of wind and rain left him calm and cold and invincible. He played brilliantly snatches of everything he knew. When Joan came and curled up in a chair beside him with her chin upon her hand, he forgot Adam Craig entirely and went on playing. Not the music of rebellion; it was more the music of dreams, dusk-moths of melody that flitted through his memory, curiously iridescent.

He drifted dangerously after a while into the tenderness and passion of the *Liebestraume*, the one thing perhaps that, loving, he knew to the end; swept through the downward cadenza with exquisite accuracy and feeling, and forgot the rest. With the girl's soft pensive eyes upon him he could have forgotten anything; he even forgot that love is transient.

"Joan!" he gasped.

A loud voice rasped through the silence.

"Kenny!"

Joan shivered. Kenny stared at her in terror. It was the voice of Adam Craig.

"Kenny!" The voice, sharp with indignation, brought them both to their feet.

"Yes?" stammered Kenny, his face scarlet.

"Do you know *all* of anything?"

Lamp in hand Kenny went to the foot of the stairway.

"Adam," he demanded, staring up aghast at the wheel-chair and the wrinkled, saturnine face bending over the railing with a leer of triumph, "how in God's name did you get there?"

"Wheeled myself, you Irish fool!" snapped Adam.

Kenny went wearily up the stairway and set the lamp in a corner of the hallway.

"Well," bristled the old man. "Why don't you say something? What are you going to do about it?"

"It's the kind of night," said Kenny, "that you always have a fire. I'm going to wheel you back where it's safe and warm."

Adam chuckled.

"That's what I thought you'd do," he jeered.

"And then?"

"Then," thundered Kenny in a blaze of temper, "I'm going back!"

As usual his show of temper filled the invalid with delight.

"Humph!" said he. "So am I."

Kenny stopped the chair with a jerk.

"What do you mean by that?" he demanded.

"I mean," said Adam Craig, "that I'll wheel my chair back where I can listen to music instead of rain. And if you wheel me back I'll do it again. The hallway's dark and it's full of turns but I'll manage somehow, if I break my neck."

There was danger at every turn. A cold sweat came out on Kenny's forehead.

"Adam," he said quietly, "how did you manage to get there in the first place? How did you open the door of your room?"

"Wheeled myself close to the knob and unlatched it—"

"Yes?"

"Then I wheeled myself out of the way and poked at the door with a stick."

"Stick! What stick?"

"A stick out of a shade. Do you think I'm a fool?"

Kenny groaned.

"After that," purred the old man with a hint of pride, "until I got into the dark hallway and began to bump, it was easy."

The sitting room door was still open. Kenny wheeled his exasperating old man of the sea over the

sill in a terror of foreboding.

Adam stared at him.

"Where in the name of Heaven," he said, "did you get that rig? You look like an actor."

Kenny turned a dark red and ignored the question.

"Don't like it!" jeered the old man.

"There's a Shakespeare quotation," reminded Kenny dangerously, "that begins—Hum! how does it begin? Yes. 'There was no thought of pleasing you' and so on. That's it."

"You impudent devil! Close the door."

"I'll close it when I go out. And I'll lock it."

They faced each other in a silence perilously akin to hate.

"Are you a Christian?" hissed Adam Craig between his teeth. "Or are you a heartless pagan?"

"I'm a pagan," said Kenny. "Orthodoxy, Adam," he added bitterly with thoughts of Joan, "I leave for such compassionate hearts as yours."

"I don't want it!" said Adam instantly. "It's churchiology, not Christianity. They are as different, thank God, as you and I."

A gust of wind and rain tore at the windows. The old man fixed his piercing eyes on Kenny's face. Kenny shuddered and looked away.

"Hear the rain!" said Adam.

"I hear it," said Kenny hopelessly.

"And you'll lock me in!"

"Yes!"

"I'll ring for Hughie and tell him to batter the door down. I would rather bump myself into eternity down that hallway," flung out Adam Craig passionately, banging his fist upon the arm of the wheel-chair, "than sit here, alone, to-night."

With his hands clenched Kenny choked back his anger and faced his fate. He could not lock the door. Either he must stay or go back with the haunting conviction that this hungry-eyed old fiend who could strum with diabolic skill upon the sensitive strings of his very soul, would propel himself in his wheel-chair to the stairway, there to sit like a ghoul at the top. Rain beat in Kenny's ears like a trumpet of doom. He felt sick and dizzy. No! with the memory of that last wonderful moment when the music had blended into the fire of his tenderness, he could not go back. Invisible, Adam Craig would still be pervasive. He would jar the idyl into a mockery, the indefinable malignity of him, alert and silent up there at the head of the stairs, floating down like an evil wind to mingle with the reminiscent sound of rain.

"Well?" said the old man softly.

"Oh, my God!" said Kenny, wiping his forehead. "I'll stay!"

"Good!" said Adam, moistening his lips. "Good! You know, Kenny," he whispered, shivering, "I—I hate the rain."

"Yes," said Kenny wretchedly, "so do I."

"Kenny," said the old man later when Kenny had carried the lamp back and made sure that Joan had gone to her room, "don't sulk. You're old enough to know better."

"I'm not sulking."

"You are."

"Very well, then, I am."

"You've had enough music for one night."

Kenny did not trouble to reply. Whatever he said would be combated.

"Music," insisted Adam, "makes you as noisy as a magpie. If you're not whistling, you're singing some damned rake of an Irish song and if you're not singing, you're at the piano battering out a scrap-heap of tunes."

"From the first day until the last when he goes to sleep with a daisy quilt over him," said Kenny

stiffly, "an Irishman lives his life to music."

"Humph!" said the old man, ready for battle, "the music of his own voice, telling lies."

Reckless, Kenny used his one weapon of composure. It made the old man cough with fury and propel himself up and down the room in his wheel-chair until, with a feeling of whirling fire in his brain, Kenny wondered if a man could lose his sanity by watching an infuriated lunatic in a wheel-chair narrowly miss everything in his way.

But he made no further effort at rebellion. Instead he went each night, invincible in his determination not to be outdone. When by playing on his pity Adam trapped him he smiled and shrugged. When the old man assailed him with shafts of truth, no matter what the aftermath of communion with himself and his notebook, he accepted it with composure and an air of interest. When in a fury, Adam reviled him for his phlegm, he laughed and was cursed for his pains.

"You told me, Adam," he said, "that my greatest drawback is a habit of excitement and temper. Excitable I shall probably be all my life. It's temperamental. But I'm learning to control my temper."

In a week his coolness and composure were bearing horrible fruit.

Exhausted by blind fits of rage, racking spells of coughing and more brandy than usual, the invalid's weakness became pitifully apparent. He seemed now but a shaking shadow, gray and gaunt. Even the doctor, who accepted him with fatalistic calm, confessed alarm. And Kenny, with his teeth set and his fingers clenched in his hair, faced another problem. He was to blame and he alone! What in the literal name of mercy was he to do?

There was one alternative left and one only. Either he must meet the old man's hunger for battle with a show of temper, the blacker the better, or leave the farm for good. But even with his thraldom heavy on his soul the prospect of leaving Joan filled him with pain and panic. There remained then but the show of temper in which Adam would be sure to thrive.

So Kenny set himself to his freak of mercy. Thereafter, when the need arose, he walked the floor under the piercing battery of Adam's eyes, blazing forth a fury that, in the circumstances, with his sense of the ridiculous upper-most, could not be real. He raved and swore when he wanted to collapse in a chair and rock with nervous laughter.

Keen, alert, intensely delighted, Adam began to thrive. Chuckling he slipped back to his normal state of debility. Finding in the stress of his victim's tempestuous surrender that he forgot the megaphone, he perversely began again to have trouble with his ears.

Kenny and his megaphone returned to the fray.

Thus September came, warm and golden. Haze, soft and indistinct lay in the valley and on the hills. Summer lingered in the garden but on the ridge the nights were cool and in the swamplands, Hughie said, already the maples were coloring with a hint of colder weather. Here and there on birch and poplar fluttered a yellowing leaf.

And Donald had not written.

Kenny, as the days slipped by, faced a new and tragic problem. October was at hand. Work beckoned with urgent hand. If he did not go soon somebody would have to balance up his check book for him and tell him how long he could live without working. Brian, dear lad, had been a jewel at figures.

But how *could* he work with the thought of the winter wind and Joan tormenting him? And the snow-bound cabin in the pines? And the ferry and the ladder of icy vine? And Adam Craig?

He could not, would not go! And where in the name of all lunatics was Brian? Life in the studio without him would be impossible. What did he intend to do? Could he, Kenny, settle down to work with the problem of his penitential quest for his son still unsettled?

And why in the name of the Sacred Question-mark, was his life a string of questions!

In the end he fled from Adam's tongue. So he told himself. In reality panic plunged him into action. His summer was ending. His madness was not. And for that alarming fact he blamed Brian.

"I was worried," he remembered irritably, "and just in the mood to make a colossal fool of myself. And I have!"

Otherwise this seizure must have run its course by now. It bothered him that he had pledged himself to linger at the farm until Joan was quite herself. Surely the gods of love and honor would understand that he had foreseen no such troublous dilemma as that which faced him now. He must take himself in hand. He must find an undisturbing level of common sense and keep his roving feet upon it. The need was drastic.

"I'll be back in a month," he told Joan, his lips white with compassion for himself and her, and stared moodily at the blaze of autumn on the hills, knowing he would not return. "Often I've longed for a winter of sketching in such a wild and lonely spot."

"And then," said Joan, "when Donald writes you must be here."

"I must be here," said Kenny.

That he felt was the kindest way. Surely, surely it was the kindest. It saved Joan the painful thought of permanent separation. In a month without him she would soon forget. A month, he knew of old, worked wonders. Absence, he had proved again and again, never made a heart grow fonder. Propinquity was at once a danger and a cure.

Joan waved him down the farm lane, her soft eyes wistful. An adorable will-of-the-wisp! Almost he could not bring himself to leave her. But for Hughie's eyes, he would have vaulted from the farm buggy, crying her name.

"The farm," she had said with frank tears in her eyes, "will be just like a grave without you."

Kenny knew it would.

The studio he found could match it.

CHAPTER XVI

TANTRUMS

Things went badly from the start. Whitaker for one thing claimed to have lost track of Brian and Kenny thought he lied. For another, he could not bring himself to work. A sense in the studio of a presence gone, he told Garry, haunted him, Brian's lazy authoritative guardianship and the comparative order to which he could reduce existence when he chose were indispensable to his daily comfort.

Ah! unbelievably care-free—those old devil-may-care days when Brian had been content to work and laugh and quarrel! Kenny, looking back with longing, likened his plight to that of Ossian returning after three hundred years of fairy bliss from the fabled delights of Tirnanoge. Touched earth he had, in spite of warning, and become on the minute a wrinkled, old, old man. So with Kenny. He had touched earth, he reflected tragically. Never again would his fairyland be quite the same. Man talked of his flaws. His fallibility they said was monumental. There was Adam who had morbidly incited him to a notebook, a damnable, pervasive notebook which he tried in vain to ignore. There was Whitaker, to whom, at a loose end, he wrote a great many letters of rebuke, some stately, some less so. There was Brian, whose absence had revolutionized his pleasant way of life; and Garry and Jan and Sid, who at any cost merely wanted him to work. Grievance enough for any man who resented the disturbance of unneeded change.

The truth of it was, he owned at times, he was homesick for Joan and fed his loneliness with letters he felt himself obliged to write. That was inevitable, for he had fled from an idyl and the memory of its charm must lessen slowly. Often with an eye upon the clock he found himself picturing the routine of the farm and longing for its freedom from the petty need of work.

He blew the horn beneath the willow and watched Joan cross the river in the punt. He climbed the garret stairway and helped her pick a gown. He watched the Gray Man steal along the ridge, lingering in boxwood paths and in the orchard. And then with night among the pines and the plaintive voice of autumn wind, Joan was climbing down the vine and hurrying through the wood to the cabin, and Adam with his eye upon the brandy was counting wearily when the clock struck. How the wind would rattle at his windows! How the log would flare! How Adam must be longing for excitement! And how glad he was that he himself had found a safe hiding place in a lonely tree-stump for the lantern Joan had reluctantly agreed to carry since the fall closed in.

Um ... Joan would be building a fire in the cabin now and drawing the shades and Mr. Abbott would be picking his way through the pines with a book beneath his arm. Kenny glowered some at Mr. Abbott. An eye for nothing there but duty and even that he saw in a stark and unromantic way. And he lacked a sense of humor. He'd proved it in the river. Joan answered his letters with an adorable primness that filled him with delight. It reflected Mr. Abbott. But her letters ended always with the naivete of a child. They all missed him.

It was pleasant to be missed.

The pleasure was curiously reactive. Kenny's irritability grew too marked to be ignored. Jan and Sid and Garry met and talked him over.

"What's wrong with him?" demanded Sid, amazed. "Garry, what is it? He's as quarrelsome as a magpie and nothing suits him. He barks at the club-boys and if you drift into the studio you're about as welcome as the measles."

"It's not because he's busy," said Garry grimly. "Nothing I've found is further from his mind than the thought of work."

"And it's plain Brian isn't coming back," put in Jan. "He might as well face that fact and have done with it. Personally I've lost patience with him. He acts like a sulky kid."

Later Jan improvised a "scarlet fever" placard which Kenny in the course of time found nailed upon his door. He read with amazed and offended eyes that he was temporarily in temper quarantine.

It soon became apparent that life without Brian was maintaining even more than its usual average of petty complication. The problem of small change Kenny found a torment. There Brian had been a jewel. It simply narrowed down to this, he told Garry: No matter how he started, he never had any. Even a bag of change he had procured from the bank in a moment of desperation was never to be found. It got under things. His eventual solution of the difficulty plunged the club into scandal and uproar. He found the bag of change and sprinkled coins into everything in the studio that would hold them.

"Now," he informed Garry with moody satisfaction, "I'll always be able to put my hand on some when I want it. I wonder I didn't think of it before. I'm better with big sums. Dimes and nickels and even quarters make me nervous. You know how it is, Garry. I always have to come in to you or do one of a number of desperate things. And then if I can't find a small coin and tip with a big one, Jan gets wind of it somehow and talks by the hour about demoralizing the club-boys. He's a pest."

The device at first bade fair to be successful. Later there was frenzied recourse to Garry to help him remember where on earth the dimes were likely to be. Later still the pages helped. The sequel came quickly. The studio attained suspicious popularity with one or two new untried boys who mined the studio in Kenny's absence and tipped themselves. Kenny, as scandalized as only Kenny could be, turned sleuth and reported the thing in wrath. Everybody missed something and the club buzzed with scandal until the boys departed, likely, Kenny thought bitterly, to retire for life on the dimes and nickels they had dug out of his studio.

Why must he always be the central pivot of a whirlpool of excitement? God knows he loved peace even if Fate never permitted him to sample it. He laid the whole thing unconditionally at Brian's door. Let Brian, instead of shirking his usual numismatic responsibilities in some indefinite green world of peace and calm, come home as he should.

As for work, Kenny loved work, Brian and Garry to the contrary. If in Brian's absence everything conspired against his passionate love of industry, it was no fault of his. Along with the torment of doubts that assailed him, thanks to that infernal notebook, the studio kept catapulting itself into a jungle of nerve-racking disorder in which it was impossible to work. And when Mrs. Haggerty fell upon it with the horrible energy of the Philistine and found places for everything, the studio became a place in which no self-respecting painter could be expected to keep his inspiration or his temper. Here again, Kenny felt aggrievedly, was a condition which Brian's presence could have altered. The lad had a way of mitigating order and disorder with a curious result of comfort.

Garry lost his patience.

"You remind me," he said, "of the English squire who only drank ale on two occasions; when he had goose for dinner and when he didn't."

Kenny remarked that the squire by reason of his nativity was a fool. And the thing couldn't be helped. The studio in order was impossible. He added with an air of inspiration that it made him think of mathematics. Mathematics he considered a final argument against anything. Besides, he was unusually fallible. Garry must always keep that in mind. Let the infallibles work. If there was only something he liked well enough, he'd drink himself to death.

"I suppose you are aware," thundered Garry, thoroughly exasperated, "that even a painter must work to live? The whole club's buzzing over your tantrums. There's been some talk of chaining you to an easel with a brush in your hand for your own good."

Kenny as usual consigned the club to Gehenna. Nevertheless, as Garry saw, he winced. Very well, he would work, furiously, as only he knew how to work and when he had scored another brilliant success—

Fate intervened. To his intense excitement Kenny was summoned for jury duty. He managed after much difficulty to place the blame of this too at Brian's door. Brian, he remembered, had flirted with the daughter of an uptown judge. Likely he had boasted about his father's versatility.

Inevitably on the morning there was civic need of him at court, Kenny awoke with a fever for work, shocked at his record of indolence. Garry found him in a painter's smock, conspicuously busy with a yard-stick and crayon. Everything in the studio on rollers had been rearranged. A chafing dish of coffee, sufficient to stimulate him through a day of fearful labor, stood upon a table beside a supply of cigarettes.

"Now, Kenny," said Garry, who was finding his responsibilities in Brian's absence more or less complex, "you know hanged well you have that jury thing on this morning. I'm going with you."

Kenny filled a battered tin-cup with something he had to sniff for purposes of identity, unearthed a number of brushes and defiantly polished a palette with a wad of cheesecloth.

"I'll be damned if I go!" he bristled. "I'm too busy."

Garry looked directly at him and compelled a slight faltering of his gaze.

"It's the one day I've felt like work," blustered Kenny, squaring off his canvas. "You spoke of work, didn't you? And a fool of an English squire who ate goose? Let the idle rich sit around in squads and swear they don't read the newspapers. I do. Me on a jury! My dear Garry! I can't even sit still in my own studio. You know that yourself."

Nevertheless after a heated argument he went wearily with Garry in a taxi, particularly individualistic in his attire. And he told the judge in a richer brogue than usual that he was a painter subject to irresistible fits of dreaminess and must be excused. Garry, aghast, stared at the judge and the judge, with peculiar interest stared at the delinquent and excused him.

"Fortunately," Garry told him later, "your civic duties haven't spoiled your day."

Kenny merely glanced at him with a gentle air of patience. He would like to remind Garry that he had wanted to work and, thanks to Brian, the law had intervened. Now the coffee would be cold and he hated the sight of cold coffee. It depressed him.

Things thickened alarmingly. At three that afternoon, when he answered a violent thump upon the wall, Garry found the Louis XV table in a cloud of smoke; it was littered with vouchers and check books. Kenny, with his teeth set and one hand clenched in his hair, was figuring with the speed of an expert without, Garry felt sure, an expert's results. Brian, Kenny said aggrievedly, had always kept his check book straight.

"Look!" he flung out, indicating a problematical balance. "Look at that! And the fool says I'm overdrawn."

"What particular fool?"

"Some clod of a mathematician," explained Kenny with contempt, "whom the bank employs to insult its patrons. Look here, Garry! Look at that balance. Over a thousand dollars. Do you wonder I told him he had a sense of humor when he said I was overdrawn? The young popinjay! Arguing with me about my own balance!"

"How did it end?"

"I told him," said Kenny formally, "that the bank would most likely demand his resignation in a few days. And when he began to grow mathematical and persistent, I hung up."

Garry patiently sorted the vouchers and balanced the check book while Kenny in frenzied consideration of a new complication roved around the studio and smoked. He was a God-fearing Irishman. He wanted peace. But if ever a man's destiny knew unheard-of complication! Well, all of it could be traced to Brian's unscrupulous flight. He must come back. Kenny felt that his career was menaced. Life in the studio had become intolerable. He had been embroiled in two scandals, thanks to Brian's bouillon cups and Brian's unscrupulous shirking of numismatic responsibility. Everybody was talking about him; he had Garry's word for it. He couldn't work. When he could he was summoned for jury duty. His accounts, like the studio, were in a mess and he'd overdrawn. If something didn't happen soon—

"Shut up!" said Garry. "How on earth do you suppose that I can work with you talking all over the studio? Here are three pages of checks when you were evidently hitting the high spots, that you've failed to subtract. Three on a page. That makes your balance overdrawn."

Kenny struck an attitude of acute despair. "God of my fathers!" he groaned, changing color. "It can't be. Garry, it simply can not be!"

"It can and is," said Garry pushing away the book.

"Adams still owes me five thousand dollars for his wife's portrait," sputtered Kenny.

"And now he's out of town."

"What on earth did you do with Reynolds' last check? You had enough there to live a year."

Kenny looked dazed.

"I recognized the danger with Brian's commercial instinct gone," he stammered, "and—and conserved my funds."

"You must have. You bought a lot of clothes," reminded Garry. "And paid some bills."

"Some," admitted Kenny.

"Enough," commented Garry, "to establish, I suppose, one of your startling flurries of credit."

Kenny had meant to pay more. But the bank had put an end to that to-day by intruding into his private affairs. He'd even meant to redeem Brian's shotgun and anything else he'd pawned.

"Lucky for Brian," put in Garry, "that you've mesmerized Simon into holding things indefinitely even when you don't pay the interest. And of course you blew in a good part of the check on something foolish."

Kenny said with dignity that he'd bought a rug, nothing foolish. It hung over there. An exquisite thing, sensuous and soft! Color and form enough to drive a man mad with delight. He'd dreamt of the thing for days before he bought it. Indeed he'd meant not to buy it but something had snapped in his brain when he looked at it. Look at the design. Never once did it tire the eye, free-flowing and sure. Its intricate simplicity was amazing.

"And you paid a small fortune for it," said Garry. "Don't sputter. The voucher's here."

Kenny sulked. Finding that Garry still had a tendency to finger disconcerting checks and jot figures on a pad, he reached for his hat and went out.

"I'm going to do some illustrating for Graham," he telephoned a little later, "if I do it quick. I'm with him now. I presume it's etiquette to do something financial when you're overdrawn. Brian always watched the bank to see that they put nothing over on me."

He disappeared from human ken for several days. Garry, sniffing the odor of coffee and cigarettes in the corridor outside his door, pictured his horrible concentration.

"It's that hazy autumn sort of weather that gets me," he telephoned nervously one morning. "I don't want to work and I've got to finish this stuff for Graham to-day. He'll pay at once if I do. Garry, I'm going to lock the studio door and throw the key over the transom to you. Don't let me out, no matter what I say."

Obediently Garry at four ignored a violent thump upon the wall. Then the telephone rang and Kenny said with some annoyance that the work was done.

When on the following day he found that Mr. Adams had returned and wanted, purposefully perhaps, to come to tea, he lost his temper and began at once to hunt cups, demanding of Garry why on earth Fate hadn't smiled upon him before he wasted his vigor and inspiration in endless hours of torture, doing pot-boilers.

"If he's coming to tea with a red-blooded check like that," said Garry, "I'll lend you some decent cups. Those bouillon cups are the limit."

"Oh, hell!" said Kenny moodily. "I've talked with him. I've even answered his questions with politeness. A man who wants to know if you must have a north light to paint by will think it a rule of the guild to double-handle teacups."

CHAPTER XVII

KENNY DISAPPEARS

That night Whitaker brought him news of Brian. He was healthy and happy and wrote no word of coming in. There, Whitaker felt himself, Brian was over-reticent.

"And the postmark?" Kenny staring in disgust at a hole in his sock transferred his glance to Whitaker.

"That," said Whitaker, "I'm not at liberty to give. I've told you so before."

Kenny drew himself up to his full height.

"John—" he thundered.

The door opened and Mac Brett, the young sculptor on the floor above who harbored H. B., came in, somewhat mystified at the warmth of Whitaker's greeting.

"Come on down to the grill to dinner," he suggested. "Garry's down there and Jan. It's drizzling and a lot of men are staying in."

Kenny, moodily painting the skin beneath the hole in his sock black, flung down the brush and found his coat.

"Once," said Mac in a panic of laughter, "he painted hairs on the bald parts of Frieda Fuller's pony-skin coat. Thick, plutocraticky sort of hairs. I shan't forget 'em. And they melted and smudged her neck. Remember, Kenny? You ridged 'em beautifully—"

Kenny did not answer. He strode toward the door. Mac and Whitaker exchanged comprehending glances of dismay and followed him down to the grill.

It was a pleasant refuge from the autumn storm—that grill. The dark old wood framed light and color, sketches and a line of paintings. Mac's sculptured ragamuffin looked wistfully down from his niche near the open rafters upon a Round Table institutionally fraternal. He seemed always seeking warmth and food. Kenny's old peasant in wrinkled apple-faced cheer smiled broadly from the wall, listening to the click of billiard balls with his painted eyes upon the doorway.

The hum and clatter at the Round Table stopped as Kenny entered. It was followed by an immediate scraping of chairs, pushed back, and a hearty chorus of greeting but Kenny knew, intuitively, that the talk had been of him.

He ate but little and went back to the studio to play dummy bridge with Mac and Whitaker. A loud thump on the studio door and a Morse dot and dash announcement of identity on the bell just as he had pieced a pack of cards together, filled him with intense resentment.

"Max Kreiling!" he said with a sniff. And a little later: "Caesare!" He thought perhaps, feeling as he did in a mood for murder, he wouldn't let them in, abuse the door panel and the bell as they would. Whitaker did it for him.

"They'll come in and play music on my piano," he insisted sulkily, "and sing notes into my air and I repeat I'm in no mood for music."

But Kreiling, big, blond and Teutonic, was already striding in with Caesare at his heels. They filled the air with joyous greetings, thumped upon the intervening wall for Garry and unloaded their pockets and an institutional leather bag.

"Cheese," rumbled Kreiling, "jam, coffee and mince pies."

Caesare unsheathed his fiddle and played a preposterous rag-time interpretation of the Valkyrie's battle-cry. It evoked an instant response from the telephone.

"It's Mac," said Whitaker. "He says he'll be down in a jiffy and bring Jan with him."

"Tell him," grumbled Kenny, "to bring beer instead. No fault of mine, Max," he added, "if Jan comes down here and eats your cheese. He's a cheese lunatic. Blame Tony. He comes into my studio, does a Pied Piper stunt on his fiddle and the whole building appears."

To Whitaker's amusement nobody heeded Kenny's petulance. Caesare was already building a wood-fire in the fireplace, complaining of the chill. Max Kreiling was furiously hunting missing sheets from a ragged stack of music on the piano and grumbling in German about his host's habits. The fire flared. Caesare's dark face, always tense, relaxed into smiles. When Garry appeared the wood-fire was blazing and Caesare was plucking in nervous pizzicato at the strings of his fiddle. Later Mac arrived with beer, a loaf of rye bread and Jan, who gravitated at once by permanent instinct to the cheese.

Kenny morosely hunted cigarettes and reflected with raised eyebrows that the studio was never entirely his, not even when he wanted vehemently to quarrel with Whitaker. And last came Sidney Fahr, round and merry, who looked casually in, nibbled at a gumdrop and professed amazement to find so many there. Kenny unreasonably chose to take affront at his chronic amazement and withdrew to a corner in a state of gloom and disgust, whence Kreiling, sensitively alive to atmospheric dissonances, routed him forth with the heated accusation that he was not *gemütlich*.

Whitaker looked on through a film of smoke. Ordinarily he knew it was the sort of evening that fired Kenny to his maddest mood of fun and sparkle. It was the romance of his Bohemia, the thing upon which he fed his sense of the picturesque, ignoring the lesser things that bothered Brian. Men loved him. In the glow of their camaraderie he was always at his best, excited, joyous, irresponsibly gay and hearty. But to-night the fun and sparkle passed him by. Garry was right. He was surely not himself. Could it be—just Brian?

"'Pagliacci!'" demanded someone.

Kreiling laughed indulgently and beckoned Jan to the piano. His big voice, powerful and tender, swept into the hush like a splendid bird.

Kenny snapped off the lights, plunged into tragic sadness by the passion of his voice. Somehow its poignant sweetness hurt. The droplight over the music and the flare of the fire leaped out of the darkness like medallions. Faintly from a corner came the whisper of Caesare's violin, offering obligato.

Then he closed his eyes to block but the sight of rain splashing on the window. Enchanted rain surely! For it transformed the single pane into many, like a checkerboard of glass, and through it he was staring queerly into the farm.

Kreiling mopped his forehead at the end and switched on the lights. The silence he understood

and liked but his keen eyes lingered in surprise on Kenny's face. His color was gone, his eyes curiously tired and wistful.

"So!" said Kreiling gently and passed on to the cheese with deliberate tact, pushing Jan away. A minute later his hand came down with heartiness on Kenny's shoulder.

"Spitzbube!" he rumbled affectionately.

Kenny laughed but Whitaker saw that his cigarette was shaking.

"Music," he reflected, feeling sympathetic, "always makes him wild and sentimental. And Max sang like an archangel."

"Now, Kenny," commanded Kreiling, nibbling cheese and rye bread, "play."

Kenny sullenly obeyed. After the first effort, something rebellious touched his sullen mood to fire and he played fragments of the Second Rhapsodic with madness in his touch.

Sid, aware of it, stared in round-eyed apprehension at his back.

"He's just in the mood again for rocketing," he decided.

From then on Kenny's reckless gayety kept them in an uproar.

When someone clamored for a wood-fire tale he told them of Finn's love for Deirdre. But the discussion it provoked bored him and he dropped back, smoking, in his chair,

"There is love and love," said Max Kreiling, "and to be in love is torture and a thing of self, but when the big splendid tenderness comes after the storm of self and craving, the tenderness that knows more of giving than of demanding, it comes to stay. But it's not the love of barbarity like Finn's. It's an evolution."

"Ask Kenny," said Mac mischievously. "He's an expert."

"Love, my son," said Kenny wearily, "is poetic like summer lightning. It flashes, blinds in a glory of light—and then disappears—in time."

He tired early and sent them home. Whitaker longed to linger but the moody cordiality of Kenny's good night was only too significant. He departed with regret.

"Garry!" called Kenny at the door.

Garry turned back.

"I meant you to wait," said Kenny irritably, "but you got out before I could tell you." He closed the door. "Garry, what were the men in the grill saying to-night when I came in?"

Caught unawares Garry flushed and stammered.

"Why," he evaded uncomfortably, "it began about the peasant picture in the grillroom. Everybody likes it."

"And then?"

"We talked some of the last thing you did—the winter landscape of snow and pines."

Garry looked away.

"Out with it!" said Kenny suspiciously. "For God's sake grant me the privilege at least of lumping it all in one supreme period of upheaval. They didn't like the pine picture?"

"On the contrary," Garry hastened to assure him, "Hazleton said you are brilliantly skillful."

"Brilliantly skillful! But?" prompted Kenny and looked a question. "Brilliant skill," he added moodily, "doesn't always make a big painter."

"Hazleton said as much," admitted Garry.

"I suppose it's best to tell you, Kenny," he added honestly, hoping to spur the culprit on to more and better work. "It may help. They said downstairs that you interpret everything, even trees and snow, in terms of unreality. You over-idealize. I suppose it's your eternal need of illusion. We've spoken of that before."

"I'm not a photographer!" blazed Kenny. "Any camera will give you realistic detail. Artistic too. What else? Go on, Garry. I'm calloused to the hearing of anything. I merely thank God you've had no newspaper training."

"Most of the older painters," Garry said with reluctance, "seem to feel that—well, there's too colorful a dominance of self in your work. Your personality always overshadows. You've an

extraordinary fluency with color, a deft assurance, a brilliancy that leaves one rather breathless and incredulous, but what you do is autocratically, unforgettably—almost unforgivably—you!"

"Art," explained Kenny loftily, "is reality plus personality. And personalities are variously vivid and anaemic. Unreal, over-idealized, too colorful a dominance of self and personality overshadows," he summarized after an interval of silence. "And in the face of that—success. I am successful?"

"Undeniably."

"Even Hazleton, with his sordid gangs of Eastsiders nudging each other on a dirty bench, can't deny it," bristled Kenny.

He had divided the honors of more than one exhibition with Hazleton and admired and resented him impartially.

"It has been said," said Garry, ruffled by his air of triumph, "that you paint down subtly to the popular fancy where you might paint up to your own ideals."

The barb went home. Kenny flushed.

"Your work," added Garry, "lacks the force and depth of sincerity. Even in Brian's dreadful East River sunset over there, there's a quality you lack, an eagerness for reality and truth and life as it is. Brian has painted poorly what he saw but he painted boats for ragged sailors. Real boats. You've painted brilliantly, in the pine picture for instance, what you wanted to see, a dark forest for mystic folk to dance in when the moonlight lies upon the snow."

"And what," inquired Kenny with a shade of sarcasm, "was the final verdict of the grill jury when all the evidence was in?"

"Remember old Dirk, Kenny? He said that the fullness of life came through—sacrifice. That all things, good and permanent and true, come only out of suffering; that men pay for their dreams with pain." He let the full import of that drive home. "The verdict was, that if you'd forget your public and look for truth, paint with restraint and less brilliant illusory abandon, you'd be a big painter."

"And that," said Kenny with icy politeness, "unalterably defines my status as a painter. In this club at least."

"You asked me—"

Kenny looked tired but he held out his hand. "Dear lad," he said, "'twas fine brave friendship to tell me—when I asked you."

Failure! He, Kennicott O'Neill who had been decorated by the French government! The men in the grill then talked openly of his flaws and the verdict, officious or otherwise, was failure. Flaws! He was not a big painter. He was merely a self-centered, impecunious, improvident Irishman, indifferently skillful, whose vanity and self-indulgence had driven his son off into a vague green world, God alone knew where. He *was* a big painter! Posterity would fling that back in the teeth of men!

"Kenny!"

It was Garry's voice.

"I'm going."

"Oh," said Kenny vaguely. "Yes, of course."

He was grateful when the door closed, though he stood for full a minute afterward tapping on the table with his fingers. Then indignantly he looked up the word failure in Brian's dictionary and underscored it heavily.

Ah! this world of his was amazingly awry and he himself was hurt and unhappy. After all, was there any romance, any camaraderie in the Bohemia he once had loved. By Heaven, no! One had but to stare at the studio with Brian's vision to see the thing aright. Disorder and carping tongues and loneliness! God help him, how he longed to escape somewhere, anywhere where there was peace—and faith and friendliness in human eyes.

Afterward, a painter on the floor below, swore that Kenny had tramped the floor all night and there had been occasional thuds. At daylight he had gone out hurriedly and banged the door.

Sid, entering the studio by the door Kenny had forgotten to lock, found abundant evidence of frenzied packing and carried the news to the grill.

"I knew it," he said. "I knew it last night. By the Lord Harry, it was in his eye. Where on earth d'you suppose he's gone?"

"God knows," said Garry and heartily wished he'd kept the grillroom verdict to himself.

At sunset Kenny blew the horn beneath the willow.

Twilight here among the vivid leaves was softly orange. Where was the invisible lamp, Kenny wondered with his blood singing, that filled the world with golden dusk? It lay reflected in the water and in the dim and yellowed forest paths behind him. And there behind the gables of the farm, an autumn sunset focussed its softness into a brilliant blaze of color.

Later when life was kind and peace was in his heart, Kenny was to paint that picture with exquisite truth and restraint and call it "Afterglow."

At the flutter of a cloak on the cliff-path he slipped behind the willow.

For an eternity it seemed he traced the forward sweep of the punt until it grated on the shore. And the surprise perversely came to him.

"Kenny!" called Joan.

There was mischief and laughter in her voice—and welcome. And Kenny, oblivious of the detail of his going, knew only that he stood beside her in the golden dusk and that her eyes were curiously like shining, leaf-brown stars.

"Ah!" he reproached, catching both her hands. "You are a witch. You're burning an invisible lamp of incense off somewhere in that yellow wood and out of it comes the twilight and the secrets of the world. How did you know?"

"The horn was so excited!"

"The horn!"

Joan nodded.

"I know them all," she said. "Mr. Abbott blows an apology for disturbing me. Mrs. Lawler is stout and when she's delivering butter and eggs, her wind doesn't last and she gets no further than a toot, and the blacksmith's wind is amazing—"

"Enough!" said Kenny sternly. "You've too much wisdom. But—"

"Of course," said Joan, "I didn't know you would ride to the village yonder but I thought you might. Uncle said you wouldn't come."

Kenny laughed. Joan never knew that he had not meant to come again.

He found home in the farm kitchen and joyously pumping homely hands, stepped at once on the tail of Hannah's cat. Toby, after a vocal minute of terror, fixed a hard eye upon his heel and withdrew at once to a sheltered spot behind the stove. He had learned before that Mr. O'Neill with his head in the clouds was frequently unaware of feet things.

Kenny went of his own accord to Adam's sitting room.

Almost he surprised a glint of welcome in the old man's piercing eye.

"Well, Adam," he said happily, "I'm back!"

"Humph!" said Adam ungraciously. "I knew you would be."

By the end of the week Kenny forgot that he had been away.

CHAPTER XVIII

BRIAN SOLVES A PROBLEM

To Brian had come a problem of his own. His vagabond days were nearly over. Now with the wind cool at twilight and the dawns sharp, the two wayfarers, lean and brown as gypsies, were tramping back over the trail of the summer, finding old fires and the delight of reminiscence.

"Don," said Brian one twilight as they swung along in the dust of a country road, "if I'm not mistaken back yonder is the field where you barked for a summer show. Man alive," he added with a laugh, "how you did bark! Now with a summerful of health in your system and your voice full of fresh air, I could understand it, but then! Honestly, old top, I didn't know it was in you!"

The boy looked up and laughed.

"It wasn't," he said with utter truth. "You told me I could do it and I—I just did."

"I knew you could do it!" said Brian with the vigor of confidence that had made the boy his slave. "Still, when you unleashed that first roar and the crowd began to collect, I confess I thought you'd busted something vital and were yelling for help."

Don glanced at this clothes. The summer show had freed him from the mended rags he hated. Shirt and trousers, hat and shoes were as near like Brian's as they could be. So was the coat upon his arm and the knapsack on his back.

"Whenever you tell me I can do a thing," he said, "and hang around to see me do it, I can always somehow seem to make myself do it. Look!" he broke off with a boyish grin, pointing at a farmhouse on a distant hill. "There's the farm where you threw the can of whitewash at the farmer when he swore at his wife for dropping the eggs and threatened to lick her. Wasn't he a sight!"

"He was!" admitted Brian. "And wasn't he mad? If he hadn't been a coward he would have licked me instead. As it was, I never fully understood why his wife shied an egg at me. However, that's all rather a shady part of my past. I'm not reminding you of the self-winding blunderbuss you got in part payment for chopping wood, am I? Or that it went off by itself and shot a cabbage?"

Laughing they struck off into a twilight stretch of woods, found a familiar clearing near a spring and made a fire.

"Well," said Brian when the fire was down to embers, "what's the schedule? You're road manager this week. What do we eat?"

"Sausages," said Donald, unloading his pockets. "A can of macaroni and an apple pie."

"You disgraceful kid!" exclaimed Brian. "Whenever you get into a country store without a guard you kick over the traces and appear with something in your pocket that busts a road rule and obligates me to a sermon when I hate 'em. Pie, my son, is effete and civilized. It's like feeding cream puffs to a wandering Arab. You're apt to make him stop his Arabing and hang around the spot where the cream puff grows. However, now that you've brought the thing into camp, it would be improvident not to eat it. What am I, Don, wood-scout or cook?"

"Cook," said Donald. "All day," he added, "you've been limping."

Brian made a fence of forked twigs, hung the sausages up to toast, opened the can of macaroni and set it in the embers. That Don had noticed the limp gratified him immensely, even though it had been a mere and prosaic matter of a blistered heel.

Whistling softly, he watched the boy gather wood. Well, thank God! he was as unlike that white-faced moody lad who had stumbled into his Tavern of Stars as a boy could be. He whistled a good deal. He was as slim as a sapling, the slimness of muscle and health. His eyes were clear and boyish. And there was color in his face. Best of all, to Brian's mind, after the first sullen period of readjustment he had worked his own salvation and reverted by wholesome instinct to boyhood with its inexhaustible animal vigor, its gaucheries and its boisterous minutes of frolic heretofore denied. Now save for the hours by the camp fire when he passionately blurted out again and again the tale of his rebellion until Brian knew his life as he knew the weather-lore of the open road, he seemed ever on the verge of laughter.

Brian smiled. Attuned to the mood he summed up the achievement of his own summer. The brawn of splendid health and a clear head! For the one he could thank his gypsying; for the other, in a measure, he could thank the boy.

In the lonely hours before he came with his problems there had been solitude less soothing than Brian had expected. There has been an inclination to smoke and brood and nurse certain sentimental misgivings about Kenny when the fire was low and the owls hooting in the forest. After, mercifully—for they might have driven him back to sunsets—there had been no time. The life of another had made its demand and sympathy with Brian was never passive. Impossible somehow not to romp with the young savage yonder rejoicing in his freedom, with even work a lark! Impossible not to laugh with him, fight out his battles with him and surrender with a sigh of content to the weariness and hunger of a caveman!

If now with autumn at hand the fortunes of the road had in them a grain more of hardship and less of romance, it was to be expected. Brian had tramped to his goal. The staleness was gone. It was time to be up and off, seeking Whitaker.

A sausage burst its casing with an appetizing sizzle and leaped, it seemed of its own accord, into suicidal embers. Brian rescued it with a stick and looked up. Don had come back with the wood.

"It's fall," said Brian. "The wind's full of it to-night. Last night I was cold."

"So was I," said Don. Brian thought he looked a little out-of-sorts.

"It narrows down to two things," said Brian, fishing in his pocket for some forks and spoons. "Either we must acquire another blanket or two or get a job and sleep under cover until—"

The boy's imploring eyes upset him. Brian turned a charred sausage and sighed. There was his

problem, he knew: Don and his future. And they were barely twenty miles away from his uncle's farm.

"Remember the mountain quarry somewhere over there to the west?" he asked. "Suppose we hike over there in the morning and see if they need some brawny arms to help 'em crush stone. Seems to me there were a lot of shacks up back of it on the mountain. We could live in one of them."

"Yes."

"What's the matter?"

"Oh," said Don with an effort, "I'm a little blue. I suppose it's the fall."

They tramped west in the morning and climbed a winding road. The quarry lay ahead in the rocky wall of a mountain.

"Lord, what an out-of-the world spot!" exclaimed Brian in dismay. "Don, you thought we were getting too close to your uncle's farm but nobody'd find us here. I suspect they have to build shacks to keep the men contented. That basin of stone looks as if it had been gouged out of the mountainside by the hand of a giant."

A drill-runner was shouting to a man with a red flag as Brian climbed into the pit. The flagman waved him back. A second later a dull blast shook the quarry, earth and stone crumbled out of a fissure in the cliff ahead, and the suspended labor of men awaiting the Titan aid of inanimate force, turned to noise and bustle.

"Hum!" said Brian, glinting, "mostly dago labor. Well, that doesn't need to worry us, does it? You stay here, Don, while I find the boss."

Don obeyed. Derricks hung above the cars upon the spur track. Farther back a screen revolved and sorted stone. Men were feeding the crusher and men were busy at the drills but the boy's eyes, with an instinct for adventure, followed a man who drove a mule-cart along an overhanging ledge above the pit. The task held for him a fearful fascination.

"Needs men to load cars," announced Brian coming back, "and feed the crusher. In quarry caste I imagine that's about at the bottom. The shacks are furnished and four of them are empty. We can take our pick. What do you say?"

"Whatever you say," said Don.

"Well," said Brian, "to tell you the truth, I have the keys."

The quarry, he fancied as he climbed the path to the cluster of shacks, would solve his problem for him and when the time was ripe he would have his say.

The time ripened with frost in the morning and a harvest moon at night; and Brian had failed to have his say. A letter came from John Whitaker definite in detail and a shade impatient. Why was he loitering when God's green world of spring had turned to autumn? Was he still stale and thinking wrong?

Brian set his lips to his task and spoke.

"Don," he said one night when the dishes were washed, the shack swept and the lamp lighted, "I've been thinking a lot about you and what you're going to do this winter."

The boy, who had been sparring with a kitten that had strayed into the shack the day before, rose abruptly.

"You say you won't write to your sister until you've made good?"

"It isn't just that," stammered Donald, changing color. "I—I don't dare. She'd beg me to come back —"

Brian nodded.

"Yes," he said. "I know the feeling."

"And I won't go back!" flung out Donald passionately. "I won't go back. I simply can't."

"It's better," said Brian sensibly, "if you don't. For a number of reasons. But you must do something. I mean something with the future in view."

"Yes."

"As far as I can make out," went on Brian, puffing at his pipe, "you're wildly unhappy and discontented at the farm and that worries your sister. Of course your absence worries her too but the two letters we wrote that night you tumbled into my camp fire must have made her feel a lot better, particularly since we both expressed our intention of making the best of ourselves. You say she won't leave your uncle because he's an invalid. That leaves you without any string to your bow but your own inclination. In a sense you've followed that too long. I mean, Don, shirking the course of study the old

minister mapped out for you when your sister kept on plugging. You need it."

"Nothing mattered," said the boy bitterly. "I knew I wouldn't stay. I didn't dare. Once," he added in a low voice, "when Uncle cursed my sister and threw a bottle of brandy at her, I made up my mind to kill him."

"Good Lord!" said Brian, shocked.

"That's one of the reasons I don't dare go back. I'm afraid. You can't guess what it is," he choked. "He taunts and jeers and curses in a breath and he gets drunk every night. I wish to God he would die!"

The wish was horrible in its sincerity. Brian ignored it.

"If you were older," said Brian, "and your chief need wasn't school, I'd take you abroad with me, free lancing. But in the circumstances, with your welfare somewhere else, that's impossible."

Donald hung his head.

"I—I wish it wasn't," he blurted. "I want to go wherever you go."

"That first night when I asked you to tramp along with me," said Brian gently, "I said, in my letter to your sister, that I'd see you through. That I'm going to do. But you've got to help me. I want you, after I'm gone, to stay up here at the quarry, study nights, and next year work your way through college."

The boy stared, blank terror in his eyes.

"A year's work will put you on your feet—your kind of work when the mood is on you—and you can enter in the fall. I know a chap who's working his way through Yale. He'd show you the ropes."

"Here!" said Donald. "Alone!"

"Here," said Brian quietly, "alone. I know you can do it."

Don brushed his hair back heavily from his forehead. It was but little browner than his face. The gesture reminded Brian irresistibly of Kenny, Kenny in rebellion.

"It isn't the college part," Don said hopelessly. "There I think I'd get through. And I'd like to be an engineer. It's the year here. An entrance examination would be stiff, wouldn't it, Brian?"

"Yes."

"I know chunks of a lot of things I don't need, almost nothing of things I ought to know a lot about. When I liked a thing, I studied. And when I didn't I let it slide. It worried my sister. And I work by fits and starts when there's nobody around to keep me at it. Up here alone, working all day and studying half the night, I'd never swing it. It would mean the hardest kind of work."

"Once," said Brian, "I saw you chop wood for thirteen hours."

"You were there."

"And down there in the quarry Grogan says you can load more stone to the hour than two wops."

"You're there feeding the crusher. And you work as hard as I do."

Brian rose. His pipe was out. He knew as he knocked the ashes into a saucer and filled again from a bowl of tobacco upon the mantel, that Donald's eyes were upon him, abject with misery and remorse. But neither spoke.

Irritable and upset, Brian went out upon the porch.

The straggling cluster of shacks around the rude store were dark. Grogan's weary men found bed early. The moonlight was calm and cold and weirdly bright. A wind mournful with the rustle of dead leaves came sharply from the trees behind the shack where by day the autumn sun touched russet into gold and scarlet. A bleak spot up here! The solitude of stone and struggle. Could he expect Don to linger here and fight his battle? Brian, with the weight of his years heavy on his shoulders, said honestly no. And the problem still was with him.

He went down the steps and walked aimlessly along the ridge above the quarry. The bright emptiness below was grotesque with shadow, shadows of ghost-like derricks, screens and drills. On the spur track lay a car half full of stone. Standing there with the trainload of Donald's labor at his feet, it came sharply to Brian that the boy stood again at the parting of the ways. And the year would tell.

To the right from the dank water of a quarry pool abandoned long since to catfish and willows, a milk-white mist was rising eerily into the moonlight. Brian saw it but he saw it indistinctly. He was thinking of the boy's sister, her sweet face tragic with imploring. It lay in the mist and yet not in the mist, and it was binding him to obligation. He had written a promise. That promise he must keep. The

face his memory etched upon the mist made its appeal to every finer instinct of his courage.

Brian did not face his problem with excitement. He faced it with ruthless concentration. All summer he had been groping through fog and disillusion to the meaning of service, service to his fellowmen, and he had groped through to something vague and lofty. Service lay across the water where men raved in the red fever of destruction, service and inclination. Could not one be mercifully the religion of the other? Must service spring from the bitter dregs of self-denial? Brian stared wretchedly into the dank white mist curling in the moonlight like a fallen cloud. And again with his conscience up in arms he remembered the face of Donald's sister. In a sense he could thank the boy for the peace of his summer. And he had written his promise. He was like Kenny, that boy, inflammable of purpose, erratic in his vigor, and likable. And he needed a friend, inflexible and kindly.

"Always," said Brian, "I am slated to be somebody's keeper."

Could he shirk? Had he shirked when he left the studio in anger? Had he a right to live his life his own way? Had anybody? His common sense endorsed his earlier rebellion. This was different.

"Whenever you tell me I can do a thing and hang around to see me do it, I can seem to make myself do it somehow!"

The words echoed harshly in his ears; and at first Brian refused to hear them. Then inexorably he faced his fact. He and he alone was the spur to the boy's amazing energy. A year? Well, after all what was a year?

He went back through the autumn moonlight with a sigh.

"Don," he said, "you're right. You couldn't swing it up here alone. I'll stick and see you through it."

Don looked up, his face scarlet with emotion. Brian's hand was on his shoulder. And Brian's eyes were half humorous, half quizzical and wholly tender.

"No, no, Brian, no!" he choked. "I—I didn't mean that—"

"Of course you didn't," said Brian. "I thought that much of it out for myself."

Don's head went down upon his hands with a sob.

That night Brian wrote to Whitaker.

CHAPTER XIX

SAMHAIN

To Kenny in poetic mood the seasons were druidic. There was May Eve with its Bel fires when summer peeped over the hilltops at the cattle driven through the sacred flames to protect them from disease. There was Midsummer's Eve with more fires, and if St. Patrick in unpagan zeal had chosen to kindle his fires in honor of St. John, he could. To Kenny the festival was still druidic. There was Samhain or summer ending, when the November wind speeded the waning season with a flurry of dead leaves; and to Kenny, Samhain came and drove him forth in the chill dusk to face another problem.

He had come to the farm in blossom time and he had stared ahead to sanity—in September at the latest. Now with branches dark and bare against the glorious sunsets that burned at night in the west long after the valley was in shadow, even with talk in Hannah's kitchen of early snow, his madness was if anything a trifle more acute. Even the dreaded hours with Adam ceased to trouble him in the joy of his days. There was peace here and, thanks to Mr. Adams, who had simplified his relations with the bank, freedom from work and worry.

The November twilight, scintillant with stars, lay darkly ahead. He forged through it in excitement. He who could forecast with the wisdom of experience the duration of his own enslavement had gone over his time. And, powers of wild-fire, he still kept going! Something emotionally was wrong.

It pleased him in a moody moment to busy himself with mathematics, much as he hated them, and deduce a singular fact. He had spent delicious hours of many a day with many a maid. But days and days and days with one? Not ever!

For one hour he had spent with some forgotten object of his adoration in the past, he had spent five with Joan. The thought alarmed him. It came to this. If by rational reduction you translated each flare into hours, the vertigo of his summer with Joan became at once in contrast equivalent to years. And by every law his infatuation should have stopped the sooner. How much longer would it linger?

What if Christmas still found him turbulent and upset—and hating the thought of the studio? This furlough of his from work and worry must come to an end in time!

Paralyzed by an infinite variety of prospects he stopped dead and stared at the fading red behind the hills. When had it altered—this madness of his? Why was it stronger? Any man addicted to falling in love knew well enough it shouldn't be.

It was his fate to remember as he stood there the talk of love around the wood-fire. He had barely listened. Yet now his memory cast up Kreiling's words and took his breath away.

"There is love and love and to be in love is torture and a thing of self but when the big splendid tenderness comes after the storm of self and craving, the tenderness that knows more of giving than of demanding, it comes to stay. But it's not the love of barbarity like Finn's. It's an evolution."

To stay! … The thought was volcanic. … *To stay*!

And yet … how different that first dizzy sweep of delight at the sight of Joan's loveliness, from this big, nameless something that filled his heart with humility and longing! … How far away that day beneath the willow when he had blown the horn! … An eternity lay between.

This love of his—no, it was no longer merely a storm of unrest. It was no longer merely a delirium of the senses in which he knew suffering no less than ecstasy. It was a big, kind, selfless tenderness that grew from day to day. A thing perhaps for eternity!

Kreiling was right.

Kenny's irreverent philosophy of the heart crumbled into ashes at his feet. Love he had once believed was poetic like summer lightning. It flashed, blinded in a glory of light and disappeared. If it lingered it would lose its mystery, It was a quest in which the emotion was paramount; the object that inspired it merely essential and subordinate. Love was the only thing in the world worth while but though a poet's love might fill his life with a perpetuity of delight the object was bound to be a variant. Kenny had often mourned for departed madness. He had never mourned the girl whom Chance had appointed to inspire it. Why mourn a flower that has bloomed and faded when the bush is full?

And marriage? That uncomfortable essential, legalists said, to civilization and the transmission of property? To Kenny marriage had always seemed a little like the Land of the Ever-Young. Mortals imprisoned there soon tired of exile and longed for freedom and distraction. His own marriage was but a memory he refused to face, dim and distant, an inexplicable flurry of sentimentality that had ended tragically with Brian in his arms. The brief year of it had been poignant and at the end he had gone forth upon the hills, praying for death. That girl of long ago with the black-lashed eyes of Irish blue like Brian's, he had loved with all the passionate tumult of boyhood; and in the end he had lived for Brian, coming to believe as life carelessly unfolded for him its book of heart-things that in time he must have tired. Lived for Brian! Had he? Or had he lived for himself?

The memory he had crushed out of his heart in a panic long ago, now left him with a terrified sense of obligation. Why in this dreadful moment of crisis when he had to think must even his memories accuse him? Brian! Brian! Always Brian!

The pang was spasmodic. The immensity of his love for Joan swept everything before it and filled him with terror and amazement. To stay! Any other thought was a profanation. And he must face another problem. If Joan's madness was the kind that waned, if for her there was no madness, if the summer had left her tranquil and indifferent. … The uncertainty maddened him.

He struck a match and glanced at his watch. It was supper time. In an hour now Joan likely would be coming to the cabin. So, alas! would Mr. Abbott. Kenny struck off hurriedly toward the south.

The cabin was dark and silent. He waited near it, endlessly it seemed, smoking and wondering if his heart would ever stop its nervous thumping. If only she would come! His head had begun to ache. His hand was shaking. Where the blood pounded in his wrists there was a flurried sense of pain. And somehow the heavy odor of the pines and the chill silence was depressing.

It was his fate to see Mr. Abbott come first. Unaware of the Irishman who drew back at his approach, his hot heart sick with disappointment, he opened the door of the cabin and went in, the inevitable book under his arm. A second later the cabin window with its shade drawn, sprang out of the shadow, a yellow checkerpane of light. Kenny stalked off, chafing intolerantly at the anticlimacteric tenor of his summer.

He saw her coming a long way off, her lantern bobbing along like a firefly, and walked faster. Impatience brought a cold sweat out upon his forehead and then he needs must call her name before she could hear.

"Joan!" he called a little later. The tenderness in his heart hurt.

The light faltered and became a fixed point in the darkness ahead.

"It is I, Kenny!" he called again.

Once more the firefly glimmer glided toward him.

"Kenny," called Joan in the darkness, "is it really you? You frightened me a little. And why in the world didn't you come home to supper? Hannah's wondering where you are."

But his voice failed him and with shaking hand he took the lantern and held it high above her head. If he could but read her eyes!

Joan glanced up at him in wonder and the hood of her cloak tumbling back upon her shoulders, bared her hair. It shone, in the lantern light, with an odd dark gold. She had never seemed so lovely—or so much a part of the lonely wood.

"Why do you stare so, Kenny?" she asked. "And why are you so—quiet?"

"Mavourneen!" said Kenny. And his eyes implored.

It was not at all what he had meant to say. The word, tell-tale in its tenderness, had seemed to speak itself.

Joan's face flamed. But her eyes were beautiful and kind.

Kenny dropped the lantern with a crash and caught her in his arms. She cried and clung to him in the darkness.

"Joan! Joan!" he said and kissed her.

He did not remember how long he stood there under the bright November stars with Joan in his arms and his face upon her hair. He knew his eyes were wet. He knew there was peace in his heart and a vast content. But something made him dumb and tongue-tied.

"Kenny!" exclaimed Joan. "The lantern!"

"I know, colleen," said Kenny, "but one lantern more or less in an epoch doesn't matter."

"Mr. Abbott will be waiting. Suppose he came to look for me."

"God forbid! I can't—I won't let you go."

"You must!"

"Joan, you are sure, *sure* you love me?"

"I know," said Joan steadily, "that I love you. I've known it since that night upon the lake when you first spoke of—going. I knew it when you went. And then when you came again. When I think of the farm without you it turns my heart to stone. Every minute that I—I am away from you, I am eager to be back."

"Bless your heart!"

She slipped out of his arms with a sigh. His hands clung to her.

"Truly, truly, Kenny, I must go!"

"I'll come back with another lantern after supper."

"No," said Joan. "Please don't. Mr. Abbott might scold. Besides, every star is a lantern to-night. And Uncle sent Hughie for you long ago."

Kenny groaned.

CHAPTER XX

THE CHAIR BY THE FIRE

He went with her as far as he dared, and turned back with shining eyes and stumbling feet. He did not afterward remember his supper or what he had eaten, though Hannah at his command had set the table in the kitchen and Hughie had talked sensibly of pumpkins. He did not remember climbing the stairs to Adam's room. The one thing that jarred through his dreamy feeling of detachment was the old man's face.

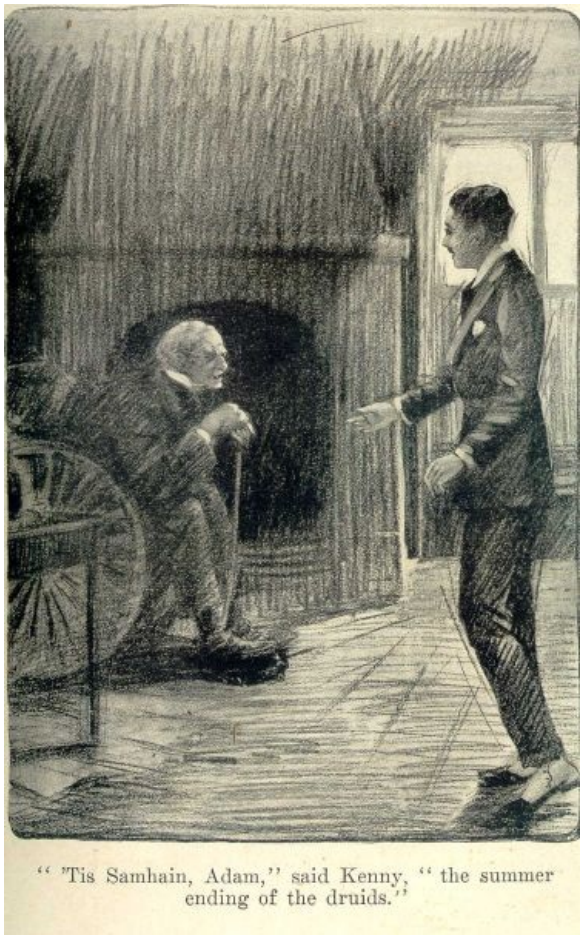
"You're late!" he said.

"Yes," said Kenny happily, "I am." Even now with Adam's piercing eyes upon him, he had a feeling of invincibility; as if, aloof in the aerial sphere in which he seemed to float, he could shut the old man

out.

Adam stared at him with eagle-like intentness and a puzzled frown. His face said plainly that Kenny's mood was without precedent and therefore strategical. It behooved him to get to the bottom of it at once and be on his guard.

"'Tis Samhain, Adam," said Kenny, "the summer ending of the druids. And to-night the hills are open and the fairies are all out a-temptin' mortals. I myself have heard the fairy pipes showerin' sweetness everywhere. Wonderful music, Adam! Silver-soft and allurin' and the kind you can't forget! It throws you into a trance and fills you with beautiful longing. I forgot to come home. There! I must tell Hannah to put a light under the churn to-night. Then the fairies, hating fire, can't bewitch it."



" 'Tis Samhain, Adam," said Kenny, " the summer ending of the druids."

[Illustration: "'Tis Samhain, Adam," said Kenny, "the summer ending of the druids."]

Adam stared at him blankly. He was in mad mood, this Irishman. His eyes, ardently blue and tender and intense, danced with incautious gleams of laughter. His color was high. He was gay and utterly friendly.

An odd jealous hunger sprang up in the invalid's eyes.

"Are you mad?" he demanded.

"Quite!" said Kenny.

"More like," said the old man tartly, "you're drunk."

"Drunk," nodded Kenny, "with heather ale. Only the fairies know how to make it now. And who wouldn't be drunk in the head of him to-night with the Good People dancing on the hills and the dead dancing with them."

Adam frowned and shivered.

"You Irish," he said harshly, "are as morbid as you are poetic."

"'Tis all a part of the night," cried Kenny gayly and poured himself some brandy. "The druids," he remembered, "poured libations on the ground to propitiate the evil spirits and the spirits of the dead; but, Adam, I'm drinking to-night to Destiny! To Destiny," he added under his breath, "and the foreverness of her gift!"

"What gift," demanded Adam Craig, "are you trying to clinch with a gift to yourself of my brandy?"

"The gift," said Kenny cryptically, "of—Life!"

Well, he had spoken truth there. Life was love and love was life and perhaps until now he'd known neither.

Still the old man stared at him in dazed and sullen envy. His wild vitality seemed a barrier impossible to surmount.

"And it isn't just Samhain," said Kenny, setting down his glass. "Ugh, Adam, your brandy's abominable! It's the Eve of All Souls. To-night the dead revisit their homes. Once I remember when I was tramping through Ireland, an old woman left a chair by the fireside that the spirit of her son might come back to her. She even left some embers in the fire."

"That," said Adam Craig with a shudder, "will be enough of your damned ghosts and fairies."

Afterward to Kenny the evening was always a blur but he knew they had gotten on badly. And Adam, quiet and sullen, had drunk more than usual.

Kenny sparkled through the evening in a baffling, dreamlike oblivion to everything but his thoughts, and floated away to his room, feeling curiously light and iridescent.

He meant not to sleep. He meant to roll the shades to the top and with the cold wind upon his face and the stars winking in silver beneficence overhead, to lie awake and think until the dawn came. He slept soundly, dreaming of thistledown and a little old woman in a green cloak who came out of a hill and played a tune upon a sort of lantern-flute. The notes had winged off in bars of music written in fire against the darkness. He had not finished the dream when he was awakened by someone knocking at his door.

It was Hughie, his face pale and disturbed.

"Mr. O'Neill," he said, "I'm wondering if you'd drive down to the village and telephone the doctor to come here first. Mr. Craig's had a bad fall. He's unconscious."

"Unconscious!" exclaimed Kenny, changing color. "How on earth, Hughie, did he fall?"

"I don't know," said Hughie sadly. "He must have climbed out of bed in the night."

"But, Hughie, he couldn't!"

"He could stagger a step or two," explained Hughie. "Not far. The trouble's in his spine. But he never dragged himself so far before."

"How far?"

"From his bed to his sitting room. I found him in a heap by the fire."

"Poor devil!" said Kenny, shocked.

He dressed quickly. Hannah helped him hitch the old mare to the buggy and found him nervous and unfamiliar with his task. Kenny drove off down the lane, oppressed by the bleak wind and the bare black tangle of branches ahead of him. The tragic effort of Adam's wasted legs had left him startled and uneasy. For the life of him he could not put out of his mind the tale of the old Irish woman and the chair she had left by the fire on the Eve of All Souls for the visit of her dead son. It had bothered Adam Craig and made him shudder. It bothered Kenny now. He wished he hadn't remembered it last night or to-day. But the sound of Nellie's hoofs plodding along the soft dirt road was no more recurrent than his own foreboding. It filled him with sadness and guilt. Adam perhaps had dragged himself to the sitting room fire in a drunken fit of superstition. Seeking what? Someone he had *wronged*? The sinister spark inflamed his fancy. His brain whirled. Inexplicably the tale of the fairy mill and the rascal who stole the widow's bag of meal linked itself with the mishap of the night before. Then too Adam had fallen forward in his chair unconscious.

Nellie stumbled and jolted Kenny into sanity. He put his thoughts aside in horror. But dreadful strings of mystery converged persistently to one point: Adam Craig, the pitiful old miser who for some reason huddled every book in the farmhouse on his shelves. Fate cruelly had brought melancholy into this, the first morning of his love. Kenny shivered with resentment.

He telephoned the doctor's farm and found him ready to start his weary ambulant day; hamlet to hamlet, farm to farm, until dusk and often after. The bare thought of it filled Kenny with sympathetic gloom. Then his brain began again to burn in speculation. Frowning, he turned back homewards up the hill and through the wood, where the road lay, rough and lonely.

With his mind upon it he evolved Nellie from her harness and led her into the stall. When he had done with her halter he found that Joan had slipped into the barn and stood a little way off, her soft eyes intent upon him.

"Joan!" he exclaimed radiantly. The sight of her was like a lilac wind in fog. The fog fled and you found the world clear and fragrant.

She came to him instantly, her face like a colorless flower, a faint shadow in her eyes.

"Colleen!" said Kenny. He kissed her gently. Again he was conscious with a flurried feeling of impatience that the force of his tenderness would not rise to his lips. He whose words of love had been so fluent and poetic!

"Hannah sent me," said Joan. "She was afraid you wouldn't know how to get Nellie out of the shafts. Oh, Kenny!" There was quick compassion in her eyes.

"Let's not think of sorrowful things, dear!" said Kenny swiftly. "I dreamed of a lantern."

"And I," said Joan, the rich rose tints he loved flaming in her face, "I dreamed of you."

Kenny choked back the tender untruth he would have liked to utter. For an instant he hated the little old fairy in the green cloak who had come forth from the hill in his dream. How easy for the dream-god to have made her—Joan!

"Joan," he said wistfully, "you're sure you love me!"

"Yes," said Joan. "There is no one in my life I love so well."

"And it will last?"

Disturbed she glanced at him, her eyes dark with rebuke.

"Until the judgment day!" persisted Kenny.

"Kenny," she said, "why do you speak so strangely. Love is love, isn't it? And if you who have known all things love me, how much more must I who have lived so much alone, love and cling to you?"

He kissed her hair and pressed his cheek against it where the shadows were soft and golden.

"I want you, heart of mine," he said steadily, "to love me in this wonderful way that I love you. There are ways and ways of loving."

That, in her girlhood dream of love, she could not see. And Kenny was passionately glad that his words were a riddle.

Then the horn came, clear and mellow, through the cold November air and Joan drew the hood of her cloak about her head.

Kenny sighed. He clung to her hand as she started away.

"Girleen," he said soberly, "the wind's cold. Must you ferry the river in winter, too?"

"Save when there's ice," said Joan. "The bridge is three long miles away."

From the barn doorway he watched the flutter of her cloak as she hurried down the path to the river.

CHAPTER XXI

THE SHADOW OF DEATH

Kenny went back to the kitchen, hungry and depressed. To his fancy, as eager at times in its morbidity as in its lighter sparkle, the shadow of death seemed brooding over the farmhouse. This an hour later the weary little doctor confirmed. He had tired shadows around his eyes, that doctor; he seemed always bored to death at the proneness of mankind to ills and aches and babies; and his kind tired voice never lost its drawl no matter what the crisis.

"It isn't just the spine trouble, Mr. O'Neill," he said. "With that alone he'd likely linger on for years. And it isn't the trouble here in his chest. That's chronic and unimportant. It's the brandy. He drinks a quart a night and he won't give it up."

"I know."

The doctor shook his head and pursed his lips.

"I think he'll just slip away without regaining consciousness. Pulse is barely a flutter. Joan can tend him. She's done it before. Every now and then for a good many years he's had a bedfast spell. Poor child!" The doctor cleared his throat. "Well, Mr. O'Neill, such is life! I'll stop back to-night on my way home."

Distraught and rebellious, Kenny fought the girl's refusal to let Hannah take her place. She hid the mended gown he hated under an apron of Hannah's, slipped into his arms and out again with tears upon her cheeks, and fled from his protestations with her hands upon her ears. Kenny followed her to the door of Adam's sitting room, frantic with distress. Verily, he thought, as the door closed gently in his face, the quality of Joan's mercy was not strained. It came like Portia's gentle rain from Heaven. It forgot and forgave and condoned. But the thought of her, flowerlike in the shadow of death, was unendurable.

Anxious to help, Kenny sculled the old punt back and forth, whenever the horn blew, until dusk. He had humbly pledged himself to curb a tendency to speed and excitement and therefore ferried the river well until a wind rose at twilight, clouds thickened overhead and a spatter of rain blew into his face. Then his patience waned and he tacked an enormous sign upon the willow under one of Hughie's lanterns. Owing to illness, it said, the ferry had been discontinued. Afterward he went to tell Joan what he had done, and met the doctor on the stairway.

"By morning," he nodded slowly, answering Kenny's look. "Yes, I'm afraid he'll be gone. I'd like to stay, Mr. O'Neill, for Joan's sake. But there's a baby coming over at the Jensen farm. There always is. And my duty as I see it is more with life than with death."

"I'll stay with him," said Kenny. "Joan must rest."

But she would not.

"Donald should be here too," she said. "We are all he has."

"Then," said Kenny, his lips white, "I shall stay here with you."

The night closed in with gusty showers of rain. There was no sound from the high old-fashioned bed where Adam Craig lay, gray and still. The silence, the gloom of dark wood, the grotesque shadows from a lamp burning dimly on the bureau and the loud licking of the clock drove Kenny with a shudder to the window. Death to him who so passionately loved life's gayety and its music was more a thing of horror than of grief. He found no solace in the wind and rain of the autumn night. They plunged him instead into a mood of morbid imagery. The weird music of the wind became Ireland's cry of lament for her dead. The tossing boughs beyond the window, rain-spattered and somber, took on eerily the outline of dark-cloaked women keeners rocking and chanting the music of death. The rain was tears.

Ochone! Ochone! The wind of sorrow rose and fell, rose and fell, with unearthly cadence. Kenny thought of the horrible Dullahaun who roves about the country with his head under his arm and a death-warning basin of blood in his hand ready to dash in the face of the unlucky wight who answers his knock.

He shuddered and choked. Then Joan slipped into the shelter of his arm, terrified at the thought of death, cried and watched the rain with him.

Adam Craig died at dawn with the rain he hated beating at the window. And peace came wanly to his wrinkled face.

CHAPTER XXII

IN THE CABIN

They were hard days for Kenny, who hated gloom save when it was picturesque and transient. And they were harder for the pity and misgiving in his heart. He himself perhaps had hastened the old man's death with a careless story. Why had it bothered him? Why had it goaded his wasted legs to horrible effort?

Ordinarily Kenny knew he would have resented the intrusion of alien sorrow into his life. He hated sorrow. Now for Joan's sake he made himself a part of it. If Joan must endure it, so could he. But he sickened at the need.

He was doomed to a tragic, unforgettable hour in the churchyard when the voice of the old minister, conventional in its sadness, droned wearily into his very soul:

"Ashes to ashes … dust to dust." … The clock turned back and he stood in a church by an Irish hill. White and terrified, Kenny remembered what in its vivid agony of detail he would fain have forgotten. Why, now, when Joan was slipping into his life, a lonely waif of a girl in a black gown he hated, why must he think years back to that soft-eyed Irish girl and Brian? Had he broken his pledge to her, driving her son away with a passion of self no less definite for its careless gayety? Eileen's son! Eileen's son! Sadness tore at Kenny's heart and twitched at his dry, white lips. Ah! why must he live again that agonizing day when Eileen had gone out of his life forever?

The voice went on, funereal, gentle. Kenny's eyes blurred. Sweat came coldly forth upon his forehead. At the first thud of earth he choked and turned away, the pain unbearable. Adam Craig had driven his nephew away … with a passion of self … and he had died with mercy at his bedside, not love. A passionate hunger for Brian stirred in Kenny's heart and made him lonely. Ah! how farcical his penance! Some nameless thing of self linked him to Adam Craig. The thought was horrible. Some nameless thing linked each mournful detail of to-day to the tragedy of long ago. … And then mercifully the thing became a blur of November wind, a monotonous voice of sorrow, the thud of earth and the end.

The coach toiled up the hill and Kenny, with Joan in his arms, forgot.

"Mavourneen," he said wistfully, "let's slip away, you and I, to the cabin in the pines. I want you to myself. And there in the house—" he looked away. The thought of the old house, bleak and desolate at its best and haunted now by the sense of a presence gone, oppressed him.

Joan nodded.

"And not that dress!" begged Kenny with a shudder.

She laid her cheek against his shoulder.

"It was just for to-day, Kenny. Hannah thought it best." Her soft eyes, curiously child-like with the shadow of sadness in them, appealed to him for understanding. He kissed her, marveling afresh at the tender miracle of peace and tenderness her presence brought him.

"Had I loved Uncle a great deal more—it isn't wrong for me to say that now, Kenny?"

"It would be wrong, dear, if you made pretense of something you couldn't feel."

"I—I meant that even then I could have mourned him better with my heart than this—this dreadful dress. It would carry gloom wherever I went. And that would be selfish."

He blessed her shy intelligence and kissed her again. Then the carriage stopped at the farmhouse door and Kenny hurried up to his room to find clothes less formal and depressing. Afterward he went ahead to the cabin and built a fire.

The crackle of the wood was lively to his ears and cheerful. The room grew, warm and homelike. When Joan came a little later, he was whistling softly and making tea. He liked her dress. It was dark and soft. He liked the lace fichu at her throat. And he liked the huge old-fashioned cameo that fastened it.

"Hughie is hunting the key to the table-drawer," she said. "I told him about the cabin. It doesn't matter now. Poor Uncle!" She blinked and wiped her eyes. "He didn't mean to be cruel, Kenny. It was the brandy and the pain. If Hughie finds the key, he wondered if you'd go over Uncle's papers to-night. The will is there."

"The will!" said Kenny. He put wood on the fire in some excitement. A miser's will!

Joan's eyes were tender.

"Kenny, how good you've been!"

"Nonsense!" he said brusquely.

"Hughie said so, too. And Hannah and Hetty. Someone had to think and plan and you did it all so well. And, Kenny, I told Hannah, that I'm going to marry you and she cried and kissed me and—and poured a wash-bowl full of tea for Hughie to wash his hands in!"

"The heart of her!" said Kenny. "Come, girleen. The tea's ready. I want to see you pour it."

He watched with his heart in his eyes while she poured his tea. There was a sense of home in the cabin here and the crackle of the fire was the music of comfort. Kenny drank a little of his tea and roved off to the window to light a cigarette.

Beyond the November monotone of trees blazed the red of a sunset. A winter sunset! The fall was over.

"Joan!" he called softly. "Come, jewel machree, the Gray Man is stealing through the pines."

She came at once and slipped into the circle of his arm. Kenny held her tight and found his courage. He was restless, it seemed, and after months of irresponsibility, the thought of work was bothering him badly. Kenny must leave the farm. He must go soon; in a week. And his wife must go with him.

Joan's breathless amazement made him laugh.

"But, Kenny, I—I can't!" she said.

"And I," said Kenny stubbornly, "can't and won't go away and leave you here. The thought of

winter and the hills and that barn of a house when the wind is blowing would haunt me. No, no, girleen!"

Joan looked up and smiled and her soft eyes were wistful.

"Kenny, I must study for another year!"

"Another year!" said Kenny blankly. "Colleen, you've the wisdom of the ages in your head right now."

Joan shook her head.

"I must learn to be your wife," she said. "Now it—it dazzles and frightens me—"

"Joan!"

"Have you forgotten, Kenny, that I have lived my life up here in hills and trees. And you—"

"Joan, please!" he begged in distress.

"But I can't forget," said the girl steadily. "Whenever I read the article Garry sent about 'Kennicott O'Neill, brilliant painter'—think of it, Kenny! 'Brilliant painter!'—I go back and read again just to be sure I'm not dreaming. I've been so much alone that the thought of going out into your world with you—terrifies me. I could not bear to have you—sorry!"

"Mavourneen!" he said, shocked.

There were tears upon her cheeks.

"I would only ask that you be your own dear self," said Kenny gently. "And every man of my world and every woman will stare and envy!"

"I must know music and French," said Joan, checking the need upon her fingers. "I must know how to dance. Now when I talk I must have something to say. Otherwise I feel shy and quiet. I must learn how to talk a great deal without saying anything as you do sometimes."

He laughed in delight at the final need.

"All of it," declared Kenny happily, "I can teach you."

"No," said Joan with a definite shake of her head. "You would kiss me. And I would always be right even when you knew I was wrong."

His eyes laughed at her mischievously. But he caught her hands and pressed them to his lips.

"Listen, dear," he pleaded. "My world isn't a world of social climbers or snobs or dollar-worshippers. It's a world of gifted men and women who haven't time to look up your ancestors or your bank balance before they decide to be friendly and kind. I know a poet whose mother was a gypsy, a painter who's a baron and he says he can't help it, a French girl who paints millionaire babies and her father was a tight-rope walker in a circus. My world, Joan, is the happy-go-lucky Bohemia of success and the democracy of real talent. We're actors and painters and sculptors and writers and artists in general and all in all I think we work a little more and play a little more, enjoy a little more and suffer a little more than the rest of the world. Once in a while to be sure a head grows a bit too big and then we all take a bop at it! But the big thing is we're human; just folks, as a man in the grillroom said one night. We're human and we're kind. It's not a smart set, dear. And it's not an ultra-fashionable four-hundredy thing. God forbid! It's the kind of Bohemia I love. And I'm sure you'll love it too."

Her eyes were shining. In the dusk her color came to him like the glimmer of a flower.

"Kenny!" she exclaimed. "How wonderful it all is, you and all of it! And yet if—if I feel as I do, you must let me go for a year. Otherwise if I lack confidence in myself—Oh, can't you see, Kenny, I shall be shy and frightened and always ill at ease!"

"Go!" he echoed blankly.

"Somewhere," said Joan, "to study music and French and how to talk your kind of nonsense. Hannah says there must be money enough in Uncle's estate for that."

"Where," said Kenny, his heart cold, "would you go?"

"I thought," said Joan demurely, "that perhaps I could study in New York where I wouldn't be so—lonesome."

He caught her in his arms.

"Heart of mine!" he whispered. "You thought of that."

"Then," said Joan, "I can learn something of your world before I become a part of it. Don't you see, Kenny? I can look on and learn to understand it. I should like that. Come, painter-man! The tea's cold.

And it's growing dark. We'd better light the lamp."

With the tea-pot singing again on the fire and the lamp lighted, Kenny, but momentarily tractable, had another interval of rebellion. Joan, in New York, might better be his wife. Joan, studying, might better have him near to talk his sort of nonsense, listen to her music and make love volubly in French to which she needed the practice of reply. His plea was reckless and tender but Joan shook her head; and Kenny realized with a sigh that her preposterous notion of unfitness was strong in her mind and would not be denied.

"A year, Kenny!" pleaded Joan. "After all, what is a year? And at the end I shall be so much happier and sure." She came shyly to his chair and slipped her arms around his neck. "I want so much to do whatever you want me to do. And yet—and yet, Kenny, feeling as I do, I shall be—Oh, so much happier if you will wait until I can come and say that I am ready to be your wife."

"It will make you happier!" he said abruptly.

"Yes."

"Then, mavourneen," said Kenny, "it shall be as you say. I care more for your happiness than for my own."

They went back through the darkness hand in hand.

CHAPTER XXIII

A MISER'S WILL

Kenny lingered moodily over his supper. His evening was casting its shadow ahead. He dreaded the thought of climbing the stairs to Adam's empty room. If he could have kept his hostile memories in the face of death, he told himself impatiently, it would have been easier. But Garry was right. He was wild and sentimental. Only pitiful memories lingered to haunt him: rain and loneliness and the old man's hunger for excitement.

He went at last with a sigh, oppressed by the creak of the banister where Adam had sat, sinister and silent in his wheel-chair, listening to the music. Memories were crowding thick upon him. Again and again he wished that he had never opened the door of the sitting room that other night and caught the old man off his guard. It had left a specter in his mind, horrible in its pathos and intense. Strung fiercely to the thought of emptiness, it came upon him nevertheless, as he opened the door, with a curious chill sense of palpability; as if silence and emptiness could strike one in the face and make him falter.

The room was fireless and silent and unspeakably dreary. Hughie had left a lamp burning upon the table. The key he had found in the pocket of the old man's bathrobe lay beside it.

For an interval Kenny stood stock still, his color gone. He faced strange ghosts. Here in this faded room, with its mystery of books, he had known agonizing pity and torment, gusts of temper, selfish and unselfish, real and feigned, moments of triumphal composure that now in the emptiness it was his fate to remember with a sickening shudder of remorse. Here he had battled in vain for Joan, practicing brutally the telling of much truth; and here with his probing finger, Adam Craig had roused his slumbering conscience into new doubt and new despair. And here he must not forget he had told the tale of the fairy mill … and suspicion had come darkly to his mind. Suspicion of what? That, as ever, he refused to face.

A chair stood by the fireplace. Kenny with a shudder moved it to a distant corner. He could not bear the memory of that last night when he had barred the old man out from his joyous mood of sparkle, telling Samhain tales of the fairies and the dead.

After all, had he meant always to be cruel, that keen-eyed old man with his keener wits? What conflict of spirit and body had lain behind his fretful fits of temper?

Kenny turned, blinking, from the wheelchair, and his glance, blurred a little, found the old man's glasses on the mantel. The shabby case, left behind while Adam faced the great adventure, was oddly pitiful. Kenny cleared his throat. He had his moment of rebellion then at the inevitability of death and doom. It behooved all of us, he remembered with set lips, to be kind and mend quarrels while the sap of life ran in our veins, strong and full.

The sight of the key upon the table sent his thoughts flying off at a tangent. A miser's will! … Mother of Men! It was a thing of morbid mystery and romance!

Kenny sat down in wild excitement and opened the drawer.

He saw at once an orderly packet of papers. The will, which barely a month ago, Hughie said, he and Hannah had signed without reading, lay uppermost. Adam had written his will himself, disdaining lawyers.

Kenny opened the will and began to read. He read as he always read in moments of excitement, blurring through with a glance. But though the old man's writing was distinct and almost insolent in its boldness, the portent of the written words did not filter through at once to his understanding. He frowned and read again. Once more he read, pacing the floor with unquiet eyes. A number of things were becoming clearer. There was in the first place no mention of the fugitive nephew. Joan was the sole heir. There was one executor. That executor was Joan's guardian and Joan's guardian was one—Kennicott O'Neill! Kenny read the name aloud as if it belonged to someone else. Joan's guardian! Again he read the clause aloud with an exclamation of doubt and unbelief. It lay there definite and clear. He was the sole executor of Adam's will and he was Joan's guardian. Startled he read the rest.

"To Kennicott O'Neill, my friend, my signet ring ... to my niece, Joan West, from whom, no matter what the circumstances, I have never had an unkind word, I bequeath the Craig farm and all the land and all the rest, residue and remainder of my wealth wheresoever situate, provided the executor can find it."

Kenny went back with a feeling of numbness in his brain and read it all again.

"The rest of my wealth wheresoever situate ... provided the executor can find it!"

Those words he scanned blankly with a feeling of much fire in his head and a tantalizing cloud before his eyes. They meant what? Strange hints and subtle smiles recurred to him. ... And Adam had been a miser who read of buccaneers and hidden treasure. ... Buccaneers and hidden treasure! ... He would have hidden pirates' gold, he had said, under the biggest apple-tree in the orchard, under the lilac bush or ... Where else had he said? ... And ... what ... had ... he ... meant?

Kenny struck his head fiercely with his hand, raked his hair in the old familiar gesture and roamed turbulently around the room with the will in his hand. He was conscious of that dangerous alertness in his brain that with him always presaged some unusual clarity of vision, a startling speed with the adding of two and two. Four came now with bewildering conviction. Fragments of the puzzle of mystery that had bothered him for days dropped dizzily into place, even the fairy mill and the Eve of All Souls. What wonder that in a drunken fit of superstition Adam had staggered out to seek his dead!

With his hair in disarray from the frantic combing of his fingers, Kenny went down to find Joan. He read the will aloud to her, controlling his voice with an effort.

"Don shall have the farm," said Joan. "I shouldn't know what to do with it."

Kenny read the baffling clause at the end of the will again.

"'All the rest, residue and remainder of my wealth, wheresoever situate, provided the executor can find it.'"

It seemed to him in his excitement that he could not tell her what he thought—that he could not say it all with care and calm when his head was whirling.

"Joan," he said gently, "you must tell me everything you remember about your mother and your father and your uncle. And whether there was ever money. Much money," he insisted, his vivid face imploring.

Joan shook her head sadly.

"There is so little I remember, Kenny," she said. "So very little. There was never money. I do not remember my mother or my father. Neither does Donald. We lived until I was eight with an old cousin, Nellie Craig. She said that uncle was a miser who loved nothing but his brandy. Then she died and we came here. We had to come. There was no other place for us. I remember that Don's clothes and mine were always ragged until I grew old enough to mend them. Then I found mother's trunks in the garret. Later Don and I thought of the ferry and had for the first time some money of our own."

Kenny looked crestfallen.

"And there is nothing more?" he said. "Think, Joan, think!"

"Nothing," said Joan. "Donald and I were afraid of Uncle. We never dared to ask him questions. And he never spoke of my mother save to sneer and curse the stage. What is it, Kenny? What are you thinking?"

"I think," said Kenny, making a colossal effort to speak with the calm he could not feel, "that somewhere buried on the farm is a great deal of money. I think it belonged to your mother and that it was left in trust to your uncle for Donald and you—"

"Kenny!"

"I think," went on Kenny steadily, "that this singular clause in your uncle's will was a miser's struggle between justice and his instinct for hoarding and hiding. Money he had kept so long he hated

to relinquish. Yet he dared not keep it. And so he buried the money. God knows how or where, and shunted the responsibility of its finding upon me. If it was never found, as perhaps he hoped, he had still fulfilled his trust and the dictates of his conscience in willing the money back to you."

"But, Kenny, how could he bury it?"

"How often," reminded Kenny, "has Hughie in summer wheeled him out to the orchard and left him there? How often has he wheeled himself around the walk by the lilac bush? And he was clever and cunning. Could he not, from time to time, hide the money in his bathrobe and find some means of digging?"

Joan looked unconvinced.

"And where," she said, "would my mother, who earned her living on the stage, get money? A great deal, I mean?"

"I—I don't know," said Kenny, wiping the sweat from his forehead. "I wish I did. Sometime or other, Joan, there has been Craig money and a lot of it. This old house is the house of an aristocrat with money enough to gratify expensive whims. Either the money was willed to her or with the beauty she must have had, she married it. They are the things you and I must find out somehow. Of one thing I am absolutely convinced. There is money. It did not belong to your uncle. It is hidden somewhere on the farm."

He told her of the fairy mill, of the old man's gloating pride in the word miser, of All Souls' Eve and Adam Craig's hints about the apple tree and the lilac bush.

"And many another place," added Kenny bitterly, "that slipped by me for I didn't listen!"

"It is unlikely," Joan said, "that he would find the opportunity for hiding money in so many places. Why then did he name them all?"

"His conscience forced him to give some inkling of the spot where he had hidden money not his own. But he purposely multiplied our chances of failure. Joan, I've got to get a spade and dig up the apple-tree!"

His excitement was contagious. Neither of them heard Hughie in the doorway until he spoke.

"Mr. O'Neill," he said eagerly, "have you read the will?"

Kenny struck himself upon the forehead and stared at Hughie in genuine resentment. Hughie was another problem. But Hughie's quiet eyes pleaded; and Hughie's ruddy face was honest. Kenny told him all.

"I'm not surprised," said Hughie. "From the minute I set foot here three years back, I said, and Hannah said, that Mr. Craig was a miser. And it's common talk in the village."

But Kenny was off through the doorway with the will in his hand. Joan and Hughie followed him to the kitchen.

Here when the will had been read again commotion seized them all. Hughie went out to the barn to hunt a spade, Hannah trotted about talking of wraps, Hetty found a lantern for Kenny and Kenny burned his fingers lighting it, and stepped on the cat. Joan soothed the outraged feline with a nervous laugh. There was madness in the air. In an interval of blank disgust in which he criticized the length of the cat's tail and the clarion quality of his yell, Kenny fumed off barnwards in search of Hughie. His excitement was compelling. Hannah headed a cloaked exodus from the kitchen, chirping an astonishment which she claimed was unprecedented in her quiet life.

They straggled up the orchard hill in a flutter.

It was snowing a little. The coldness of the air was soft and heavy. Hannah and Hughie held the lanterns high and with a startling attack that made the dirt fly, Kenny began to dig.

The lantern light rayed off grotesquely through the leafless orchard but the silent group, intent upon the energetic digger, watched only the spot where the fan-like rays converged upon the spade. The wind, sharp, intermittent and bringing with it now and then a flurry of snow, flapped their clothes about them. Kenny, pausing to wipe his forehead, thought the night warm. Joan's eyes, dark, solemn, frightened, spurred him on to greater effort. He dug furiously, flinging earth in all directions. Hughie marvelled at his madcap speed and the strength of his sinewy arms. His jaw was set. His face, dark and vivid in the lantern light, shone with a boy's excitement. But when the wind came he looked defiant. They could not know that to him, then, the spirit of Adam Craig seemed to come with a sigh and a rustle and hover near them.

Hughie took his turn at the spade but to Kenny his methodical competence proved an irritant. He was glad when Hughie's back gave out and forced him to surrender.

"Mr. O'Neill," said Hannah flatly after what seemed an interminable interval of digging, "you've dug a hole big enough to bury yourself. Mr. Craig's money couldn't be no further down than that. Myself I think you'd better let it go until morning. It's snowin' harder every minute and we'll all get

our death of cold."

Kenny shuddered at the homely phrase. But he wiped the dirt and perspiration from his forehead and went off toward the kitchen in gloomy silence, his energy and optimism gone.

CHAPTER XXIV

DIGGING DOTS

So madness settled down upon the Craig farm.

Futile, flurried days of digging followed for which Kenny, delving desperately in his memory, supplied forgotten clues. Fearful lest the villagers might take it into their heads to climb the hill to Craig Farm and help them dig, he pledged every one to secrecy and went on digging, with Hughie at his heels. The suspense became fearful and depressing.

On the third day Hannah rebelled. The gloom and mystery were getting on her nerves.

"Hetty," she said irritably, "if you're standin' at the window there, figurin' out where Mr. Craig's money is likely to be buried, you can stop it this minute and clean the lamps. Your father's out pulling up the floor-boards in the barn and Mr. O'Neill's digging up the lilac bush for the third time. And that's enough. It beats me how Mr. O'Neill can go on rememberin' so much now he's got his memory started. He just seems to unravel things out of it overnight. It keeps me all worked up. I feel as if I ought to whisper when I speak and every night the minute I get to sleep I find myself diggin' in first one outlandish place and then another. And if I'm not diggin' in my sleep, your father is, with jerks and starts and grunts enough to wake the dead. I'm all unstrung. So far as I can see the only thing we're findin' is nerves. One thing I will say: It was dull and lonesome before Mr. O'Neill came and I missed him when he went but dear knows, it was peaceful. It's been one thing right after the other. Who upset Mr. Abbott in the river, I'd like to know, and almost hit him in the head with an oar? Who kept Mr. Craig so upset that he threw his brandy bottle at your father most every morning? Who sang the roan cow into kickin' at the milk? Who—"

"Sh!" said Hetty.

It seemed that Mr. O'Neill at that minute was not digging up the lilac bush. There was a sound of hurried footsteps in the room beyond and he came in with a piece of letter paper in his hand.

"Look, Hannah," he cried. "Look! I found it among Mr. Craig's papers. It's a rude chart of the farm, picked out here and there in dots."

Hannah wiped her arms and put on her glasses. The paper filled her with excitement.

"Sakes alive, Mr. O'Neill," she exclaimed, "what will you do now?"

"Do?" said Kenny wildly. "Do? There's only one thing to do, of course. Hughie and I will dig up the dots. I wish to Heaven I could find a Leprechaun somewhere under a thorn-bush."

"What's a Leper John?" demanded Hannah.

"A fairy shoemaker," explained Kenny absently, "in a red coat and he wears buckled shoes and knee-breeches and a hat with a peak and always he's mendin' a shoe that he doesn't finish, find him and never once let him trick you into lookin' away and he'll tell you where treasure is hidden, always."

Hannah blinked.

"What ye need most to my mind, Mr. O'Neill," she said earnestly, "is a regiment of grave-diggers and stone-cutters to help you and Hughie get the thing done."

Night came upon them with Hughie digging up a dot beside the well and Kenny again in the orchard. Everything led back somehow to the orchard, his memory, the chart, even his own conviction.

That night in a dream Kenny distinctly saw the weary little doctor with a bag of mystery in his hand and a spade over his shoulder walking down the orchard hill.

He awoke at dawn with a shiver of excitement. The doctor! What could be more reasonable? Adam had known him for a lifetime. Whom else would he trust? The thought nerved him to heroics.

Kenny climbed out of bed and dressed, shiveringly conscious that the morning was cold enough to turn his breath to steam. It was that period of indistinctness moreover when farmers and roosters, he knew, were getting up all over the dawn, but Kenny, with little time and no inclination at all for

melancholy rebellion, tip-toed down the stairway with his shoes in his hand. He put them on by the kitchen fire. There was water by the window in a milk-pail. He poured some in a basin, washed his face and hands and found the water cold enough to hurt his face. Still his excitement kept him keyed to a pitch of singular and optimistic hilarity. Through the kitchen window came the pale glimmer of snow. He hoped Hughie wouldn't hear him harnessing Nellie, and shoot at the barn. The possibility sent him to the kitchen stairway. It wound upward in an old-fashioned twist to the room above.

"Hughie!" he called in a low voice. "Hughie!"

There was a noise of many creaks overhead.

"I'm going to hitch up Nellie and drive over to Dr. Cole's farm. I—I feel sure he buried the money!"

"God Almighty!" exclaimed Hughie.

But Kenny was already on his way to the kitchen door.

CHAPTER XXV

CHECKMATE!

Daylight came bleak and cold as Kenny drove rapidly up the doctor's lane. The aggrieved mare had traveled. Through the farm window, green with potted begonias, Kenny could see the doctor already at his breakfast. A young colored girl was pouring out his coffee. The doctor himself opened the door.

"Well, Mr. O'Neill," he exclaimed, "who's sick? Not Joan, I hope?"

"No," said Kenny, following the doctor back to the table. "No, nobody sick."

"Sit down," invited the doctor, "I always figure you can talk as well sitting as standing and you can rest. Won't you have some breakfast?"

"I couldn't eat," said Kenny. "Doctor," he added hoarsely, "would it—be possible—for me—to speak to you—alone?"

The doctor nodded. In a life made up of emergencies as his was, nothing astonished him.

"Annie," he said kindly, "just tell Mrs. Cole not to hurry down to breakfast. And close the door."

Kenny took the will from his pocket and spread it on the table.

The doctor wearily fumbled for his glasses and put them on.

"Hum!" he said. "The old man's will, eh? I've been wondering about it. Well, he didn't leave much but the farm, did he? And it might have been better for Don and Joan if he'd taken it with him. Nobody around here would buy it. A barn of a place! And the land's full of stone."

"Ah!" said Kenny significantly. "But Adam Craig was a miser!"

"Pooh!" said the doctor with a sniff. "Who told you that?"

Kenny stared.

"I found it out for myself," he said stiffly. "Since then I have learned that it is common rumor in the village. And the old man, even when I—I spoke of it directly to him, never troubled to deny it."

"Shucks!" said the little doctor crossly. "He liked it. It saved his pride."

"Saved—his—pride!"

The doctor nodded.

"Mr. O'Neill," he said, "country folks stare less unkindly at a miser than at some other things. It hurt Adam, knowing his guilt, to see the old Craig home going to rack and ruin. Had a lot of money when his father died. A lot. And he wanted folks to think he still had it. But he didn't. Went through it, Mr. O'Neill, hitting the high spots. Came home a penniless wreck of a man, body and soul and pocketbook warped beyond recall. I was there when they settled up his estate. As a matter of fact my brother was his lawyer. And what he hadn't lost in gambling and dissipation he lost speculating in Wall Street. Oh, he never tried the miser stunt with me. He knew that I knew that he hadn't a cent."

"Not a cent!" echoed Kenny feebly. "Not a cent!" He cleared his throat. "Not—a cent."

"Not a cent," said the doctor cheerfully. "And barely a living from that farm."

"Dr. Cole," said Kenny steadily, "he may have lost his own money. Of that I know nothing. But what about his sister's?"

"Why," said the doctor at once, "she hadn't any. Old Craig senior left it all to Adam. She ran away, you know, and went on the stage. He never forgot it. 'Tisn't much of a story. She was a darned pretty girl, high-spirited and clever, and the old man was a devil like Adam. A scandal of that kind fussed us up pretty much in those days. I remember I went to see Cordelia once in some old-time play. She was wearing those old gowns that Joan, poor child, wears now. Always had a feeling after that that I was a part of the scandal. Mother," he added dryly, "felt so too."

The doctor shook his head lugubriously.

"She was a widow when she died," reminded Kenny.

"Yes."

"The money I mean must have come from her husband and she entrusted it to Adam for Joan and Donald."

"But my dear fellow," said the doctor kindly, "he hadn't any. He was an actor chap. Cordelia came home to the farm to die while Adam was in Europe. She hadn't a cent."

"Not a cent!" said Kenny again. "Not a cent!"

"Not a cent," repeated the mystified doctor.

"Oh, my God!" said Kenny. "And I've dug up the farm!"

It was the doctor's turn to stare.

"You dug up the farm!" he said blankly.

Sick with discouragement Kenny pointed to the will.

"Read it," he said bitterly. "Particularly the 'remainder, residue and situate' part."

The doctor read and he read slowly. Before he reached the clause in question Kenny was on his feet, mopping his forehead. He told of the fairy mill and the chair by the fire.

The doctor poured himself another cup of coffee and looked at Kenny with a shade of asperity. Fairies, it would seem, were a little out of his line.

"Adam had a good many spells like that," he said, "'specially when he was drinking hard. Off like a shot, hanging out of his chair. Mere coincidence. As for the night he staggered out to the sitting room, it is possible as you suggest that he did it in a fit of drunken superstition. But there wasn't any money on his conscience. Couldn't be for there wasn't any. If he feared at all to have his sister revisit her home—queer notion, that, Mr. O'Neill! You Irish run to notions!—it was simply because he hadn't given her kids a square deal and he knew it."

Again the doctor adjusted his glasses and went back to the will.

"Doctor," flung out Kenny desperately, "I myself have seen indisputable proof in that house that Adam Craig was a miser—even the way he handled money."

The doctor sighed and looked up. And he smiled his weary, understanding smile.

"What you saw, Mr. O'Neill," he said soberly, "was something very close to poverty. He was selfish and he had to have his brandy. His economy in every other way was horrible. Horrible! As for the way he handled money, as I said before, he wanted you to think he was a miser. It seems," added the doctor dryly as he went back to his reading, "that he was a grain too successful."

"He hated his sister," blurted Kenny. "Why would he hate her and revile her memory unless he knew he had wronged her? Why did he have black wakeful hours in bed and have to drink himself to sleep?"

"Adam," said the doctor with weary sarcasm, "fancied his sister had brought disgrace upon the grand old family name of Craig. She was a good girl and clever. But Adam believed in sacrifice and conventional virtue—for women. Most men do. And he knew the way folks feel up here about the stage. The world's queer, Mr. O'Neill. And Adam was just a little queerer than the rest of it. In a sense he had wronged her. God knows he was cruel enough to those two poor youngsters. As for his passion for drinking himself to sleep—well, when a man's had straight legs and plenty of health, such a fate as Adam's hits hard.

"He hated Joan and Donald," said Kenny. "Why?"

"He resented their drain upon his pocket-book. He hadn't enough left for them and brandy too. Though the Lord knows they never cost him much. Nellie Craig had them for a while after Cordelia

died. Good old soul, Nellie. But her tongue hung in the middle and worked both ways like a bell-clapper. I always blamed her for the start of the miser yarn. Adam managed to get it over on her and that was enough."

He made a final effort to read the will and while Kenny sat in stony silence, choking back a creepy feeling of despair, reached the clause pertaining to the residue of Adam's wealth.

"Ah!" he said.

"Well?" choked Kenny. "Is there some damned commonplace explanation for that, too?"

The doctor tapped the paper with his stubby finger.

"And you," he marveled, "who knew so well his devilish cunning! That clause I think was his last cruel jest."

Kenny turned white.

"A trap!" he said.

"A trap," said the doctor. "And you've swallowed bait and trap and all."

"How he must have hated me?"

"On the contrary," said the little doctor warmly, "I think in his way he was fond of you. He counted the hours until nightfall, that I know."

"And I—" said Kenny with a sharp intake of his breath, "I killed him with that story of the chair."

"Oh, nonsense, nonsense!" said the doctor kindly. "Chair or no chair he would have died just the same. I saw it coming. And your presence there this summer freed him entirely from money worries. He even paid me."

"Yes," said Kenny, "my money helped him drink himself to death."

The doctor sighed.

"Oh, well," he said, "that too would have happened just the same."

Kenny brushed his hair back dazedly from his forehead and rose. He felt as if he had fallen from a great height and hit his head. It was numbly aquiver. As he picked up the will and put it in his pocket, Adam Craig, sinister and unassailable, seemed to mock him from the grave. His last trap! Almost Kenny could hear him chuckle: "Checkmate, Kenny, checkmate! And the game is won." How well he had known his opponent's excitable fancy!

"Doctor," asked Kenny drearily, "why were all the books in the farmhouse in Adam's room?"

"There," said the doctor, "I think he meant to be kind. Cordelia had had all sorts of schooling and so had he. I think by denying the youngsters books and too much knowledge, he thought to clip their wings at the start and keep them contented. In tune with the farm, I mean, and willing to stay. He'd seen enough of ruinous discontent when his sister and himself went out in the world and tried their wings. Just a fancy. I may be wrong. Well, Mr. O'Neill, I'm sorry. There's no mystery and no money—"

"No," said Kenny dully, "no mystery and no money." He moved toward the door with a curious trance-like feeling that this was still a part of his dream.

"Just a commonplace story of self," said the doctor, following him to the door, "with two ragged little kids the victims. Myself I think it's just as well, Mr. O'Neill, to say as little as possible about things of this sort. Tales up here grow. And fire that isn't fed goes out. It's bound to. I never had the heart myself to deny the old man's miser yarn. When I do talk, I try to say as little as possible and keep my two feet solidly on the ground."

He watched Kenny down the steps and into the buggy.

"Humph!" said the little doctor. "Thought he had his fingers on a regular swap-dollinger of a mystery, didn't he? To my thinking, the only mystery in the farmhouse is himself!"

And Kenny, climbing into the buggy in hot rebellion, felt that he had come decked out gorgeously in rainbow balloons. And the doctor, practical and unromantic, had pushed a weary finger through them, one by one, watching them collapse with his bored and kindly smile of understanding. Life after all, reflected Kenny irritably, was a matter of adjectives and any man was at the mercy of his biographer. He himself could have told that story of Adam and Cordelia Craig until no man could have called it commonplace and unromantic.

CHAPTER XXVI

AN INSPIRATION

Afterward Kenny thought that Nellie must have ambled into the doctor's barnyard and turned herself, for he had no memory of guiding her. A paralyzed conviction of another anti-climax had gripped him. He remembered turning into the road with a haunting sense of eyes upon him—Adam's eyes, piercing and bright with malevolent amusement. The chart! The hints! The will! The cunning of him! What would he tell Hughie and Hannah and Hetty? What would he tell Joan? What was there to tell save that he had put two and two together and made five, a romantic five lurid with melodrama?

And the brutal practice hour in Adam's room when he had told the truth! Kenny went sick and cold and shivered. How unwittingly he had flung the old man's poverty in his teeth! How at times it must have hurt! The memory made him shrink. And it hadn't been truth. He had battled for Joan with misinterpretation and cruelty; he had practiced the truth with the telling of untruth. And the proud old man who veiled his poverty with pretense, had listened, listened inscrutably and laughed, ready to thrust from the grave itself.

Ah! Fate was forever flinging down her gauntlet.

"To Kennicott O'Neill, my friend, my signet ring." His friend! In spite of the practice hour—his friend. Kenny's eyes smarted.

"Oh, Adam, Adam!" he said, sick at heart, "I beg your pardon."

The snow crunched steadily under Nellie's feet. Kenny stared sadly at the road ahead. Could he tell Joan what now he knew: that when the few bills were paid and the estate balanced, there would be no money left for the year of study?

Perhaps Joan would marry him now—at once—to-morrow! And they could leave the farm together. After all there was silver to his cloud. Kenny brightened.

A preposterous notion of hers, that unfitness. The memory of the sunset hour in the cabin came again to darken the silver lining of his cloud. Joan's arms, Joan's voice, Joan's eyes had pleaded; it would make her happier to wait and study and watch his world before she came to it, his wife.

Kenny sighed.

It would make her—happier. And the problem still was with him.

Kenny cursed the evil in the world that had forced men to convention. If only he could help her! If only—

A car was coming up behind him with a familiar noise of rattle. It was the doctor. Kenny sat up, alert, inspired, excited.

"Doctor," he called cheerfully, "is there a long distance telephone near?"

"A mile on. Road to the right," called the doctor, inwardly amazed at his visitor's mercurial disposition. "They call it Rink's Hotel. Not much of a place. Really a road house. But you'll find a telephone."

Kenny found the telephone at Rink's Hotel in a pantry near the barroom and closed the door to insure his privacy. It seemed an interminable interval of waiting, an interval of blankness filled with voices calling numbers on to further voices, before the Club Central answered. Again he waited, tapping with impatience on the table. When the voice came he wanted, it was far away and drowsy. Kenny looked at his watch. It was not yet eight o'clock.

"Garry," he said, "is that you?"

"Yes. Who's calling?"

"It's I—Kenny."

"Kenny!" Garry's astonished voice came clearly over the wire. "Kenny, where on earth did you go?" he demanded. "And what's the matter? Is anything wrong? What are you doing up in the middle of the night?"

Kenny snorted.

"Garry," he said, "I'm mailing to you now in a very few minutes my check for four thousand dollars —"

"Say it again."

"I said—I'm mailing to you—my check—for—four thousand—dollars."

"Wait a minute, Kenny. This wire must be out of order."

Kenny swore beneath his teeth.

"I said," he repeated with withering distinctness, "that I—am—mailing—to—you—my—check—for—four—thousand—dollars. And I want you to cash it in old bills. Get, that, Garry, please. Old bills."

"Old bills!" repeated Garry in a strangled voice. "For the love of Mike! … *Old bills*!"

"Garry! For God's sake, listen! This is absolute, unadulterated common sense. I want you to get that money in old bills, the older the better. Ragged if you can. And I want you to send it to me, Craig Farm, by registered package, special delivery."

"Are you in some mess or other? Because if you are I'll bring it."

"No, I can wait. I particularly don't want you to bring it. I can't explain now. I'll write you all the details. Then I want you to get a statement from the bank. Even with the four thousand gone, my balance ought to be at least a thousand dollars. See what they make it."

"Yes."

"Next I want you to call up Ann Marvin and ask her if she's still looking for another girl to share her studio with her … Ann Marvin."

"Peggy's with her."

"I know that. She said she wanted a third girl. If she does, tell her I'm bringing my ward—"

"Your—what!"

"My—ward—"

"Kenny," came in cold and scandalized tones from the other end, "have you been to bed at all?"

"If you make any pretense at all of being my friend," roared Kenny in a flash of temper, "will you do me the favor of assuming that I'm serious? I'm not drunk. I'm not insane. I've slept the night through. And I'm tired and terribly in earnest."

"You did say your ward."

"I did. Mr. Craig—the uncle, you remember, an invalid—died. And he's made me the guardian of his niece—"

"The poor boob." Garry's voice was sad and sincere.

"Garry! Are you or are you not my friend?"

"I am."

"Then listen. Next I want you to ask Max Kreiling for the name and address of the French woman he knows who teaches music—"

"Just a minute, Kenny, old man. Let me say this all after you. I am to cash your check for four thousand dollars in old bills. Ragged if possible. I am to send it registered and special delivery to Craig Farm. I am to call up Ann and tell her about your—your ward. And I'm to ask Max for the name of the French woman who teaches music."

"Right. Garry, has Brian been back?"

"No. John Whitaker may have heard from him. I don't know. I haven't seen him. Oh, by the way, Kenny, Joe Curtis was in here blazing up and down my studio. Said you promised to paint his wife's portrait. What'll I tell him?"

"Tell him," said Kenny, "to go to—No, never mind. I'll be needing to work. Tell him I'll be back in New York positively by the end of next week."

CHAPTER XXVII

MISER'S GOLD

He was passionately glad in the week that followed that Fate, prodigal in her gifts to him, had made him too an actor with a genius for convincing. For he had to go on digging dots, feigning wild

excitement when his heart was cold within him. He hated spades. He hated dirt. He almost hated Hughie, who went from dot to dot upon the chart with unflagging zeal and system. Kenny himself dug anywhere at any time and moodily escaped when he could to write letters. He was getting his plans in line for departure.

He had settled the problem of the doctor, after an interval of bitter struggle, with a combination of fact and fancy. He said truthfully that the doctor had rejected all notions of buried money with his usual air of weariness. He added untruthfully—and with set teeth he challenged the Angel Gabriel to settle the tormenting problem in any other way—that the doctor had conceded the probability of Adam's burying money though he had had but a few thousand dollars at best to bury.

"That," said Hughie, "is enough to dig for!" And he went on with his digging.

The need was desperate and Kenny did his best. Of the doctor's story of Adam and Cordelia Craig he told enough. And he kept on talking miser's gold when he hated the name of it. His air of excitement, said Hughie who talked endlessly of dots, dug and dreamed them, kept them all upon their toes.

At nightfall of the third day when Kenny's hatred of dots was approaching a frenzy and a ballet of spades danced with horrible rhythm through his dreams, the package came from Garry. Kenny took it with a careless whistle and went slowly up the stairs.

The closing of his bedroom door transformed him. He found matches and a lamp and marveled at the erratic pounding of his heart. It was a muffled beat of triumph. Mad laughter, tender and joyous, lurked perilously in his throat. His feet would have pirouetted in gay abandon had he not, with much responsible feeling of control, forced himself to walk with dignity and calm. But his nervous flying fingers fumbled clumsily with string and paper and taxed his patience to the utmost.

The bills were incredibly old and ragged. Kenny stared at them with a low whistle of delight, blessing Garry. Moreover, Fate and Garry had chosen to solve a problem for him by packing the bills in a strong tin box. To unpack the money and dent the tin was the work of a moment. When he had darkened the shining surface with lamp-smoke and rubbed it clean with a handkerchief which he burned, the box, discolored and dented, had an inescapable look of age, like the ragged bills.

Kenny went through the dark hallway to Adam's room with cat-like tread, the searchlight that had been a part of his road equipment in his pocket, a bag of wood-ash, purloined the day before from Hannah's kitchen, and the battered box tucked unobtrusively beneath his coat. He locked himself in and drew a long, gasping breath of intense relief.

Though wind creaks startled him again and again as he made a pedestal of faded books for his searchlight and directed its glaring circle upon the blackened wall of the fireplace, no dreaded hand upon the knob disturbed him.

He worked noiselessly and with care, removing the lower bricks with his penknife.

Brick after brick he loosened, burrowing deep in the solid wall; then with infinite care and patience he walled the money in, filled the crevices with wood-ash and hid the remaining bricks in the chimney.

He went down to supper with an unusual air of calm, but his head was aching badly. Hughie, Joan said, was nearing the last dot. He was discouraged and Hannah was cross. Kenny toyed absently with the food upon his plate.

"Mavourneen," he said, "I'm wondering."

"Wondering what, Kenny?"

"If perhaps the chart isn't purposely misleading—"

"Like Uncle's hints to you?"

"Yes."

"I hadn't thought of it."

"Every clue we have found has sent us out of doors."

"Would he, I wonder, Kenny, hide the money in the house?"

"I'm wondering too."

"The sitting room!"

"There," admitted Kenny, "he was often alone."

"Kenny, shall we look to-night?"

Kenny had his moment of doubt.

"We'll ask Hughie," he said.

And so with Hannah scoffing but noticeably on ahead with the lamp, they climbed the stairs and tore the room to pieces—to no avail. In a final burst of inspiration Hughie dragged the faded carpet from its tacks and filled the room with dust. Sneezing and coughing, they faced each other in the melee with looks of blank discouragement. Even Kenny's inexhaustible energy and excitement seemed on the point of waning. He stared drearily at the fireplace.

"It's cold in here," he said, shivering.

"Yes," said Joan, "we should have built a fire."

"The fireplace!" cried Hughie hoarsely.

"It's too late now," said Kenny irritably. "I'm chilled through."

"No, no, Mr. O'Neill, I'm not meaning the fire. It's the one place we haven't looked."

"It won't hurt none to look, Mr. O'Neill," urged Hannah, who knew that Kenny's energy was subject to undependable ebb and now. "If Hughie goes out of here with that fireplace on his mind, he'll dream all night about it."

Kenny strode to the fireplace with Hughie at his heels and jerked impatiently at the mantel. It was sturdy and unyielding.

"I feared so," he said with a shrug.

Hughie seized the lamp.

"Hold the lamp, Mr. O'Neill," he begged, crouching. "I've got to look at them bricks. Careful, sir! You're tipping it."

Huddled in the glare of the lamp they stared in fascination at the smoky bricks.

"The bricks are loose!" exclaimed Hughie. "Look here!" He rattled one with his finger.

Kenny emitted a long low whistle of intense amazement.

"Hughie, where's your knife?" he flung out wildly. "I think we're on the trail!"

"The lamp's shaking!" warned Hannah. "Let me hold it."

"Oh, my God!" gasped Hughie with the dot fever flaring in his honest eyes. "That ain't mortar. It's only ashes. Look!"

Kenny frantically pulled out a brick and dropped it with a clatter. Another and another.

"Hold the lamp closer, Hannah!" directed Hughie, reaching within. "There's something here!"

Shaking violently he pulled forth a battered box and flung back the lid. It was stuffed to the brim with ragged money.

"Glory be to God!" cried Kenny and proceeded to pull the mantel down.

But he found no more.

"And to think of him burrowin' there in the bricks," marveled Hannah, "and him that weak a child could push him over."

"Ah!" said Kenny, "but his will was strong."

He counted the money with trembling fingers and a smile, curiously pleased and tender, and declared his belief that the doctor was right. The ragged hoarding—he shivered slightly with revulsion as he touched a tattered bill—represented the rest, residue and remainder of Adam's wealth wheresoever situate. And thanks to Hughie's inspiration the executor had found it.

"Four thousand dollars!" he announced at last in a voice of disappointment.

"And a lucky thing," said Hughie with an air of pride, "that I thought of the fireplace. For it might have laid there buried for the rest of time."

"Four thousand dollars!" gasped Hannah in a reverential voice. "Four thousand dollars! Well, Mr. O'Neill, it may not be much, as you seem to think after all the dots you and Hughie have been a-diggin', but I say it's a lot. It ought to buy the child all the frocks and teachers in New York."

"It will see her through the year," said Kenny.

Joan's eyes widened.

"It would see me through a decade!" she exclaimed.

Kenny smiled.

CHAPTER XXVIII

KENNY'S WARD

Peace came mercifully to Craig farm with the finding of Adam's money.

"Toby," Joan whispered to the cat, her soft cheek pressed against his fur, "I'm going away. And I can't believe it! I can't! I can't! I can't!"

"Toby will miss you," said Hannah. "And so will I. And so will Hughie and Hetty." She cleared her throat. "As for Mr. O'Neill, Toby won't be likely to miss him at all. He's stepped too many inches off his tail. Hughie thinks it must be paralyzed. I never saw Mr. O'Neill headin' for a new dot but what I knew Toby would be sure to stick his tail in the way and start a row."

Joan's face clouded.

"Oh, Hannah, if only I knew where Donald is!"

Hannah sighed.

"I wish you did, dear."

"It seems so dreadful with Uncle gone and everything changed. And Donald doesn't even know. Think, Hannah, I may pass him in the train."

"You may," said Hannah. "And then again you mayn't."

"What if he comes home? What if he writes? It seems that I just should be here."

"If he writes, I'll send the letter. And if he comes, Hughie can ride down and telegraph you word."

"It's snowing," exclaimed Joan at the kitchen window. "Harder and harder. Oh, Hannah, if it keeps up we shan't be able to go to Briston to-morrow for my suit."

"We'll go in the sleigh. Hughie spoke of it at breakfast."

"A brown suit," mused Joan with shining eyes. "A brown hat and furs! Think, Hannah! *Furs*! I do hope I shall look well in them."

"Mr. O'Neill said you would and he ought to know."

Joan laughed and blushed.

At twilight the next night she came home dressed warmly in furs and a suit the color of her eyes.

"She would wear it home, Mr. O'Neill," whispered Hannah on ahead. "And all, I think, to surprise you."

Often afterward Kenny remembered her there in the half twilight of the kitchen, joyously crying out his name. There had been a glimmer of shining tin, a halo of light from the tilted stove-lids, purple at the window panes and beyond snow and the distant tinkle of sleighbells in the barn. Hetty, he remembered, had lighted the kitchen lamp and gasped. A lovely child, proud and mischievous! Her youth startled him.

In a week she was ready and eager to go but the day of farewell found her clinging to Hannah in a panic.

When at last the old Craig carriage creaked slowly away down the lane with Hannah and Hetty waving from the farm-porch, the spirit of adventure flickered forlornly out and left her sobbing.

"Good-bye, Hannah dear!" she called, her eyes wet and wistful. "Good-bye, Hetty! And—and don't forget to write me *all* the news! And don't let Toby catch the birds!"

Hughie, blinking and upset, stared straight ahead at Nellie's ears.

Kenny sobered. How great his trust! Hannah, waving her apron back there and wiping her eyes, trusted him. And so did Hughie and Joan and even perhaps old Adam Craig; and Mr. Abbott whose gentle grilling he had endured with merely surface patience.

"Don't cry, Joan, please!" he begged, understanding how dear familiar things are apt to loom in the pain of separation. And then with her hand to his lips, he pledged himself to make her happiness the religion of his love. It was a pledge he was destined to keep inviolate.

Ordinarily to Kenny, impatient in intervals of discomfort and delay, the trip with its rural junctions and branch roads would have been interminable torture. But to-day, with Joan's eyes, wide, dark, intent, he chose to marvel with her.

They lunched at noon between trains in a little country inn. At seven, having come after much fragmentary travel into a comforting world of express trains and Pullmans, they dined in the train itself. Joan watched the flying landscape, dotted with snow and vanishing lights, smiled with the shining wonder of it all in her eyes, and could not eat. Kenny tried scolding and found her sorry, but she could not eat.

By eleven, when the train thundered into the terminal at Thirty-third Street, New York was wrapped in a scudding whirl of white dotted dizzily with lights. Already to Kenny, buoyant, excited and inclined to stride around in purposeless circles, the lonely farm was very far away. He was back again in his own world with the roar of the city in his ears—and Joan beside him. Ah! there he knew was the reason for his gladness. Joan was beside him.

The taxi he commandeered threaded its way south through a maze of lights, hurrying crowds and noisy, weaving traffic to a tenement in Greenwich Village. Joan, searching for the unknown sparkle of that Bohemian world she had been unable to envisage, stared at the unromantic basement doors ahead and clung to Kenny's hand.

"It's quite all right, mavourneen," he assured her mischievously. "Bohemia and poverty rub shoulders down here. It's picturesque. And my club is only five blocks east. Beyond this door there's a mysterious magic tunnel that runs straight through the house to Somebody's back-yard. And in the back-yard is a castle and in the castle studios and skylights, electricity and steam heat and wide, old-fashioned fireplaces. Once it was a tenement—just like this with fifty dirty people in it—but Ann with her magic wand has changed it all."

The basement door at which he had been ringing a prolonged Morse dot and dash announcement of identity clicked back and revealed a dimly lighted tunnel. At the end a flight of steps led up into a courtyard.

Kenny closed the outer door and blocked out the roar of the city. New York receded, its hum very far away. Their heels clanked loudly in the quiet.

As they climbed the steps and came out in the courtyard, Ann's windows, trimly curtained, twinkled pleasantly through the snow ahead.

A girl stood waiting in the doorway.

"Hello, Ann!" called Kenny joyously. "Is it you?"

"Hello, Kenny!" cried a pleasant contralto voice. "Hurry up. It's snowing like fury."

Kenny seized Joan's hand and raced her across the courtyard and up the steps. When she came to a halt, shy and breathless, she was standing by a crackling wood-fire in a room that seemed all coziness and color and soft light.

A tall girl with black hair, a clear skin and intelligent eyes was smiling at them both.

"Kenny," exclaimed Ann Marvin, "you Irish will-of-the-wisp! Where have you been? Everybody's talking about you. Joan, dear, shake the snow off your coat. You're beginning to melt."

Joan's eyes opened wide at the sound of her name. Ann laughed and pinched her flushed cheek.

"My dear," she said drolly, "I know more than your name. Kenny sent me a letter of measures, spiritual, mental and physical that would turn Bertillon green with envy. If ever you default with all the foolish hearts in New York I'll turn you over to the police. And you'll never escape."

Joan clung to her with a smile and a sigh of relief that made them both laugh.

"Ann," said Kenny in heartfelt gratitude, "you're a brick. I don't wonder Frank Barrington's head over heels in love with you. You'll not be mindin', Ann, dear, if I use your telephone?"

"Sure, no!" mimicked Ann broadly. "It's yonder in the den."

Kenny at the telephone called the Players' Club and with his lips set for battle, asked for John Whitaker, whose methodical habits of diversion for once in his life he blessed. When Whitaker's voice came, brief and somewhat bored, he forgot to say: "Hello."

"Whitaker," he demanded, "where's Brian? You must know by now."

"Kenny! Is that you?"

"Yes."

"Where on earth have you been?"

"Away. Where's Brian?"

"Where's Brian?" Whitaker snorted. "He ought to be in a lunatic asylum if you want my honest opinion. As to where he is, I told you before and I'm telling you again, I'm pledged to secrecy. I've even destroyed his address so I wouldn't be tempted—and my memory couldn't be worse. I'd like to say right now, however, that he's more of an O'Neill than I thought and I'm through with him."

"Phew!" whistled Kenny, much too astonished for battle. "What—what's up, John?"

"What's up?" barked Whitaker, his voice tinged with acid. "Just this: I handed the young fool a job that ten of the best newspaper men in New York were pursuing and he turned me down cold to stay all winter in some God-forsaken quarry where he's hacking up stone—"

"Hacking up stone!"

"Feels philanthropic. Grinds stone all day and at night helps a kid he's known six months cram for a college exam. Damon and Pythias stuff and I'm the goat. Pythias is seventeen by the way and wants to work his way through college."

"Mother of men!" said Kenny softly and thought of Joan's relief.

"Sounds very beautiful and lofty in a letter," went on Whitaker, angling for sympathy, "but of all the damned, high-falutin' lunacy I've ever seen in men, that's the limit."

He waited, confident in his expectation that Kenny would agree. The voice that came back fairly bristled with virtue and approval.

"You filled his head with notions about service, didn't you, Whitaker?" demanded Kenny indignantly. "What's your idea of service anyway that now when Brian's got a chance to be of absolute service to a kid who needs him, you kick up your hind-heels and howl your head off. Sort of a boomerang, isn't it? You came up to my studio, old man, and unloaded some facts. Let me unload one right now. I'm with Brian. I think he's a brick and a jewel for sense. And you can go to thunder!"

And Kenny, with a gasping gurgle in his receiver ear, smiled sweetly into the telephone and hung up with Whitaker roaring his name. He was amazed, delighted and triumphant, uppermost in his mind the thought of Joan's peace of mind. No further need to worry over Donald.

He kissed his finger-tips to Ann who appeared in the doorway.

"Your ward," she said, "is toasting her toes by the sitting-room fire. Kenny, she's a dear!"

"As sweet," said Kenny proudly, "as an Irish smile!"

CHAPTER XXIX

THE STUDIO AGAIN

The night-watchman at the Holbein Club greeted the prodigal with a broad smile of welcome.

"Wonder, I says, to the new bell-hop, I do wonder where Mr. O'Neill's got to. Everybody's been wonderin'. Mr. Rittenhouse most of all," he added, stopping the elevator at Kenny's floor. "I heard him grumblin' just last night in the elevator to Mr. Fahr. Mr. Fahr seemed to feel that you were off with the heathen somewhere paintin' 'em all up into pictures."

Kenny found the studio in a soulless state of order and blamed it instantly upon Garry. Fifteen minutes later, gorgeous in his frayed oriental bathrobe and his Persian slippers, he banged on the wall and evoked a muffled shout of greeting. As usual Garry might or might not be in bed. Kenny's time values had not altered.

Garry came at once in bathrobe and slippers.

"Lord, Kenny," he exclaimed warmly, "I'm glad you're back and sane. But I'm mad as a wet hen!"

"At me? My dear Garry!"

"You didn't write, you know, after you said you would. You never do—"

"I telegraphed instead."

"Your telegram," reminded Garry, "said 'O.K. Kenny.' And I'm chuck full of curiosity and questions. Sit down. Every chair in the studio's on a furlough."

"So I see."

"You left the studio in something of a mess. Sid tried to straighten it out and nearly had brain fever. Got to babbling and wringing his hands and we sent for Haggerty. She went on an order bust for two days."

"The old shrew! I suppose everything in the place is under something."

He found cigarettes and a chair and settled back with an air of lazy comfort.

Garry made no attempt to disguise his impatience.

"Kenny," he said, "you're the limit. If I'd ever telephoned into your slumber and asked you to find four thousand ragged dollars and mail them to me, and if I'd said I'd accidentally acquired a ward and was bringing her back with me, you wouldn't sit there in patience and wait for facts. Mind, old dear, I want the truth. It's likely to be a lot queerer than anything you can make up."

Kenny sighed—and told the truth. Garry listened in amazement.

"Kenny," he said slowly, "you've roamed off before and gotten yourself into some extraordinary messes and I honestly thought that summer in China had taught you a lesson. But this tale of Adam Craig and the miser money is the king-pin of them all. You've absolutely got to house-clean that instinct for melodrama out of existence. It's a peril; and furthermore expensive."

"Don't rub it in," said Kenny. "Whatever you can think to say, I've already told myself. Though," he added pensively, "it's queer, Garry. Wherever I go, things begin to thicken up before I've had a chance to be at fault in any way. And I'm so darned sick of anticlimaxes."

"You keep yourself keyed up to such a pitch that anything normal's got to be an anticlimax! Think of you digging dots when you knew there wasn't any money! Think of you with a ward! Oh, my Lord!" finished Garry with a gasp. "It's incredible. It—it really is."

Kenny flushed and gnawed nervously at his lips. Could he tell Garry of Samhain?

"And think of you," said Garry, his voice changing, "salting the old man's fireplace with your own money so that his niece could come down here and study French and music! You wonderful, soft-hearted Irish lunatic! I love you for it!"

Kenny rose at once and began to bluster around the studio, damning Haggerty. There was something disturbingly warm and honest in Garry's eyes. Then with a sudden gesture of impatience he came back and his troubled glance begged for understanding.

"Garry," he blurted, "there's one thing that probably we shan't be telling people for a year at least. And that is—that I love this girl better than my life and I'm going to marry her."

He waited with a fierce hurt challenge in his eyes for irreverence and incredulity and even perhaps good-natured jeers, but Garry, sensing something big and unfamiliar, held out his hand. Kenny wrung it in passionate relief.

"What's my balance?" he demanded.

"I'm sorry I forgot that, Kenny. It's eight hundred and forty odd dollars."

"As usual," bristled Kenny, "they're lying."

Garry refused to discuss the point.

"And Brian, another Irish lunatic!" he marveled, shaking his head. "Did Max write you the name of the French woman?"

"Yes. 'Twas a Madame Morny. I've written her. Garry, darlin', where on earth did you find that inspired collection of green rags?"

"The bank managed somehow."

"Weren't they curious?"

"They were until I said the commission came from you. After that nobody asked anything."

Kenny went with him to the door, dreading the emptiness of the studio. He was a little homesick for the farm.

The order was irresistibly reminiscent of Brian, of the notebook and the struggle that had driven him forth, a penitent, upon the road. The fern was dead, like the first fever of his penance. The thought upset him. Then something drew him to the door of Brian's room and he peered in and closed it with a bang.

CHAPTER XXX

PLAYTIME

December found Joan with dark, happy eyes intent upon the rose-colored phantasmagoria of existence, her worriment past. Donald was safe with Brian. It hurt her a little that he did not write.

"I think, girleen," said Kenny, intuitional as always, "that he fears to write, thinking of course you are still at the farm and would try to tempt him back. And I haven't a doubt he's set his teeth and vowed not to come to you until he's made good." As indeed he had.

After that, save for a wistful moment now and then, she seemed content, trusting Brian.

Unhappiness lay behind her like a forgotten shadow. After the loneliness and the dreams and the hills, her playtime too had come as Donald's had come to him in Brian's world of spring; and life was whirling around her, brilliant, breathless, kaleidoscopic and altogether beautiful, a fantastic fairyland that kept her dazzled and delighted.

It had no shadows for her wondering eyes; the shadows lay behind her. New York with its shops where with Ann she had gasped and laughed and colored and stared into mirrors, its lights, its crowds, its theaters, its opera where Max Kreiling sang and left her with a sob in her heart, its amazing Bohemia of success of which Kenny was a part, seemed to her but a never-ending sparkle of romance and kindness. She spent unwearied hours in Ann's studio, masquerading in a sculptor's smock and staring at clay and marble with eyes of unbelief. And she tarried for amazed intervals in the studio upstairs where Margot Gilberte plied Cellini's art, embedding pennyweights of metal in hot pitch that, cooling, held it like a dark and shapeless hand while Margot sculptured elfin leaves and scrolls upon it. Curious things came to the jeweler's desk where Margot worked; jewels cut and uncut, soft-colored sea-pebbles, natural lumps of greenish copper, silver and gold and brass (to Margot's eye there were no baser metals) malachite and coral and New Zealand jade. Joan handled them all with gasps of reverence.

"And this, Margot? How green it is!"

"A peridot for a dewdrop in a leaf of gold. And there, Question-mark, are the pink tourmalines I propose to use for rosebuds in this necklace of silver leaves."

"And blue sapphires!"

"They are for pools of sea-water in some golden seaweed and the pearls are for buds in some cherry leaves."

"What an odd frail little tool, Margot!"

"I made it myself," said Margot. "And now, cherie, if you don't run along to Madame Morny, Kenny will scold me."

She delighted Madame Morny with her willingness to work. She delighted Kenny with her willingness to play. Nothing tired her. Together they roamed to the quaint little restaurants of Bohemia; the Italian table d'hotes where Kenny was inclined to twinkle at the youthful art students who affected pretentious ties, the quiet old German restaurant that once had been a church, Chinatown where you ate unskillfully with chopsticks upon a table of onyx, and the Turkish restaurant where everything, Sid said, was lamb.

"Garry found it," he insisted. "I didn't. I'm glad I didn't, though a lot of the Salmagundi men go over there and like it. The art students too. Forty cents. Proprietor's the real thing—he wears a fizz."

"Fuzz, darlin'," corrected Kenny gently.

"Fez!" sputtered Sid in disgust. "Fez, of course. Everything's got lamb in it, even the pastry and the coffee. I swear it has! I—I hate lamb. Didn't know the Turks went in for it so much, did you, Kenny? Jan computed a table of lamb percentages on the menu and I felt like bleating. 'Pon my word I did. Menu's got a glossary and needs it. Pilaf—that's rice. Lamb's something else. No, pilaf's lamb, and rice is something else. Oh, hanged if I know. Lamb's lamb no matter how you spell it."

"Come along with us," suggested Kenny. His kindliness of late had startled more than one, accustomed to his irresponsible caprices.

"Please do!" said Joan; and Sid, delighted, and amazed as always, repudiated at once his hatred of lamb. It was nourishing, he recalled at once with a brazen air of sincerity, and the Turks disguise it in amazingly enticing ways.

Joan laughed.

"Sid," she said, "you're a dear, blessed fibber and we want you with us."

Her poise and adaptability were startling. Her simplicity won them all. To the girls who lived in Ann's studio building she seemed all laughter and happiness and breathless eagerness to please.

"She's just herself," said Peggy Jarvis, who lived with Ann and smiled over the footlights each night in comedy that was comedy and to crowds that were crowds, "She doesn't know that half the world is posing."

Joan spent an afternoon in Peggy's dressing room during a matinee and came home with moist, excited eyes.

"Think, Peggy, think!" she exclaimed. "Once long ago that was my mother's life."

Peggy kissed her and rummaged for cigarettes. Joan's eyes rested upon her pretty face with troubled indulgence.

"Oh, Peggy," she pouted. "Why do you smoke?"

"Because," said Peggy honestly, "I like it. Does it shock you, dear?"

"It did at first," admitted Joan. "And even now I shouldn't care to smoke myself. But then when that old painter Kenny likes so came here with his wife, and her hair was so white and her face so kind, and she smoked like a chimney—"

"Joan!"

"She did," insisted Joan. "Well, then, Peggy, I just stayed awake that night and thought it all out. Peggy, do all painters' wives smoke? I mean—" she flushed and stammered.

Peggy's eyes were demure and roguish.

"You ridiculous child!" she said. "Who's the painter?"

Joan turned scarlet and bit her lip.

"And what, sweetheart," begged Peggy with ready tact, "did you think out?"

"If you smoke," said Joan, "because you really want to, Peggy, it's all right. But if a girl smokes just to—to appear startling and make men look at her, then it's all wrong!"

Peggy kissed her.

"Joan, dear," she said, "you've the most amazing intelligence in that small head that I ever met. Hum. If I'm not mistaken that's Kenny at the door. He never stops ringing until he's sure you know he's there."

Joan raced away to change her dress.

With excitement in her cheeks and eyes she was extraordinarily lovely. Kenny with difficulty kept his feet firmly upon the floor a yard away from her. Peggy laughed up at him, her piquant face impudent and understanding.

"Kenny," she said under her breath, "I suppose you know you're in love with your ward?"

Kenny had had his flare with Peggy; and he had come out of it with wounded vanity, somewhat baffled at Peggy's professed belief in the transiency of feminine love. After all, Peggy said pensively, she knew too many charming men to promise an indeterminate interval of concentration upon one. Kenny deemed such a viewpoint heretical and masculine; women were meant to be faithful.

Now he stared at the girl's saucy face with a startled flush.

"Peggy!" he said, "you little wretch!"

It was growing harder day by day to keep his love a secret.

Joan's first dance at the Holbein Club brought a train of complications.

Ann, interpretative, dressed her in snow-white tulle with here and there a glint of silver. The soft full skirt floated out above her silver slippers like a cloud, but little whiter than her throat and arms. Peggy and Ann never told the tale of her rebellion or her frantic wail:

"Oh, Peggy, Peggy! I can't go. They forgot the sleeves."

She came down the stairway like a flower, but her eyes were wistful and troubled.

"Kenny, should I?"

"Should you what, dear?"

"Dance when—when Uncle—"

"If your heart is glad and your feet want to dance, mavourneen," said Kenny gently, "then no conventional pretense of mourning shall stop them. You were kind and merciful while he lived. Even he, dear, would not ask more."

"If my Victrola arm has been winding in vain while you two practiced half the floor off the studio," put in Ann, "I shall be offended. I dreamed last night that I was an organ-grinder teaching Sid to dance."

Joan laughed and kissed her.

The Holbein Club accepted her with a hum of delight.

"She *is* beautiful!" said Jan.

"Beautiful, of course," said Somebody. "Any girl in Kenny's life would be beautiful or she wouldn't be there."

As for Kenny, his path was pleasant, as it always was. If a waving arm was not bidding for his attention, it was a laughing hail or a hearty hand upon his shoulder. His bright dark face sparkled with the zest of popularity.

Joan thought him as care-free as a boy.

"We dance in the club gallery," he told her, smiling at the look of wonder in her eyes.

"And the paintings and sculpture?"

"A members' exhibition. The sculptured lion staring from his pedestal at us is Jan's. Look at the superb muscle play of his flank! The midsummer woods—see, how well the lad has painted *air*!—is Garry's. And my pine picture's over there."

"And Sid?"

Kenny danced her the length of the gallery. A white line of sculpture gleamed on either side behind a rail of brass.

"Down here," he said. "I saved it for the last. The beggar's painted—me!"

It was Kenny in a painter's smock intent upon a palette, vividly, whimsically, delightfully Kenny. There was tenderness and sympathy in Sid's portrayal.

Joan clung to his hand in delight.

And was it all Bohemia, she asked.

Ah! admitted Kenny twinkling, there you had him. Bohemia, he fancied, was always wherever you yourself were not. The men and women who did big things were too busy for picturesque posing. Bohemia, as legend read it, had to do with rags and dreams and ambition without effort, a shabby, down-at-heel pretension that glittered without gratifying. The Bohemians of to-day were the failures of to-morrow. And the crowd who lived at the Holbein Club lived, loved, worked and died much in the fashion of less gifted folk. If there was a Bohemia of success, however, it danced here to-night.

But, girleen, the music was urging! And who could resist the sweet wild delirium of a violin's call? Certainly not an Irishman intent upon a moonbeam imprisoned in a girl's bright hair. But one sound sweeter!

"And that?" asked Joan as they glided away again among the dancers.

Kenny threw back his head and his eyes laughed.

"A robin singing in a blackthorn!"

Joan smiled at the boyish sparkle of his face. He was so charmingly, so irresponsibly young and gay.

His Bohemia of success she found a startling triumph.

"Joan's horribly disturbed," Ann telephoned in the morning. "As her guardian you'll have to settle a number of infatuated young men. The telephone's been ringing all morning. I think it's a case of 'The line forms on the right, gentlemen, on the right!'"

Kenny faced the problem with his fingers in his hair.

"Who's bothering her?" he demanded bluntly.

"The Art Students' League," said Ann demurely, "the Federation of Arts, National Society of Portrait Painters, Architectural League, Watercolor Society, Authors' League and the Prince who thinks he's a playwright."

"He's a piece of cheese!" said Kenny in intense disgust. "What did Joan think of him?"

"She said she didn't like him nearly so well as the art student who plays a banjo in the orchestra because he needs the money. Peggy knows him."

"That was wholesome," admitted Kenny. "But I don't think much of him either. He has absolutely no right when he's playing a banjo commercially to recognize the girls on the floor. I'll be over to lunch."

It was a nerve-racking hour for Ann. Kenny, pensive, ate but little. He seemed very sorry for himself and eyed Joan with melancholy tenderness. When at last the dreadful subject was broached, Ann stoutly defended everybody.

Frantic, Kenny pushed back his plate and began to stride around.

"Sit down," said Ann. "You're making everybody nervous. Of course you don't blame Joan. And of course you can't blame—"

"I'm not blaming anybody," sputtered Kenny. "That club is a hot-bed of shallow-minded, impressionable, fickle-minded boobs. I can see plainly that we'll have to be married to-day. To-morrow at the latest."

"Kenny, please!" said Joan and the conflict began.

Finding the year still strongly in her mind, he surrendered with a sigh, hurt and unhappy, remembering his vow that Joan's happiness should be the religion of his love.

"Oh, you dear foolish people!" cried Ann in despair. "Why don't you announce your engagement in the Times and discourage the line once and for all?"

"Of course!" said Kenny and looked at Joan.

"I shouldn't mind at all," said Joan, coloring.

Whereat Kenny called up the Times office, and the Holbein Club went mad with delight. Jan, without meaning to, got very drunk and shocked himself, and Margot made the ring. She did not know why Kenny wanted the golden circlet barred crosswise like a frail ladder. Nor why he insisted upon a cluster of wistaria set in amethysts.

Even then misgivings sent him to Ann in a panic of conscience.

"Am I ungenerous?" he demanded. "Perhaps Joan should have had a year of utter freedom. You know what I mean, Ann. To come and go as she pleases and with whom she pleases. She's so young." He flushed.

"Joan wouldn't have it different," said Ann, touched by the boyish wistfulness of his eyes. "She clings to you. And she's as shy and unspoiled as the day you brought her here. This flurry of admiration to her means nothing at all. She's unhappy with strangers."

Kenny knew it was true and marveled.

"I would like to be generous," he admitted with an effort. "But I can't. It's the simple truth, Ann, I can't. Even the thought of her liking other men—bothers me."

December was fated to hold for him another startling anticlimax. It came one snowy morning when he had slept even later than usual, dreaming of an iridescent balloon that climbed higher and higher with Joan peeping radiantly over the edge until at the peal of the telephone bell it disappeared entirely.

Joan's voice instantly dispelled his irritation.

"Mavourneen!" he exclaimed. "Up already! And you danced half the night."

"It's eleven o'clock," said Joan. "Besides, I couldn't sleep. I've been thinking. Remember, Kenny, when you read the will and I said that Donald should have the farm?"

"Yes," said Kenny, somewhat mystified. "I remember."

"If he's going to study and work his way through college, I don't think he'd want it, do you?"

"No, dear, I doubt if he would. What's in your mind, girleen?"

"Oh, I'm so glad you think so too! Kenny—"

"Yes?"

"Do you know Jan's cousin, the pretty girl who's a model? I know that doesn't sound at all as if it had anything to do with the farm but it has. Jan's cousin said—I hardly know how to tell you, Kenny. I don't think I like telephones. If I could see your face—"

"I'm wearing my guardian's face!"

"Oh!"

"And evidently it isn't popular."

"I like you—different. Jan's cousin said that she could get me a great deal of work if I wanted it—posing for head and shoulders—"

"Joan!"

"Oh, dear!" wailed Joan. "That was a guardian's voice. Please wait, Kenny."

"I'm waiting."

"I'm going to keep the farm and give Don the rest of the four thousand dollars. … Did you say anything, Kenny?"

"No. … No, I was just clearing my throat."

"I've only spent a little of it yet. From now on I want to earn my living like Peggy and Ann and Margot and all the others. I'll still have plenty of time to study and practice. I wonder I didn't think of it before. It was selfish when I had the farm and Don not even mentioned in the will. I suppose I didn't think of it because here things seem to happen so—so fast. I'm always in a whirl."

"Yes," said Kenny sincerely. "Things do happen fast."

She waited his approval and was the first to speak, a wondering hint of reproach in her voice.

"Kenny, please say something!"

"To be truthful, dear," said Kenny in a queer voice, "you've taken my breath away. I'm thinking—just thinking."

"It's fair—"

"Yes, dear, it's fair enough."

"You don't disapprove? Oh, I hope you won't. It will make me so happy to help Don through college."

"It will make you happy!" said Kenny and sighed.

"Ann had so many, many things to say against it. She said she was trying to see it all with your eyes—as a guardian. But I told her you're hardly ever—a guardian. And your Bohemia is democratic, isn't it? And painters are respectable and worthy men and nothing like so flighty as you read. You've said so yourself. And I like to work. And there are so many charming girls who are models and Jan's cousin is a Vassar girl—" In her eagerness to convince him she lost her breath.

"I'll come for you at Madame Morny's at four," Kenny told her, sick at heart. "And then, dear, I'll tell you exactly what I think."

And when he had rung off, he sat down weakly and laughed, his laugh unmusical and sad. The dreadful, dreadful irony of it! How could he deny her? How *could* he? He who had surrounded her with women friends, talented and independent, who believed in the gospel of work! He liked her generosity. He liked her willingness to work. He blessed the dear, selfless instincts of her heart, his eyes moist and tender. And yet … and yet! Kenny laughed again. He had hidden his own money in the fireplace to send through college a runaway youth he had never seen!

On the way home from Madame Morny's in a taxi, for the snow had become a blizzard, he made one final desperate effort to break her resolution. It was futile. Again she was passionately eager to please him. Again he found it a problem that involved her happiness and peace of mind. Again, with his heart sore, be kissed her and surrendered to her wishes with a sigh.

But he found the work for her himself with the older painters.

"Kenny, I'm so glad you asked me to bring mother's trunks with me," Joan told him. "Aranyi has asked me to pose in the gold brocade."

Something sharp stabbed at Kenny's heart.

"I meant them," he said with a sigh, "for costume dances, but Aranyi paints the texture of things with marvelous skill."

By the end of the month Joan's work day was full and he was seeing her less than he had, save at

night. Garry begged her to pose for him, carried his case to Kenny and met with blank refusal.

"I'm sorry, old man," Kenny finished inexorably, "but nothing under forty need apply. You, my son, are particularly flighty and fickle. Just now you happen to be raving about Peggy, but every pretty face, I've noticed, makes you forget the one before."

And Garry, who had been trying to marry Peggy for a year and was by no means as uncertain and mercurial in his affections as Kenny would have him believe, stared with eyes intelligent and reminiscent.

"Well," he said softly, "I'll be jiggered. That's the limit!"

"Be jiggered!" Kenny told him shortly. "And have done with it."

Garry raised his eyebrows and departed. And Kenny, reverting to one of his old frantic minutes, walked the floor. He had accepted portrait commissions that would keep him busy for months; for the ragged money he had hidden in the fireplace had made his need of work imperative. Otherwise he himself could have painted Joan in the gold brocade and in all the others.

What had the money in the fireplace done for him? It had doomed him to work apart while other men painted the golden shadows in her hair.

CHAPTER XXXI

FATE STABS

March came to Kenny and found his studio with its haunting odor of coffee and cigarettes, his brushes, his head and his heart, furiously at work. He was giving himself up to love and labor with a Celtic intensity that Garry found appalling. He planned endlessly to one purpose: Joan's happiness, Joan's pleasure, Joan's future with him. The memory of the ragged money laid aside for Don he dismissed with a wry smile, gritting his teeth. What mattered in the face of the splendid fact that he was so joyously, so recklessly, so absurdly happy?

His life, with its deadly singleness of purpose, should have been simple. It attained a complexity at times at which he marveled. An inclination to blurt out the truth with panicky abruptness when he wanted to lie, plunged him into more than one predicament.

"I'm always explaining to somebody," he complained bitterly to Garry, "why I tell the truth—"

"You told Kenneth his dancing urchin was rotten—"

"It was," insisted Kenny. "Garry, why is truth always unpleasant? Why can't it be as romantic and agreeable as the things you want to say?"

"Why," countered Garry, "isn't peace as romantic as war? Ask somebody who knows. I don't."

He stared curiously at Kenny and shook his head. A heavy hand with the truth, that Irishman; and about as understandable in these splendid, tender days of his idiocy and bliss, as March wind, comets or star-dust. His passion for truth was literally a passion, relentless and exact. He worked harder. His steadiness, as Jan said, was grim and conscious and a thing of terror to anything in his path. He wrestled with his check book and managed somehow to keep his studio in order. And he was kinder. Fahr, in particular, remarked it; and Fahr, worshipping Kenny, had sputtered and endured the brunt of many tempests.

"But, Garry," he confided, round-eyed and apprehensive, "honest Injun, I don't think he ought to bottle up his temper that way. Sometimes I can almost see him swelling up and then when he speaks and I'm waiting for an Irish roar, his voice is so quiet and pleasant that I feel queer. I—I swear I do. Damn it all, I'm liking him more every day."

"So am I," said Garry honestly. "But—"

"But what?"

"I wish he'd be less turbulently happy."

"Let him," said Sid sagely, "Darn few can."

"A pendulum," reminded Garry, "swings both ways. And he's an extremist. If he'd just plant his two feet solidly on the ground and get his head out of the clouds. He's got to do it sometime."

"Oh, hell," said Sid. "Give him time. If that girl was going to marry me I'd climb up a few air-steps

myself and stick my head into any old cloud."

"Good old Sid!" said Garry affectionately. "You'd be sure to hit your head on a star and then you'd be amazed and—"

"Oh, you go to thunder!" blustered Sid.

By now Kenny's Bohemia was rushing through its yearly cycle of costume dances. Motley groups emerged at times from Ann's castle and departed in taxis.

"And Gawd knows where," said Mrs. Ryan from the third floor front of the tenement that faced the street. "They're a wild bunch and my Cassie'll never travel wid 'em. Last week the architeks rigged up somethin' fierce and danced in 'the streets of Paris,' wid bullyvard cafes, they called 'em, built into the dance hall, an actress singin' the Marseillaise in a flag, and a Roosian hussy dancin' in boots. And Mr. O'Neill, God save him for a pleasant gentleman though a bit wild in the eye, took my Dinny up to be a gamin. Gay-min. I thought myself he said a 'gay mon' and Dinny's a bit young; but I found he meant him to peddle cigarettes about among the tables."

In the quaint old gowns that were delighting the older painters, Joan glided through the shifting blare and color unaware of the eyes that watched and liked her. Not so Kenny.

He knew who stared and smiled and he knew who stared too long. He was inordinately proud of her.

"Kenny, please!" begged Garry. "Let me paint her. I'm going to California in April and I won't have another chance. I won't be back until fall."

"My son—" began Kenny wearily. Then he smiled. "Oh, go ahead, Garry, darlin'. I'll not be mindin' a bit."

And Garry curiously enough caught the tantalizing charm of her sweetness that had baffled many an older and wiser man.

Shadows had no part in the wonder of Kenny's winter, but an inclination to forget his quarrel with Brian and his flare of penance, violent and incomplete—for he had never reached the longed-for grail of his son's forgiveness—troubled him vaguely. In spasmodic moments of remorse he read his notebook, tremendously buoyed up by an augmenting consciousness of evolution. Faint inner voices warned him at times not to misinterpret his exultant happiness in terms of infallibility and when they called to him he had his moments of humility and panic.

In one of them he tried to coax the fern back to life; once with an alarming air of energy and importance, he departed in a taxi and bought a great many things for Brian's room; once when miraculously the bank and he agreed for a brief period upon his balance, he succumbed to a mathematical fit of uplift and conscience, dashed off a bewildering number of checks and left the overladen slate of his credit unmarked by even an I.O.U. His brilliant air of calm and satisfaction thereafter was distinctly noticeable.

On the whole he was much too happy to be lonely or introspective. Brian's absence and his splendid, sacrificial freak of service, had been the price of Joan's content and the welfare of her brother.

Whitaker, journalism and God's green world of spring he had chosen jealously to resent. The thought of Donald West and a dim conviction of quarry hardships filled him with a new sense of solidarity in Brian and a passionate respect. The current of his affection for his son was subtly altering. It was no longer careless and frenzied and sentimental. Nor was it selfish. Something big and abiding had sprung up out of the ashes of his penance.

By the end of March, with a record-breaking period of work behind him and a furore of notoriety over his striking portrait of a famous beauty compelling him to a radiant admission of success, Kenny found himself lulled into the self-respecting quietude he craved.

Days back self-confidence had come to him in Hannah's kitchen and Adam Craig, in the course of time, had crushed it out with a keen and understanding leer. Later it had returned with Adam's death, and the weary voice of Doctor Cole had shattered it.

So now on a March night of wind and hail—and this time by telephone after much tedious trouble with the wire, Doctor Cole's voice, tired, sorrowful and kind, came stabbing intrusively into his full-blown equanimity with a message of terror.

"Mr. O'Neill—"

"Yes."

"This is Doctor Cole of Briston, Pennsylvania."

Kenny stiffened. He had never quite forgiven the doctor for that bleak, anticlimacteric morning when he had driven dazedly away with Nellie. Adjectives, like a man's laughter, were to him an irrefutable test. With one you could definitely prefigure a man's degree of refinement; with the other

the aesthetic color of his soul. And gray was no color for any mortal's soul.

"Yes?"

"Mr. O'Neill," came the kind, tired voice, "I'm sorry, sorrier than I can tell. I've bad news for you. There has been an accident, a quarry explosion, and your son is badly injured."

A hot quiver swept through Kenny's body, ended at his face in a stinging rush of blood and left him icy cold.

"Brian!"

"Yes. ... Are you there, Mr. O'Neill?"

"Yes. ... Yes, I am here. Doctor... How—badly?"

"He is—well, conscious. I can hardly say more," owned the doctor. "Thank God he's young and strong. There are no developed symptoms of fracture yet but his skull—"

"Fracture! Skull!"

"There's a chance. Contusion now merely and a swollen condition. The soft parts are unbroken and that makes an accurate diagnosis difficult, but I must warn you that there is an immediate risk to his life from shock and perhaps compression—"

"Oh, my God!" said Kenny, his eyes wet.

"You see, Mr. O'Neill," said the doctor sadly, "there may be depressed fragments of bone or effused blood. We are watching closely. But I think you had better come to him at once. There is a possibility—"

But there were some things that even the little doctor could not say.

"Still there, Mr. O'Neill?" he asked a little later.

"Yes. Where is Brian now?"

"In a quarry shack on what we call up here the Finlake mountain."

"Finlake mountain!"

"Yes, barely eighteen miles across the valley from the farm. They couldn't find a doctor. Carson is nearer but he was out. Has a widely scattered farm practice like my own and Don, frantic with terror, telephoned to me. We've done everything possible for him, Mr. O'Neill, but his pulse is pretty feeble and it's difficult to rouse him. Sensibility of course is blunted. Bound to be—"

"I will be there," said Kenny, "as soon—as soon as it is possible. There are but three north-bound trains at Briston?"

"Morning—eight-ten. Noon, one-twenty-nine and night, seven-fifteen. But don't get off at Briston, Mr. O'Neill. Finlake, fifteen miles on, is nearer—"

"I can not possibly make the morning train. The changes make the trip long. Twelve hours... God!"

"I myself will meet you at Finlake. It's three miles farther to the quarry. If you are not on the noon train I will meet the night—"

"I—I cannot thank you, Doctor Cole." Kenny hung up, unaware that the doctor was adding further detail.

Almost at once he unhooked the receiver and summoned the club central. Afterward Pietro, who took his turn at the switchboard when the day operator departed, spoke of the quiet curtness of his voice.

"Pietro? Mr. O'Neill speaking. I want you, at once, to look up the earliest connecting train with Finlake, Pennsylvania, any road."

"Yes, sir," began Pietro. "What—" but the receiver had clicked into place.

Kenny stared with a shudder at the withered fern, his face as white as chalk.

A tearing hand seemed clinging to his brain.

In the face of this grief-stricken terror that quaked and burned in his soul, etching unforgettable scars, the recollection of his unsteady spurts of penance rose to mock him with their artificiality. His remorse had been but a pale, theatric spree! And now in this forgetful winter of his love, Fate had decoyed him into optimistic quietude only to thrust savagely and deep. Remorse in the raw! Was it punishment—punishment for the farcical penitent on the highway who had smiled into a woman's soft eyes, forgetting—

He answered Pietro's ring with a throbbing sense of confusion in his forehead.

The best connecting train and the earliest left the Pennsylvania Terminal at eleven. It was now but five. How could he wait?

"Pietro," he said, "give me now Doctor Barrington's office. And tell the operator to put me through to his private wire. It's urgent. I do not want the nurse in the anteroom. When you ring for me I want Dr. Barrington ready at the other end and I want you yourself, Pietro, to be sure he's there."

Pietro, obeyed, amazed and loyal.

"Frank?" Hot relief surged in Kenny's heart at the chance ease of connection. "Kenny speaking."

"Hello, Kenny. Nothing doing for me tonight, old man. I've got to sleep."

"I need you, Frank. Brian has been injured—badly—in a quarry explosion."

"Kenny!"

"A chance of skull fracture," said Kenny steadily. "That means?"

"A possible operation."

"Can you leave with me at eleven o'clock to-night, Pennsylvania Terminal? It will mean at least two days. He's at Finlake, Pennsylvania, barely conscious—in the hands of a country doctor."

The brilliant industrious young surgeon on the other end gasped and whistled. He worked and played at heavy pressure.

"Kenny, old man," he said, "nothing is impossible. Almost this is. But it's you and Brian and that's enough, I'll meet you at quarter of eleven. I'll go—thoroughly prepared. Do you feel like telling me more?"

"No."

Two receivers clicked and Kenny, remembering that he could not definitely locate Joan until six, felt the tautness of his control slip dangerously.

Eleven o'clock... How could he wait? He paced the floor, his mind in its chaotic desperation, numb and inelastic. With his glance upon the psaltery stick, a dim notion of accounting filtered curiously into his mind and became obsessional. He went shaking to Brian's room and put the key of the chiffonier in his pocket. Thank God the studio was in order, save a chair or two. Brian ... would ... be ... pleased. Kenny stared at the withered fern and blinked. An augury? God forbid! Then he flung the bill-file with its heterogeneous collection of receipted I.O.U.'s into his bulging suit case and called up Simon Meyer.

"Simon," he said, "whatever I happen to have there—there's a shotgun, I know, and a tennis racket and some fishing rods. ... The rest for the moment I can't recall... I want you to put all of it in a bundle and send it here at once by special messenger. I have the tickets here... I'll have them ready... Yes, I'll give him a check... No, Simon, it won't be certified and he'll take it as it is."

He rang off and searched impatiently for pawn tickets. Simon's messenger arrived and, strained and hostile, Kenny looked over the contents of the bundle and wrote a check.

Alone in the studio again, he flung up a window, his mind pushing ahead to eleven o'clock. It seemed to him then that he could not possibly wait and go on fighting for his self-control. A gust of sleet and hail swept in with a pattering sound upon the floor. Its cold, stinging contact with his face refreshed him. Kenny's brain cleared. He gulped and gasped. Garry's car! He would not wait.

"Frank," he telephoned after an unavailing interval of search for Garry, "if you're willing we'll motor to Finlake in Garry's car. He'll not be mindin'. I borrow it often. It's a bad night of course—but we could start now. And we can make time on the road. It's barely two hundred and fifty miles but the branch roads and changes make unendurable delay. Shall I come for you in half an hour?"

Again Barrington gasped. Again he whistled. "Make it three quarters," he said, "and I think I can swing it."

"You're a jewel for sense," Kenny told him, a passionate note of gratitude in his voice. "I love you for it."

He called Ann's studio at six. Joan had not returned. Ann took the message, startled and sympathetic.

"I'll wire her in the morning," he said and, hanging up, found that Sidney Fahr had come in. He stood with his back against the door, his round face blank with terror.

"Kenny," he stammered, "I—I couldn't help hearing." The hot sympathy he could not bring himself to utter, flamed desperately in his face—almost to the ruin of Kenny's iron control. "I—I—I can do

something, can't I, Kenny?"

"Yes, Sid, darlin', you can," said Kenny gently. "I'm taking Garry's car. You can square me with him."

"I—I'd even thrash him," mumbled Sid.

"Then if you will I'd like you to get in touch with Westcott's wife and tell her. I'm painting her portrait. She comes to-morrow at ten. Sid, could you—could you clean off those two chairs?"

Sid fell upon the nearest chair with fearful energy. At the table Kenny hurriedly wrote a check.

"And to-morrow I want you to deposit this to Brian's account. I'm paying back—what I owe him." His mouth worked.

"Oh, Sid!" he said, his face scarlet.

"Now, now, now, Kenny," choked the little painter, winking and making horrible faces at the littered chair, "don't you go to taking on. Don't you do it. I'll call up Westcott. The old gladiator!" Somehow he turned his sniffle to a snort. "What in thunder does she want to be painted for anyway? She's got a nose like a triangle and the composition of her face is all wrong."

He blinked away the wetness on his lashes and wondered why, with every other chair in the studio clear, Kenny should make a point of the littered two. But he did not ask. Instead he entered upon a period of fruitless and agitated trotting that lasted until Kenny came hack from the garage with Garry's car. Then Sid packed him in, made one last terrible face and bolted across the sidewalk for the door.

Beyond the threshold he bolted for a telephone.

"Jan," he said in shocked tones, "I want you to come down to the bar and watch me. I—I've made up my mind to get drunk. I've got to." He gulped. "I'll tell you why when you come down."

"Oh, fiddlesticks!" said Jan in a bored voice. "Go down to the grill and eat something. And order me an English mutton chop and some macaroni. I'll be down to dinner in five minutes."

Sid aggrievedly obeyed.

CHAPTER XXXII

ON FINLAKE MOUNTAIN

Frank Barrington was to tell wryly in the grillroom of that night-ride in the sleety wind through a polar world of ghostly, ice-hung trees. Every flying rod of the sleazy road he knew was a peril. Even the chains failed at times to grip. For eight hours the whir of the motor and the tearing sound of the wind blared in his ears. For eight hours he marveled at the silence and efficiency of the muffled driver beside him who had apparently said all he intended to say upon the ferry. He drove even faster than Frank had anticipated; and he drove with more care, as if, defiantly, he feared the traps of an evil destiny to keep him from his goal. At times he turned the swiveled searchlight upon a road-sign and evoked a glistening play of silver on the trees. Once, cursing, he changed a tire; once the car skidded dangerously in a circle but to Frank his air of confidence was hypnotically convincing. The final stretch of the journey became a dim and frosty blur of sleety trees.

At Finlake they began to climb. It was after three when the headlights blazed upon the quarry.

"I wired the doctor to wait," said Kenny. "He knows you're with me."

"We leave the car here?"

"We'll have to." He turned his searchlight on the cliff ahead. "There's a path yonder."

"And which shack, I wonder?"

"There's a light in only one."

Frank worked his stiffened face to relieve the feeling of cold contorted rubber and followed Kenny up the path. Light glimmered dimly through the jungle of frost upon the shack window. Fronded whitely by the sleet, the panes loomed out of the dark like an incandescent series of camera plates, bizarre and oriental. Frank shivered in the wind.

Doctor Cole opened the door. Beyond in the rude room of the shack a lamp flared smokily.

"Brian?" said Kenny, his color gone.

"Why," said Doctor Cole, "his pulse is a lot stronger, Mr. O'Neill, and he complains now of pain—"

"That means?"

"It means, Kenny," said Frank Barrington, "that he has passed on normally to the stage of reaction." But his keen, intelligent eyes sought Doctor Cole with a furtive lifting of his brows and asked a question.

"Not a sign," said the little doctor gladly. "If anything he's a shade too wide awake. And irritable. I've been setting his leg—"

Kenny wheeled fiercely.

"His leg!" he said. "His leg!"

"I'm sorry," stammered the doctor. "I—I quite forgot you didn't know. … Broken between the knee and the hip," he added, turning to Barrington. "I thought it merely paresis of the muscles until—"

"Where is he?" put in Kenny sharply. "What room?"

"There are only two rooms here," said Doctor Cole. "The stairway's yonder."

"Just a minute, Kenny." Frank checked him with a gesture. "I'm going up first with Doctor Cole."

Kenny groaned.

"Sit down," said Frank kindly. "Where's some brandy? Thank you, Doctor. Now, Kenny, listen, please. The first risk to Brian's life is past. I mean death from shock. He's not drowsy and he's feeling pain. His leg, in the face of other possibilities, is merely painful. But I must look at his head—"

"Frank, darlin'," said Kenny patiently, "I brought you up here to order us all around. Go to it."

He flung himself into a chair by the stove and drowsing after a while in a reactive sweep of exhaustion, awakened with a terrified jerk. A boy was banking the red-hot stove, his white face like and yet unlike—Joan's.

"Mr. O'Neill," he blurted with a boyish sob, "I—I did it. I was driving the mule-cart up the path. Grogan told me not to but I—I coaxed Tony. And when some earth crumbled ahead I jerked back—too quickly—and scared the mule. I've got to tell somebody. I've got to… And nobody listens—"

"Tell me the rest," said Kenny wanly. "I've been wonderin'."

"You see, Mr. O'Neill," he gulped, his eyes dark with grief and horror, "the mule went back upon his haunches and drove the cart against a boulder. It came out and crashed over the ledge and through the roof of the dynamite shack—"

"God!" In that vivid moment of his picturing, Kenny wondered why he should think of bouillon cups crashing loudly on a roof.

"And the other men were only scratched. A while ago—when Brian sent for me—he thought of it through all his pain—"

"He would," said Kenny.

"I—I wanted to kill myself."

"Oh, nonsense," said Kenny kindly.

Don flung his arm across his eyes and sobbed aloud.

"Oh," he choked, "if someone would only swear at me!"

"I—I'd like to," said Kenny wryly, "for your sake and for my own, but I'm all—in."

He stared dully at the fire until the stair creaked and Frank came in with Doctor Cole.

"There isn't yet," Frank told him, "a single pressure symptom that I consider alarming and Doctor Cole has done wonders with his leg. But any emotional excitement is a danger. Three minutes, old man." He followed Kenny up the stairway, watch in hand.

The raftered room was dim and quiet. Kenny sickened at the faint odor of antiseptics and softly closed the door.

Brian opened his eyes.

"Kenny, old dear," he said softly, "all these doctors are boobs. Frank in particular is an awful ass. I told him so. He's loaded with fool questions. One look at the Irish face of you is worth them all."

Kenny, staring at the pallid face upon the pillow, blinked and smiled.

"Frank told me you drove up here through the sleet," marveled Brian, clinging to his hand. "A god-forsaken spot! I'm sorry—"

"Three minutes!" warned Frank Barrington at the door. He knew Kenny much too well to trust him further.

And Kenny made a wry face and departed—with torture in his throat. His voice had failed him utterly.

A sleety dawn was graying at the windows.

"Bed!" commanded Barrington briefly.

"Doctor Cole has found another shack. He's waiting for you."

"And you?"

"I'll sleep to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXXIII

IN THE SPAN OF A DAY

Kenny slept heavily until three that afternoon. Don wakened him.

"My sister is here," he said.

"Joan!"

Don stared a little at his quick, astonished warmth.

"She wired Doctor Cole," he said, "and went to the farm. He brought her back with him at noon."

"The heart of her! I might have known. And Brian?"

Brian, it seemed, was wakeful and nervous, his pain intense. The pressure symptoms had not advanced.

"Head's better," Don finished. "They've watched him like a hawk. But they're letting up a bit now —"

"And Dr. Barrington?"

"Asleep downstairs."

"Here?"

"Yes. We found another cot. The car's in Grogan's shed."

From the quarry below came the rumble of a blast.

"Would you think—" he demanded, but the futility of his protest made him dumb.

"The world keeps on going," said Kenny. He dressed hurriedly.

"Women," commented Don gloomily, following him down the stairs, "are queer. My sister wept all over me. As if I hadn't had enough shocks—"

He caught his breath and stumbled. In the room below Barrington stirred.

"Quiet, Don!" warned Kenny, sensing the tears of heartbreak that quivered on his lashes. He read the boy's hot heart with a renewed shock of understanding; they were namelessly akin.

Cold sunlight lay upon the cluster of shacks. The wind that bore the rumble of the quarry upward was sharp and gusty and laden with stinging particles of grit. A group of Italian women, chattering and gesticulating in, apparently, unheeded unison, lingered near the shack where Brian lay, agonizingly conscious of nerve and body, irritably weary of the inevitable doctor at his bedside. Kenny charged them with a look of indignation and shooed them to retreat in maledictory Italian.

Inside Joan was busy at the stove.

Kenny caught her hands, protesting, praising, thanking in a breath, and Don, regarding them with a look of frank and bitter comprehension, moved off toward the window with all a boy's disgust. In the span of a day he had learned and suffered over-much. Grogan's world of drills and noise down there was heartless and insistent. … It went on and on, puffing, drilling, sorting rattling stone. Up here in the shack was the lunacy of heart-things apart from him. The thought filled him with jealous anger. And upstairs— He wheeled and glared, fighting down the agony in his throat. Kenny was moving toward the stairway.

"Mr. O'Neill," barked Don, "Dr. Barrington particularly said you—you were not to go up there. He said that Brian's got to have the—the quiet kind around—"

Joan's quick stare of reproach brought the color to his face.

"I—I beg your pardon, Mr. O'Neill," he blurted. "He said—he said he must have quiet."

"It's all right," said Kenny ruefully. "Quite all right. You've been up?" he added quietly.

Don dug his toe into the floor and a hot flush suffused his forehead.

"To tell you the truth," he said with some annoyance, "Doctor Barrington wouldn't let me in. He seems to be able to manage a good many things at once."

"Ah!" said Kenny.

"We must find still another cot," said Joan, pouring coffee at the stove.

So in the dark hours of nervous unrestraint that marked for Don and Kenny that lagging period of terror and suspense, Joan stepped to the helm and steered. And there was need of steering.

Chaos would have reigned without it.

CHAPTER XXXIV

A FACE

Vagueness lay for Brian in that shack room where the noise of forest trees mourned always at the window. Only pain was sharp … colossal, rearing misshapen out of the blur induced by an awful weakness. Sleep wrenched him for horrible dreaming minutes from his world of pain. Pain wrenched him back. At times a mammoth terror lay in his soul, undefined yet grotesquely positive, as if, pushing back, his consciousness foresaw that horrific catastrophe of noise and belching terror, and waited, unable to sense any of its details save the single one of personal tragedy and pain. There were cramped minutes when the rafters of the peaked roof seemed pressing down upon him … and minutes of a diffused reaching out when the world, torn by internal explosion, seemed flying away from him in fragments, even walls receding from his cot which stayed, by a miracle, alone upon a wind-swept moor.

Intervals were an eternity. Familiarity with the detail of the room engendered frantic loathing. His brain conned over the faded colors in the rag rug and encountered the unchangeable, bayonet-like crack in the mirror with nervous fury. No peace came with the darkness. Each familiar thing persisted, looming clearer to his tired mind by the very effort his straining eyes made to reach it. There was the table clogged with doctors' litter … and there the other cot where Frank pretended to sleep and kept his vigil … there the chair … and there the dab of yellow in the rug that the sun struck into faded gayety in the morning … and there the crack across the mirror, the wriggling, distorted, foolish crack that seemed alive for all its sameness. And there was always the noise of wind which became a corollary of his pain, pulsing with it, never quiet, an overtone that tragically would not yield.

Into the blur of wind and weakness and pain came two miracles—a red geranium peering out of the dusk of the room like a glowing coal, unfamiliar and therefore a delight—a bit of velvet laughter in the drab that caught his whole attention … the other a face. The face came first in a cloud of flower-spotted purple that he knew clearly was in some way related to the hypodermic needle Frank had plunged into his arm while the sunset still lay painted on the window. … It took form in the purple like a pansy—that face—grew sweet and vivid and very real. Mercifully its loveliness was changeable, losing its pansy purples and gaining glints of gold … becoming less a pansy … more a face flower-like with compassion.

"And now?" wondered Brian when the face came again.

"It is morning," said Joan.

At the sound of her voice there came within him an extraordinary fusing, at once a pain and a delight … fragments of memory … a moonbeam … tears … the crackle of a fire … a quarry mist … the

glory of stars … a meaning … a motive that startled and defied him.

"There should be moonlight on your hair," said Brian, drifting slowly back to a knowledge of reality and pain.

"Moonlight?"

"You are Joan."

"Yes. At least until Doctor Cole finds someone else, I am at times your nurse. The pain, Brian?" She bent over him, straightening a pillow, touching his forehead with cool, questioning fingers.

"Not worse," said Brian.

"I am glad."

"There was a purple cloud," he said, frowning.

"The drug. Doctor Barrington wanted you to sleep."

"And the geranium?" His eyes sought it with relief.

"Kenny found it. Grogan's wife had it in her window. I think he must have bullied her a little—"

"Bless him! … Where's the mirror?"

"Downstairs. I'm sleeping there."

"Thank God!" He closed his eyes, his color ebbing. "This plaster cast," he apologized, "is like a suit of armor. It bothers me."

"Poor fellow! … Can you eat?"

"Not—yet… Who's cooking?"

"Sometimes Don; sometimes I—unless the doctor sends me here. Once—Kenny."

Brian smiled.

"You are very good," he said simply.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE PENITENT

Brian's skull was young and elastic. It saved him much, but Barrington lingered until the period of suspense was at an end. Kenny drove him to the Finlake station.

"This car has been a godsend," he said.

"And Garry's wired me to keep it. He's going to the coast."

"When?"

"Thursday."

Kenny's eyes were moist and grateful.

"Ah, Frank, darlin', you're a jewel!"

"Piffle!" countered Frank. "Kenny, old dear, I think you hit a chicken. If at any time," he added at the station, "you feel the need of me, I want you to wire. He's bound to be nervous. And if his convalescence seems slow and irksome, remember that the reaction of a shock like that isn't merely physical."

Kenny wrung his hand in silence. He motored home, oppressed by the bare line of hills and the noise of the quarry.

As usual the sight of Joan dispelled his gloom. Brian's pain was less. He had fallen asleep of his own accord.

"He asked for you," she added.

"You told him Frank wouldn't let me in?"

"Yes."

"Hum... Where's Don?"

"I sent him to the store."

Kenny darted away with an air of expectancy to the other shack, whence, after an excited period of foraging, he emerged, carrying a bundle. Frank, knowing him well enough to read his shining enthusiasm aright, would have turned him back at Brian's door without a qualm. But Frank was not at hand.

"You look like a kid sneaking home with a stray cat!" Brian told him with a grin.

"What's in the bundle?"

"I've tried so many times to get in," admitted Kenny, "with Frank nippin' me just as my hand was on the knob, that I'm feelin' a bit surreptitious." He held up a tennis racket and a shotgun.

"And everything else," he boasted with an air of triumph, "that I took to Simon."

"And the bill-file!" exclaimed Brian, staring at the litter on the floor. "Jemima!"

"You remember it, Brian? You hated the sight of it. 'Tis the stiletto I stuck in a chunk of wax—"

"Lord, yes! And you wrote the I.O.U.'s on anything from a playing card to the end of a shirt."

"And never paid 'em until I had to," said Kenny with an unyielding air of self-contempt. "Many the time you checked 'em off, Brian, and rebuked me as you should. But that, by the Blessed Bell of Clare, is all behind me."

He proudly exhibited the bizarre collection of scraps, initialed in token of debt and reinitialed in token of payment.

"Brian—I—I—"

"Go ahead, old boy," said Brian, his eyes tender. "I can see you've got a lot on your mind."

"I paid 'em—every one!"

"So I see."

"And never again will you have to bookkeep lies. I'm that truthful now Sid worries a bit!"

Brian's amazed eyes twinkled.

"You delicious lunatic!" he said.

"I practiced," went on Kenny with his lips compressed. "I practiced hard—up at the farm with Adam."

"Joan's told me you were there. I can't quite hitch things together yet, but I will in time."

"A landslide of things seemed to happen the minute you went—"

"I always had a feeling," admitted Brian, "that if I didn't stick around and keep an eye on you, a lot of things would happen."

"They did. They've been happenin' ever since."

Brian flushed and put out his hand.

"Kenny, surely you guessed. I was sorry—"

"Jewel machree, I was fair sick about the shotgun. And after you went I was willing to be sorry about anything—to get you back."

"And Ann's statuette. Lord, I burn when I think of it."

"You couldn't be blamed for a bit of temper. You're Irish, lad, and an O'Neill. 'Tis a splendid inheritance but volcanic too." He changed color and began to roam around the room, his mind casting up a painful memory.

"You'll never guess," he went on moodily, "what fell upon the head of me after you went. John Whitaker came up and took a shot at me. And Garry. And then after a while when I was quieter, old Adam, stirring me up afresh. My ears are as used to the truth as my tongue."

"It's a darned shame!" said Brian warmly. Kenny sighed.

"Ah, Brian," he said wistfully, "I was needin' it all. You can't conceive until you put your mind to it or—or write it down, what a failure I've been—"

"Failure!"

"As a parent. Even my penance on the road was—was like the rest."

"Your *penance*!"

"I bought a corncrib and a mule," flung out Kenny, roaming turbulently around the room, "and thrashed a farmer. And I hated the rain and the smell of cheese and burned up the corn-crib—"

"Kenny, what are you talking about?"

Inexorably intent upon the easing of his conscience Kenny told the tale of his penance with terrifying honesty and truth.

Brian listened and dared not smile.

"At first I—I hoped to find a clue," finished Kenny, wiping the sweat from his forehead. "And then after I—I saw Joan I hoped I wouldn't. You're not blamin' me, Brian?"

"Not a bit. I'd have lingered myself."

"The heart of you!" said Kenny, biting his lips. "I don't deserve it. Lad, dear, the sunsets are past. I'm understandin'. And if you want Whitaker's job, I—I'm willing. If you'd rather come back to the studio and free-lance, I—I want you to know—" he gulped—"that things are different. There's order there and the—the chairs are cleared. Never a chair but what you can sit down on without staring behind you. You wished that, Brian—"

Brian turned his head.

"Yes," he said. There were tears and laughter in his voice.

"The money and clothes I borrowed," went on Kenny fervidly, "are paid back. The clothes are safe in a new chiffonier and here's the key. I sealed it in an envelope and well I did. I was badly needin' some things you had and Pietro went out and bought them for me. As for my temper, it's a lot better. A lot! Sid marvels at it. I—I do myself. It all comes from the hell up there on the ridge with Adam." He drew a long breath. "I've a record of work that will fill you with pride. And though I seem to have a lot of money, I haven't bought a foolish thing since the corncrib. There's plebeian regularity enough in my money affairs now, Brian, to please even you! Though I'm havin' a bit of a struggle with my check book. You can see for yourself, can't you, Brian, 'twould not be the disorderly Bohemia you seem to hate? 'Twould not be hand-to-mouth. Mind, I'm not seekin' to persuade you. So help me God, I—I want you to do just what you want to do yourself—"

"Kenny," said Brian dangerously, "if you go on one second more, you'll have me sniffling—"

Horrified and guilty, Kenny bolted for the door, his hand clenched in his hair.

"One thing more, Brian," he said, wheeling, "I—I've got to say it. I've anchored that damned stick to the psaltery with a shoestring. We—we couldn't lose it!"

And closing the door, Kenny again wiped his forehead, remembering sadly that he had planned to wind his son around his finger and induce him to return. It had been the trend of all his preparation and resolve. And now—what? He had choked back his inclination and begged Brian, with impassioned sincerity, to do precisely what would please him most.

He wondered why the anticlimax brought him—peace.

When Doctor Cole arrived an hour later he found the shack in turmoil. The truant hour of laughter and excitement, Kenny told him in a panic of remorse, had sharpened Brian's pain. His pulse was galloping. With a sigh the little doctor drugged his tossing patient into troubled sleep.

Again through a cloud of flower-spotted purple shot now with gleams of light as from a camp fire, Brian drifted unquietly, conscious of odd and unrelated things, stars that turned to eyes, a moonbeam that broke upon a pine-bough and fell in a shower of moon-silvered tears; in the tears a face that turned perversely to a pansy. Then something snapped and crackled sharply and he sat beside a camp fire, conscious of an indefinable fusing within him. Beyond in a curling milk-white mist lay the pansy, half a flower—half a face. It floated toward him, sometimes part of the smoke from his fire, sometimes but a flower-shadow in the cloud of purple. Brian strained to see it clearly and could not until the inner fusing came again and Joan stood by the fire, the sheen of moonlight on her hair.

"You did so much for him," she said, "and now—the boulder!"

Brian furrowed his forehead in painful concentration.

"I thought I did it all for Don," he said. "For months I've thought so but since something fused here in my heart, something linked to tears and stars and moonlight and the crackle of a fire, I know I did it all for you."

"For me, Brian!"

"For you!"

In the cloud of purple Joan's eyes grew round and unbelieving.

"Your face, all tears and sorrow and sweetness," said Brian stubbornly, "etched itself on my memory the night Don ran away."

"I—I did not know you saw me."

"I know now that all I did that night I did for you. Don swore at you—remember?"

The flower-like face in the purple cloud saddened. Brian distinctly heard the crackle of the camp fire.

"I thrashed him for it!"

"You said in your letter—"

"I said I would help him, yes, but I wrote and I made Don write because I could not bear to have you hurt and worried. And even at the quarry, when I was keen to be off to Whitaker, I saw your face in the mist, urging me to stay—to stay and help Don. And I did—for you. I know that all these things I did for you. I *know*!"

But again he was staring at a pansy and the cloud of purple floated hazily away. Tired, ill and aeons old, Brian opened his eyes.

"I'm glad you're awake," said Joan gently. "You were dreaming. Drugs frighten me."

"Nothing was clear," said Brian, touching his forehead, "but the pansy and you. And purple—like that." He pointed to her ring. "What an odd ring it is, Joan! Wistaria?"

Joan nodded, her color bright.

"Wistaria on a ladder. It's the ring Kenny gave me."

Brian's startled eyes met and held her own. "Why?" he asked.

"I'm going to marry him. Didn't you know?"

"No," said Brian. "I—I didn't know."

CHAPTER XXXVI

APRIL

April with its tender flame of green brought lagging days of worry. Brian, said Kenny wistfully, was just—not Brian. He was an irritable convalescent in a plaster cast, too nervous to be patient. His pain had been intense, the shock disastrous to his self-control. The haggard mark of it upon his face Don read with scalding heart and brooded. When after a refractory week of undisciplined nerves and temper that strained the doctor's endurance to the breaking point, Brian went out of his head for forty-eight hours and babbled like a madman about a face in the mist, Kenny in terror wired for Frank Barrington. Brian, he thought, must be frantic with pain.

Frank came, mystified and apprehensive. He found a white and apathetic patient who, with his delirium gone, denied abnormal pain.

"It isn't pain," Frank reported. "Of that I'm convinced. His head's in excellent condition and his danger of lameness is at an end. Though he resented the suggestion, I think there's something on his mind. And whatever it is, he's much too shattered nervously to give it a normal valuation."

"Keep that kid out of his room," advised Kenny hotly. "I can't. He moons around up there like a ghost. Brian admits that he's so sorry for him at times that it makes him feel sick."

"Hum!" said Frank and went in search of Don.

"I suppose you think I'm too much of a kid to have an opinion," Don told him, his face white and

fierce, "but I—I did it. And I watch him more than anybody else—" He choked and blinked back boyish tears of indignation.

"Keep Mr. O'Neill out of Brian's room," he snorted. "He'd excite anybody!"

"I intend to keep you all out," was Frank's verdict in the end. "All but the nurse and Joan. Joan's not temperamental and she has nothing on her conscience. She has moreover a sedative convincing type of cheer that's a mighty good influence. The rest of you are simply on a sentimental spree of penance. You, Kenny, are so anxious to square yourself that you make him nervous and he fumes and blames himself. And Don can't look at him without remorse in his eyes. You're both too flighty and penitential for Brian's good."

Frank departed and Joan compassionately set herself to sentinel the sickroom. There were trying hours when her voice alone had power to soothe the querulous young savage whose tired eyes begged them all to forgive him.

Nurses came and nurses hopelessly departed. Brian hated and hounded them all with savage and impartial persistence. He was jarring even the little doctor out of his normal weary calm.

"I've seen him flat on the back of him before," Kenny confided to Joan in some distress, "a lamb for sense! But now he's tiring you out."

"You mustn't blame him," urged Joan. "He never asks me to come. I go always of my own accord and oftener now since Frank scolded. He's lonely without you and Donald and he hates the nurse—"

"He hates 'em all," said Kenny.

"No matter how nervous he is, I can read him to sleep."

"Ah, colleen!" There was a flash of reverence in Kenny's eyes. It mutely thanked her.

"I can't forget what he did for Don. Nor can I forget that Don's impulse—"

"Don remembers too."

Joan sighed.

"He worries me, Kenny—Don, I mean. Sometimes I think he sees in my help the one atonement he can make: he fumes and reproaches so when Brian is nervous or lonely. He even dreams of the boulder."

"And the year of study, mavourneen?"

Joan's face clouded.

"Don needs me," she said. "He would be frantic here alone. I cannot desert him."

"Nor I," said Kenny. "But the year of waiting ends at Samhain."

"Yes," said Joan, coloring. "I have given Don the money," she added. "If now he would only study!"

"He shall!" said Kenny and set himself to the finishing of Brian's winter task. That sacrifice, at least, he decided, nagging Don into hours of study that were a godsend to them both, should not become an anticlimax. He had paid once—in ragged money. For Joan's sake he would pay willingly again in time. Brian and Joan and Don—and he himself, with indolence for once in his life unwelcome, would be happier for the effort. But there were moments of clash and irritation when Don's energy flagged and he flung his books aside in black disgust.

"No use," he said moodily. "I can't work. I've got too much on my mind."

Kenny merely looked at him.

Don flushed.

"Mr. O'Neill," he barked.

"Shut up!" thundered Kenny, "I don't propose to quarrel now or at any other time."

They glared at each other in nervous indignation.

"Brian," Kenny added with a sniff, "was sure you could swing it. I never was. You need balance and a sense of responsibility."

Don gritted his teeth and worked in an inexhaustible spurt of endurance.

"Stop wandering around the room and kicking things," Kenny commanded more than once with his own hand clenched in his hair. "If you don't remember, you don't remember, and that's an end of it. Here's the book. Look it over while I'm smoking."

Once when the clash had a suspicious ring of familiarity, he grinned.

"What's the matter?" demanded Don huffily. "What are you laughing at? Me?"

"No," said Kenny. "I was just thinking of a man I know. Name's Whitaker."

Thus May came with a warm wind of spice and fresh misgivings furrowed the doctor's brow.

"Now that the windows are opened so much," he fretted, "the rumble of that quarry is inferno. The blasts bother him?"

"He jumps," said Joan.

"I thought so. He must have peace and quiet. If Mr. O'Neill is willing, we'll move him to the farm."

By the time the orchard flung out its white prayer of blossoms to the sun, the doctor had his patient at the farm.

And summer dreamed again upon the hills.

CHAPTER XXXVII

HONEYSUCKLE DAYS

Pine-sweet wind still blew around the cabin, the sylvan river laughed in the sun, wistaria hung grape-like on the ladder of vine; but over it all, to Kenny, brooded the pathos of change.

He longed wistfully for the gay vitality of that other summer when every day had been an exquisite intaglio of laughter. There were times when unreasonably he even missed Adam. How the nights in contrast had sharpened the joy of his days! And he hated the village boy who ferried the punt back and forth upon the river, hated the horn with its transforming miracles of reminiscence, for it pointed the nameless lack of sparkle now that struck melancholy into his soul. He had lived in Arcady and jealously he would have hoarded each detail of its charm.

The days were long and quiet. Life for all of them centered around the wheel-chair on the porch. There Joan read aloud while the nurse kept wisely in the background, and Hannah at meal-times set the table on the porch.

In the long afternoons of study that Kenny spent with Don, Brian asserted his independence and banished books. He seemed content to talk. Joan listened eagerly to his tales of the road, never tiring of Don's vagabond adventures. After the worried months of monotony and pain, the afternoons of reminiscence were tonic for them both. Lazy humor crept back to Brian's eyes. At times he whistled. Wind and sun were tanning his skin to the hue of health.

He had his dark hours. Every effort then to cheer him left him tired and quiet. Talk of the chain of circumstances that had, oddly, brought them all together, he avoided with a frown. Any reference to her life in New York, Joan found, plunged him into gloom. Was it, she wondered, because he knew his accident had brought her year of play and study to an end? She longed passionately to tell him how easy it had been for her—how trifling, as a sacrifice, in the face of his kindness to Don; but shyness held her back.

"Honeysuckle days!" Brian called his days of convalescence, for the vine upon the porch hung full.

"Is it so hot in the pines?" he wondered one sultry afternoon.

"No," said Joan. "There it's always dark and cool and quiet. When you can walk, Brian, you must see the cabin."

Heat quivered visibly in the valley. A faint breeze frolicked now and then upon the ridge, fluttering the honeysuckle and the pages of an open book upon the table.

"I'm glad it isn't," said Brian in relief. "Somehow I can't imagine Kenny off there in a hot cabin striding up and down and grilling Don. He's so—so combustible. As a matter of fact," he added, "I can't imagine him in any sort of cabin grilling Don. Soft-hearted lunatic!"

"Don gets awfully on his nerves," said Joan, shaking her head. "If it wasn't that he's doing it for you—"

"For me, Joan!"

Joan nodded.

"What you began, he'll finish for you. He said so. It bothered him that all those dreary months you spent at the quarry just to help Don might be in vain. Don went so dreadfully to pieces."

"Sentimental old hothead," grumbled Brian, touched and pleased. "I love him for it."

"I wonder if you realize how much he cares!"

"For—you?" asked Brian quietly. "Yes."

"No, no," said Joan, coloring. "For you. For you he has worked through splendidly to—to less of self. And so has Don. It's a wonderful tribute, Brian. To inspire something fine and beautiful is fine and beautiful itself."

Brian stared uncomfortably at a red barn in the valley.

"To have something dormant inside that catches fire and burns up splendidly into unselfishness is better," he said. "This porch is like a throne. One sits up here among the honeysuckles and finds a world of summer at his feet."

"Last summer," remembered Joan, "Kenny used to tell me over and over again that you were all things in one. All, Brian. Think of it! Almost," she finished demurely, "I came to believe it."

Brian glanced at her in droll suspicion. Her eyes laughed at him with the wholesome mischief of a child.

"Almost!" he countered. "I insist upon my full meed of perfection. When did I lose it?"

"When you hounded the nurse—"

"Plural noun," amended Brian wryly.

"Plural," agreed Joan. "I knew then that the idol had clay feet."

Brian groaned.

"Haven't you?"

"Yes," he said. "And a clay head. But I was never an idol."

"Oh, yes you were!" said Joan. "When you gave up your trip abroad to help Don, you became to me a wonderful sort of—of selfless young god—"

"Joan!" He stared at her in panic.

"Truly. And I'd rather have you human. I always thought of you with thankful worship—"

"I approve the attitude," said Brian mischievously. "Please state when and why discontinued."

"The minute I met you."

"Phew! That I consider unnecessarily heartless candor. Did you ever hear of tempering the wind to the shorn lamb?"

"If I had met you in the end, alive and well," said Joan thoughtfully, "I would have kept you up there on your pedestal out of mortal reach but you came into my life, hurt and pitiful, and you needed help, my sort of help, and something humanized you. You were no longer a god. You were something human—"

"Thank God for that!" said Brian.

"Besides," added Joan, twinkling, "you had clay feet. Garry wrote me that you had an Irish temper —"

"And I told you to write him!"

"I asked him *all* about you," said Joan. "He wrote me such a splendid letter. It made me like you—more. And you can't know what it meant when you wrote and pledged yourself to help Don."

"Garry is my press agent," said Brian with a sniff, "I pay him. And I'll dock him for the part about my temper."

"Brian, so often I—I've wanted to thank you!"

"Don't," he begged. "Please don't. What I did—you see," he stammered, "it just—happened."

"Like the letter you wrote to me, praising someone else to guarantee your own respectability. Is it always someone else, Brian? Don't you ever think of yourself?"

"Lying here," said Brian moodily, "I've thought of little else. There's Hannah with the tablecloth. It

can't be six o'clock."

"It is," said Joan. "And Mr. Abbott's coming to supper."

She fled in a panic.

"Will the child never have done with chains?" Hannah demanded as the weeks slipped by.

"When it wasn't Don, it was old Adam. And now it's someone else. And Mr. O'Neill's got more patience, Hughie, than I ever thought was in him."

"I like him better t'other way," said Hughie. "Things is livelier. I'd sooner be diggin' dots than dronin' along so poky."

"It's my opinion," put in Hannah tartly, "that last summer just about spoiled your taste for anything but the life of a pirate. If you must have somebody throwin' a bottle at your head or dumpin' ministers into the river or diggin' treasure, things have come to a pretty pass."

Hughie whistled.

"I ain't the only one that's restless," he defended. "Don's as contraptious as a mule. And I've caught a look in young O'Neill's eye once or twice like old Sim's black mare, mettlesome and anxious to bolt."

"Until Joan slips into a chair with a book or some work," snapped Hannah. "Then he's a lamb. If I was Mr. O'Neill I'd thrash Don into common sense and I'd remind t'other young man, son or no son, that the nurse ain't earnin' her keep. Joan's earnin' it for her."

Alone, Kenny owned, one can not be gay and lunch in glens where the wee folk hide and whisper. And Joan and he himself had chains. He accepted the summer with a wry grimace, reading in its irksome demands a chance for real requital. He found no bitterness in the cup he had set himself to drink. It was the price of Brian's welfare and Brian's peace of mind. But he hungered for Joan and the long, gay days of another summer. When had she grown up so, he wondered impatiently. He missed the romping child with the sun shadows in her hair; he missed her eager tears and laughter. To his skillful touch they had been but strings of a beautiful harp, subtly, unfailingly responsive. Ah! she had been a beautiful promise—that starved child of a summer ago—but the promise fulfilled in the woman, he owned with a rush of feeling, he loved more. Her essential tenderness, strumming kindred chords in his sensitive Celtic soul, aroused an unfamiliar sense of the holiness of love.

And he was splendidly afire with dreams.

In July the little doctor found his patient strong enough for crutches and dismissed the nurse. And unexpectedly John Whitaker arrived, growling his opinion of the rural trains.

"Can you walk without your crutches?" he barked, his glasses oddly moist.

"A little," said Brian.

Whitaker sat down and blinked.

"You don't deserve a job," he grumbled, "turning me down for a dynamite spree, but I'm going to send you to Ireland in the fall. There's a story there—a big one. If," he added grimly, "you can manage to get in."

Late August found the tension of worry at an end. Brian at last was walking. And Don had fought a battle with his books and won.

Kenny's spirits soared.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

ARCADY ELUDES A SEEKER

"Come," Kenny begged one night when the dusk lay thick in the valley. "Let's pace the Gray Man, Joan, in Garry's car. Nobody needs you now as much as I."

His bright dark face pleaded.

The girl smiled.

"Kenny, Kenny, Kenny," she said, "will you ever grow up?"

"Did Peter Pan? Better get your cloak, dear. You may need it."

He went off whistling to the barn. Kenny had blessed the car and Garry many times. He blessed them again as the engine throbbed in the dusk. Hot silence lay upon the ridge, broken only by the noise of insects.

"A long road and a straight road and Samhain at the end!" he sang as Joan climbed in. "And bless the Irish heart of me, dear, there's a moon scrambling up behind the hill and peeping over. Lordy, Lordy!" he added under his breath, "what a moon!"

"'On such a night
Did Jessica steal from the wealthy Jew
And with an unthrift love did run to Venice
As far as—'

"Hum! I've forgotten. Wonder why Shakespeare looked ahead and harpooned me with that word unthrift. Where to, Jessica? Where shall the unthrift lover drive on such a night?"

Joan stared absently at the road ahead.

"To Ireland," she said.

The answer pleased him.

"I mind me," he said instantly, "of an Irish tale of Finn McCoul."

Joan did not answer.

"Tell me," she said at last. "Finn and you are always delightful."

Kenny stared at her in marked reproach.

"Joan!" he exclaimed.

"What—what is it, Kenny?"

"That's just the sort of polite nothing you learned in New York!"

"I'm sorry, Kenny. I'm—tired. And just for a minute I wasn't listening. You know how it is. You hear an echo in your mind a long while after and answer in a panic." She brushed her cheek against his sleeve with a remorseful gesture of appeal. His arm went round her.

"There!" he said with a sigh of relief. "That's better. I'm lonesome when we're not in tune."

"And the story?"

Kenny told of a fairy face that Finn had seen in a lake among the heather.

"Leaf-brown eyes had the nymph, I take it, and satin-cream skin with a rose showin' through and allurin' lashes maybe dipped in the ink-pots of the fairies."

"What," said Joan from the shelter of his arm, "is a blarney stone?"

"A substitute for lips!" said Kenny instantly and kissed her.

"And Finn?"

"Plunged into the waters of the lake, he did, as any son of Erin would—and found the maid."

But Joan's eyes were absently fixed upon the road again and Kenny abandoned his legend with a sigh until he bethought himself to use its climax in reproach.

"And when Finn reappeared, he was an old, old man, as old as a man may feel when his lady's attention wanders."

Joan colored and laughed, her eyes faintly mischievous, wholly apologetic.

"Finn's youth," Kenny gallantly assured her, "was restored to him by magic and surely there is magic in a woman's smile."

They motored on in a silence that Kenny found depressing. When would Arcady come again, he wondered rebelliously, wistful for the sparkle of that other summer when fairies, silver-shod, had danced upon the moonlit lake. The strain of worry had tired them both.

The wind swept coolly toward them sweet with pine. Wind and pine up here were always mingling. A night—a moon for lovers! The clasp of his arm tightened.

The peace of the night was insistent. After all with worry at an end Arcady might not lie so very far away—it was creeping into his heart, sweet with the music of many trees. Joan too perhaps—he

stole a glance at the girl's face, colorless in the moonlight like some soft, exquisite flower—and drew up the emergency brake with a jerk. Her lashes were wet.

"Joan," he exclaimed, "you're not crying!"

She tried to smile and buried her face on his shoulder.

"I think," she said forlornly, "it—it's just because everything has turned out so—so nicely."

He motored homeward, ill at ease, aware after a time that the girl cradled in his arm had fallen asleep. Her tears worried him.

"But I'm quite all right now, Kenny," she protested as they drove up the lane. "It's partly the heat. Why didn't you wake me?"

He swung her lightly to the ground.

"I liked to think I was helping you rest," he said gently. "You need it. Don't wait, dear. It's late."

He climbed back in the car and glided off barnwards, waving his arm. Joan went slowly up the stairway to her room.

Latticed moonlight lay upon a chair by the window. She dropped into it, weary and inert, grateful for the rushing sound of the river; it soothed her with familiar music. A clock downstairs chimed the hour, then the half—and then another hour. Below in the moonlight a man was climbing up from the river.

"Brian," she called breathlessly, "is it you?"

"Yes."

"Dr. Cole will scold. It's twelve o'clock."

Brian tossed his cigarette away with a sigh.

"He'll never know. I've been sitting down there in the punt. The river's silver. Come down for a while," he implored. "All evening I've been as lonely as a leper. Ever since you motored off with Kenny, Don's been a grouch. Can't you climb down the vine?"

"I—I can't, Brian."

"Please, Joan. I'll tell Kenny myself in the morning."

"No," said Joan. "I—can't. I—I wish I could."

"So do I," said Brian. He walked away.

Shaking and sobbing, Joan flung herself upon the bed.

"Sid writes me you're home," Kenny wrote to Garry in September. "What about the car? Come up for a while and drive it home. We can do some sketching. Brian's full of Irish melancholy and waiting for word from Whitaker. He may go any time. Joan's tired and busy with clothes. Don's cranky and I'm rather at a loose end, hunting things to do."

Puzzled, Garry went.

"I can't make out what's wrong," he wrote to Sid, "Kenny's rational enough, but Brian's strung to the breaking point. I suspect it's just as it always has been—they're miserable apart and hopeless together. But the year has been a sobering one, and what used to flash, they bottle up. In my opinion the sooner Brian gets away the better. He's not himself."

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE TENSION SNAPS

Months back Fate had flung out a skein of broken threads to the wind of Chance. In mid September she chose to bring the flying ends together.

It began when Hannah dropped a dipper. Hughie on his way to the wood-box with an armful of kindlings jumped and dropped them with a clatter. And he stepped on Toby's tail and swore. Hannah and Hughie and Toby, startled, shared a sharp moment of resentment.

"Hughie," Hannah's impatience keyed her voice a trifle high, "'pon my honor I don't know what gets into you. Ever since you took to diggin' dots you've been as nervous as a cat. You're full of jumps. It's my opinion if the doctor hadn't told you that Mr. O'Neill himself buried the money in the fireplace, you'd be diggin' dots in a lunatic asylum!"

Hughie's horrified face of warning turned her cold with foreboding. Hannah turned and gasped.

Joan stood behind her.

"Hannah," she asked, "what did you say?"

"I—I don't know," said Hannah, scarlet with confusion. "I'm all unstrung and my head's queer—"

Hughie went out and slammed the door.

"You said that Mr. O'Neill—buried—the money—in Uncle's fireplace!" repeated Joan distinctly. She caught Hannah's arm, her dark frightened eyes imploring. "Hannah, did he?"

Shaking, Hannah put her apron to her eyes. "Hannah, you must tell me. It is important that I know. No, don't cry. Did Mr. O'Neill bury the money—in Uncle's fireplace?"

"Yes," choked Hannah in a low voice. "Oh, Hughie will never forgive me!"

"How do you know?"

"The doctor. Hughie went on diggin', thinking there must be more, until he was sick with nerves. The doctor had to tell him."

"And how did the doctor know?"

The girl's strained quiet helped Hannah to regain her self-control.

"Mr. O'Neill went to Rink's hotel to telephone," she faltered, wiping her eyes, "and Sam Acker put his ear to the door. He—he telephoned for a lot of ragged money—"

Joan caught her breath.

"And then a week later," gulped Hannah, "when the doctor came to tend his wife, Sam told it, for Mr. O'Neill had said the doctor sent him there to telephone. And the doctor never would have told but for Hughie's nerves. He said so when he pledged us both to keep it secret. He spoke wonderful about Mr. O'Neill. That I must say. And he called him somebody Donkeyhote—"

"Where is Mr. O'Neill?" "He drove down to the village with Mr. Rittenhouse for the mail."

Joan glided away like a shadow.

Don Quixote! And so he had done that strange, fantastic thing for her—and she had given the money away to Don! Joan stopped at the foot of the stairway, her face colorless and unbelieving, her mind casting up a vivid picture of the night of search in the sitting room. It—could—not—be!

Ah, but it could! For Kenny, reckless and on his mettle, was a finished actor. And the morning at the telephone! His silence and constraint had bothered her then not a little. Later, whirling through the blizzard in a taxi, he had begged her not to do it. And he had surrendered in the end with a sigh and smiled and kissed her. His eyes, warmly blue, irresistibly Irish in their tenderness, seemed now to stare at her with sad reproach. Ah, the kindness of him! Hot stinging tears rolled slowly down the girl's white cheeks.

"Joan!" It was Brian's voice behind her.

Joan turned, trembling, blinked and smiled.

Something in her face drove his memory back to the moonlit wood. Niobe on the verge of a passion of tears!

"You look like a sad little brown thrush," he said gently.

His voice, his eyes chilled her with foreboding. They stood in utter silence.

Joan touched the throbbing veins in her throat and moistened her lips.

"You have heard from Mr. Whitaker—"

"Yes, Garry brought the letter up."

"When—"

"I'm sailing in a week. I go from here—to-morrow."

"Brian!"

The terror in her eyes startled him and the tension snapped. An instant later she was crying wildly in his arms. Brian crushed his lips against her cheek, conscious only of an agonizing stab of joy, then Joan pulled away, her eyes dark with grief and shame.

"Oh, Brian, Brian," she whispered passionately, "I—want—to die."

"I've wanted to die for weeks," said Brian. "Almost I think I did."

Joan caught her breath with a shuddering gasp.

"Don't!" said Brian. "I—can't bear to hear you cry. I've always known that I was a pretty poor sort but this—"

His honest eyes begged for understanding,

Joan's face, wet with tears, condoned.

"I—I am worse," she said unsteadily.

He caught her hands rebelliously.

"But you love me," he said wistfully. "That, at least—"

Joan slipped into his arms again with a sob.

"I love you better than my life," she said, "and I may—never—say it again."

"I love you better than my life," Joan said, "and I may — may never — say it again."

[Illustration: "I love you better than my life," Joan said, "and I may—never—say it again."]

Brian pressed his cheek against her hair.

"No," he said. "No. I would not have you say it again, Joan, dear as it is to hear it."

An eternity of minutes seemed to tick away in the silence.

"Brian, you must believe I meant to be true to Kenny—"

"Don't!" he choked, paling at the sound of Kenny's name. "Oh, Kenny, Kenny!"

Joan buried her face in his arm. Both were thinking with hot remorseful hearts of that stormy penitent with the laughing, tender Irish eyes. Both loved him well. And both were pledging themselves to keep his happiness intact.

Joan's tormented memory was busy with pictures: Kenny disastrously sculling the punt to help her, Kenny in the death-chamber shuddering and patient and passionately resolved to stay by her to the end, Kenny with the lantern held high above her head, Kenny digging dots and helping Don to study and Kenny tearing bricks from the ancient fireplace.

She slipped out of his arms in a panic, her face, Brian thought, as white as the old-fashioned lilies in the garden.

"Brian, go—" she choked.

With the truth of the ragged money burning itself into her mind—with Brian so near and yet so far—the touch of his arms was torment.

Hungry for the peace of the pines and the lonely cabin, Joan fled out-of-doors.

CHAPTER XL

THE KING OF YOUTH

Ten minutes later Kenny, coming into the dark, old-fashioned library where Adam's books were once more arrayed upon the shelves, found Don wandering turbulently around the room.

Was this boy ever anything but turbulent, he wondered with impatience. Must he always brood about the boulder and atonement?

Don stopped dead in his tracks, his fingers clenched in his hair, his white face staring queerly; and Kenny, irresistibly reminded of himself in minutes of turmoil, stared back, knowing in a flash of inspiration why the tale of the boulder had made him think of the crash of bouillon cups. The desire of the moment that marked men for disaster! The tongue-tied youngster there with his feet rooted to the ground and his face pale with agitation, was indeed something like himself. Kenny had a moment of pity.

"Mr. O'Neill," said Don with a hard, dry sob, "you know I've wanted to make up to Brian somehow about that boulder. If I hadn't been crazy to drive up the ledge once and if I hadn't lied to Grogan and bullied Tony, Brian wouldn't have spent the rest of the winter in a plaster cast. I—I want to do something for him, something big, and I—I've got to do it in a queer way." He shuddered and wiped his face. Kenny saw that his hands were shaking wildly, and pitied him again. "Mr. O'Neill," he blurted, "Brian loves my sister and she loves him."

It seemed to Kenny that lightning struck with a sinister flare of fire at his feet and hot blinding pieces of the floor were flying all about him.

"How do you know?" he said fiercely. "How *do* you know? How can you know such a thing as that? You can't! You can't possibly."

"I do," said Don. "I heard them say it."

"Heard them!"

"I was on the porch," said Don, "and I came through the window there to get a book. They were in the hall."

"You listened!"

Don flushed.

"I—I wanted to," he said sullenly. "And I did."

"Ah, yes," said Kenny, wiping his hair back and wondering vaguely why it felt so wet, "you wanted to and you did."

"I wanted to," said Don fiercely, "because I knew Brian loved her. And I knew my sister wasn't happy. She's looked sad and tired and frightened a lot of times, Joan has, and she's cried a lot—"

"Yes," said Kenny, "she has."

Don's challenging eyes swept with stormy suspicion over Kenny's face.

"Mr. O'Neill," he flung out, "don't you blame her. Don't you do it. She was a kid, an awful kid when you came here first, and lonesome. She wanted to be flattered and loved. All girls do. She wasn't happy. She wanted to play and you gave her a chance. You're famous and you've been everywhere and

you're a good looker," he gulped courageously, "and maybe you turned her head. I—don't know. I think she loves you an awful lot anyway. But not—not that way. You could have been her father—"

"Yes," said Kenny wincing. "She's younger than Brian." Where had he read that youth was cruel? "Yes, I could have been her father."

"I don't mean you're old," stammered Don, flushing. "I mean—Oh, Mr. O'Neill—" and now Don slipped back into childhood for a second and sobbed aloud—"I—I don't know what I mean. You just—just mustn't blame her. She's my sister. She even patched my clothes."

"I'm not blaming her, Don. God knows I'm not. I'm just wonderin'."

"Joan's going to marry you just the same. She said so. Mr. O'Neill, you've got to do something. You—you've got to!" He clenched his hands and bolted for the door.

"Yes," said Kenny, frowning, "I—I've got to do something. I can't—think—what. Where's Joan?"

"I think she's gone to the cabin. She often went there when Uncle made her cry. Mr. O'Neill," Don clenched one hand and struck it fiercely against the palm of the other, "you've been good to me. I—I'm awful sorry—"

He fled with a sob and Kenny put his hand to his throat to still a painful throbbing.

There was a clanking in his ears. Or was it in his memory? Ah, yes, Adam had said that life was a link in a chain that clanks, and he couldn't escape. Well, he hadn't.

Kenny sat down, conscious of a tired irresolution in his head and a numbness. Nothing seemed clearly defined, save somewhere within him a monumental sharpness as of pain. Joan's happiness he remembered must be the religion of his love.

After that things blurred—curiously. Superstition, ordinarily within him but an artificial twist of fancy, reared a mocking head and reminded him of omens. Sailing over the river long ago he had thought of Hy Brazil, the Isle of Delight that receded always when you followed. Receded! It was very true. Later the wind among the blossoms had been chill and fitful and Joan had been unaware of the romance in the white, sweet drift. Omens! And rain had come, the blossom storm. And Death had spread its sable wing over the first day of his love. He shuddered and closed his eyes.

Separate thoughts rose quiveringly from the blur. He thought of a lantern and Samhain. Samhain, the summer-ending of the druids! Perhaps this was the summer ending of his youth and hope. And he had drank in Adam's room that Samhain night to Destiny—Destiny who had brought him—this!

Still the blur and the separate thoughts stinging into his consciousness like poisoned arrows. Whitaker's voice, persistent and analytical, rang in his ears. The King of Youth! Kenny laughed aloud and tears stung at his eyes. He blinked and laughed again. Why, he was growing up all at once! John would be pleased. Thoughts of Whitaker, Brian, his farcical penance and Joan, became a brilliant phantasmagoria from which for an interval nothing emerged separate or distinct. Then sharp and clear came the dread of Brian's death and the ride over the sleet with Frank. The steering wheel strained in his aching hands and the wheels slid dangerously ... He did not want to be a failure ... He wanted passionately after all the turmoil to be Brian's successful parent. If in this instance there was a curious need to wreck his own life in order that he might parent Brian with success, he must not make a mess of it. Once, accidentally, John said, he had almost shipwrecked Brian's life and Brian had stepped out—just in the nick of time. He must not do that again. Brian had suffered enough from self rampant in others.

The King of Youth! ... The King of Youth! ... And Brian was twenty-four years *old*. He must not make him—older. This sharp aging all in a moment was fraught with pain.

His weary ears resented the mocking persistence of Whitaker's voice. Kenny's happy-go-lucky self-indulgence, it said, had often spelled for Brian discomfort of a definite sort... Well, it—should—not—spell—pain... And if in the past his generosity had always been congenial, now it should hurt. Was he about to learn something of the psychology of sacrifice that Adam had said he ought to know?

He swung rebelliously to his feet. Why must the fullness of life come through sacrifice? Why must all things good and permanent and true come only out of suffering? Why must men pay for their dreams with pain?

He moved mechanically toward the door. ... Yes, he cared more for Joan's happiness than for his own. And she was suffering. Why, the tired truth of it was, he loved them both enough to want to see them happy ... And he would be a part of Don's erratic atonement.

He smiled wryly and realized with a start that he was already out-of-doors, walking dazedly toward the cabin in the pines. The fresh, sweet wind blew through his hair and into his face, but the blur persisted, filled with voices and memories and promptings from God alone knew where.

The odor of pine was sharply reminiscent... And then with a shock that stung him out of inhibition he was staring in at the cabin window. Joan sat by the table, her head upon her arm, her shoulders heaving.

"Poor child!" he said heavily. "Poor child!" And savagely cursed the summer pictures that flamed in his mind at the sight of her. The cabin, the wistaria ladder, the punt, the girl by the willow in the gold brocade—

Well, he must go hurriedly toward that door or not at all. His courage was failing.

The sound of the door startled her. Joan leaped to her feet and stood, shaking violently, by the table, one hand clutching at the edge of it in terror.

In that tongue-tied minute, if he had but known, with his fingers clenched in his hair and his face scarlet, he was like that turbulent boy who such a little while ago had crashed into his life with a sob.

Joan's agonized eyes, wet with tears, brought home to him the need of a steady head ... and responsibility. Yes, he must keep his two feet solidly on the ground and face a gigantic responsibility.

"Don't cry, dear, please!" he said gently. "It's just one of the things that can't be helped. Don told me. He overheard."

Her low cry hurt—viciously. And she came flying wildly across the room to his arms, sobbing out her grief and remorse.

"Oh, Kenny, Kenny." she sobbed. "I—want—you—both."

His shaking arms sheltered her. A heart-broken child! He must remember that. And, as Don said, he could have been her father.

"Happiness with the least unhappiness to others, girleen," he reminded with his cheek against her hair. "Remember?"

"Yes," she choked.

"You must go to Brian. Any foolish notion of sacrifice now will only tangle the lives of all of us."

"But—I cannot forget! Kenny, if only you would hate me!"

"I didn't mean to love you, mavourneen. It was like the tale of Killarney. I left a cover off in my heart and a spring gushed out and flooded my life."

"I am blaming myself!"

"You must not do that. You were in love with love. You must now know how different it—" But he could not say it, courageous as he felt.

"And the money!" choked Joan. "Oh, Kenny, Kenny, the ragged money! And I gave it away. And you were so good—so good!"

He frowned, unable to understand at once the relevance of the ragged money and realized that Joan was sobbing into his shoulder the tale of an eavesdropping bartender and a doctor. He accepted it, dazedly, thunderstruck at the alertness of his Nemesis who missed no single chance to shoot an arrow.

"And Don must give that money back. I will tell him—"

"No," said Kenny. "No, he must not."

She stared at him in wonder.

"Mavourneen," he pleaded wistfully, "may I—not do that at least for someone who is yours? Don needs it."

He could not know that his kindness was to her more poignant torment than his bitterest reproach. He thought as the color fled from her lips and left her gray and trembling, that she was fainting. He held her closely in his arms.

She slipped away from him and sat down weakly in a chair. Dusk lay beyond the windows. Joan covered her face with her hands.

"The Gray Man," she whispered. "He's peeping in."

Pain flared intolerably in Kenny's throat and stabbed into his heart. He drew the shades with a shudder and lighted the lamp.

In the supreme moment of his agony, came inspiration. He must save them all with a lie! Queer that, queer and contradictory! Yes, after practicing the truth, he must save them all from shipwreck with a lie.

"Girleen," he said, "there is something now that I must tell you. I thought never to say it. You came into my dream that day beneath the willow in gold brocade, with afterglow behind you and an ancient boat. I am an Irishman—and a painter. 'Twas a spot of rare enchantment and I said to myself, I

am falling in love—again."

"Again!" echoed Joan a little blankly.

"Again!" said Kenny inexorably. "You see, Joan, dear, I was used to falling in love. There are men like that. You and Brian would never understand."

"No," said the girl, shocked. "No."

"You made a mistake, the sort of mistake that drives half the lifeboats on the rocks. I mean, dear, falling in love with love. But you're over that. It was—a different sort of love with me. I knew as we crossed the river that first day in the punt that the madness could not last. You see—it never had."

"Kenny!"

If Joan in that moment had remembered the Irishman tearing bricks from the fireplace in a spasm of histrionic zeal, she might have distrusted the steadiness of his level, kindly glance. She might have guessed that again he was reckless and on his mettle. But she did not remember.

"Romance and mystery," said Kenny, lighting a cigarette and smiling at her through a cloud of smoke, "were always the death of me. My fancy's wayward and romantic. Afterward your will-of-the-wisp charm held me oddly. You kept yourself apart and precious. And I was always pursuing. It was provocative—and unfamiliar. And then came Samhain, the—the summer-ending." There was an odd note in his voice. "I faced a new experience. I had gone over the usual duration of my madness and I thought," he smiled, "I thought I was loving you for good. But—"

Her dark eyes stared at him, wistful and yet in the moment of her hope a shade reproachful.

"And—your love—did not last, Kenny?" It was a forlorn little voice, for all its unmistakable note of rejoicing. How very young she was—and childlike!

"It—did—not—last!" said Kenny deliberately. "It never does with me. I should have known it. I love you sincerely, girleen. I always shall. But I love you as I would have loved—my daughter."

"Your daughter! Kenny, why then did you speak so of the flood of Killarney?"

"I was testing you. You can see for yourself. I could not honorably tell you this, dear, if you still cared."

"But I do care," cried Joan, flinging out her hands with a gesture of appeal. "I love you so much, Kenny, that it hurts."

"But not in the way you love Brian."

"No."

"And that, mavourneen, is as it should be."

He told her of the stage mother. Let the lie go with the castle he had built upon it. And he would begin afresh.

"Ah," said Joan, dismissing it with shining eyes, "there, Kenny, you meant only to be kind."

He wondered wearily why the lie with all its torment had not shocked her. Truth was queer.

Joan glided toward the door. He caught in her face the look of a white flame and dropped his eyes. A Botticelli look. Ah, well, it was beautiful to be young and joyous!

"I must tell Brian," she said.

"Yes," said Kenny. "Of course."

And she was gone. Kenny lay back in his chair and closed his eyes; the sound of her flying feet death in his ears.

CHAPTER XLI

WHEN THE ISLE OF DELIGHT RECEDED

Often Kenny had appreciatively dramatized for himself possible minutes of tragedy. They were always opportunities for Shakespearian soliloquy and gesture.

Now he lay back in his chair much too tired for tragedy and gesture. And the need of soliloquy would have found him dumb. Upper-most in his mind was a dream in which Joan had peeped down at him from a balloon that went ever and ever higher—like the Isle of Delight that was always—receding. He had sensed in her to-night that aerial aloofness he had felt when he blocked old Adam out from his dream of love. Liebestraum! The stabbing pain in his heart grew hotter.

It was lonely here in the pines. He wondered why he had never caught before that chill pervading sense of solitude—sad solitude. The pines whispered. It was not merely poetry. They whispered plaintively… And he was very tired.

Rebellion came flaming into his apathy and Kenny caught his breath and held it, fiercely striking his hands together again and again. Sacrifice and suffering! Must it be like this? What had he written in his notebook anyway? He seemed almost to have forgotten.

The book opened at a touch to the page he wanted.

"Sunsets and vanity," he read drearily and penciled the rebuke away with a faint smile. Like his hairbrained, unquenchable youth, bright with folly, the sunsets and vanity lay in the past. Vanity! Ah, dear God! he could not feel humbler. Nor was he irresponsible—or a failure as a parent. He had made good to-night. Surely, surely, he had made good to-night. The one thing that he might not mark out was his failure as a painter.

"Need to suffer and learn something of the psychology of sacrifice." Well, he was—learning… Nay, he had learned. Kenny fiercely drew his pencil through the sentence and read the rest.

The truth, though he did not fully understand it, he would always try to tell. He had no debts. The chairs in the studio were cleared of litter. A plebeian regularity had made him uncomfortably provident.

So much for that part of his self-arraignment. One by one he marked the items out and stared with a twisted smile at the next.

"I borrow Brian's girls, his money and his clothes!" Hum! Once Garry had barked at him for sending orchids to a girl or two whom Brian liked.

The money, the clothes, the paraphernalia he had pawned, were returned. As for the girls—well, Brian had retaliated in kind and perhaps the debt in its concentration of payment, was abundantly squared.

"Indolence." That the record of his winter could disprove.

And finally, he read what, after Adam's telling of the truth, he had scribbled at the end.

"Life is a battle. I do not fight. And life is not an individual adventure."

It wasn't. It was a chain that clanked.

"I do not fight," he read again and crossed it out.

"Adam, old man," he said wryly, "I think to-night I've done some fighting. And the fight has just begun."

He tore the page out, struck a match and burned it. Again he dropped back in his chair and closed his eyes.

Into the blur came Garry.

"Kenny!" he called. "Kenny!"

Kenny opened his eyes with a start. Garry stood by the cabin door, his hand upon the knob.

"Don asked me to come. Kenny, I was on the porch. Great God! the kid must have gone crazy."

"You heard?"

"Yes."

"He wanted to—atone."

"And now that he's cooled down enough to remember your kindness, Kenny, he's breaking his heart over you. A queer kid! I almost thrashed him. He's tramping off his brain-storm."

"And Joan?"

"With Brian." Garry looked away. "They have forgotten the world," he added bitterly.

"Kenny, how did you manage? That look in her face—"

"I lied."

"Gallant liar!" said Garry huskily. "I knew you would. It was the only kind way."

"Almost," said Kenny, "I did not remember to lie in time. Truth is a thing I cannot understand."

The sympathy in Garry's eyes unnerved him.

"Garry," he flamed, "why did I practice the telling of truth to end now with a lie? Why did Joan plead for a year to learn to be my wife and learn in it—not to be?"

"God knows!" said Garry gently. "Why did agony come to Brian at the hands of a boy he'd befriended? And then—to you?"

"It is the Samhain of my life," said Kenny rising. "And I am no longer John Whitaker's King of Youth. I think my youth died back there when Don thrust it aside, not meaning, I take it, to be cruel. But I grew up all at once." He frowned. "Drowning men, they say, have a kaleidoscopic vision of the past. I think sitting here that came to me. Perhaps, Garry, if Eileen had lived I would have been different—steadier. I think I loved her. I think it would have lasted. A child is a beautiful link. Perhaps that fever of vanity that grew to a burning in my veins would never have started. Started, it was like a conflagration. It drove Brian to sunsets. God knows what it didn't do. I thought only of myself—always. That desire for adulation in a woman's eyes, that curious persistent fever was, I'm sure, a sort of sex vanity. It has nearly ruined many another man's life. It nearly ruined mine. Always when I was drifting into new madness, I couldn't work. I dreamed. The Isle of Delight, always receding! I sang and whistled. The King of Youth! Only when I was drifting out again, could I bend myself to concentration and sanity. And then another look in a girl's soft eyes—and more vanity and self and delirium. But I'm tired. I want to look ahead to—to quiet and steadiness and work."

Garry, with the husk still in his throat, wandered off to the window.

"Garry!"

Garry wheeled and found a wistful, boyish Kenny with his fingers in his hair.

"I'm no longer a failure as a parent?"

"No!" said Garry with decision.

"And God knows I haven't been a failure as a lover. I'm prayin' I shan't always be a failure as a painter. It's the one thing left. Somewhere in Ireland, Garry, nine silent fairies blow beneath a caldron. They know the secrets of the future. I'd like to be peepin'."

He was to know in time that the caldron held for him peace and big achievement.

"I wish I could help!" said Garry.

"Garry, could you—would you drive me home to-night?"

"Anything!"

"You'll not be mindin'?"

"No. It's better."

"Come," said Kenny, his color high. "We'll be facin' it now."

They went in silence through the pines.

CHAPTER XLII

THE END OF KENNY'S SONG

A light flickered on the porch where Hannah hovered around the supper table, puzzled and annoyed.

"I'm glad somebody's come at last," she exclaimed a trifle tartly. "Every bug on the ridge has been staring at the supper table through the screens. And I promised Mis' Owen to drive over there to-night with Hughie."

"Where's Brian?"

"He went down to the village with Joan."

"And Don?"

"Don said he'd eat his supper when he came. It might be late."

Kenny, whistling a madcap hornpipe, glinted at the table with approval.

"Off with ye, now, Hannah, darlin'," he said. "I'll stare the bugs down until they come."

"They ought to be here now." Hannah's eyes strained, frowning, toward the lane.

"Ho, Brian!" Kenny called.

"Ho!" came a distant shout. And then: "Coming, Kenny."

Had Kenny's call been one of reassurance? To Garry, miserably intent upon the ordeal ahead, the big Irishman, whistling softly in his chair, had sent a message through the dark to ease the tension. Already the daredevil light danced wantonly in his eyes.

Hannah trotted off in better humor.

Dreading the supper hour, dreading the sound of steps upon the walk, Garry smoked and gnawed his lips. The meeting must be painful... Now they were coming along the gravel ... and now ... He had undervalued Kenny's tact.

The latch of the screen door clicked. Kenny rummaged for cigarettes and struck a match. Joan had slipped to her place at the table before he threw the match away. Then he smiled. His eyes were a curious droll confessional that Brian seemed at once to understand. They deplored the fickle strain in his blood that doomed all madness of the heart to end in time. Brian had seen that look too many times to doubt it now.

"Come, Garry." Joan brought him into the circle at the table with a smile. Garry joined it with a sinking heart. He would have had that shining look of wonder in her eyes less unrestrained. But the shadows for Joan, thanks to Kenny's lie, lay already dimly in the past.

The merriment of the supper hour Garry thought of later with a pang. He ate but little, fascinated by the reckless spontaneity of Kenny's mood. It put them all at ease. The big kind Spartan will behind it brought a catch to Garry's throat. Daredevil glints laughed in Kenny's eyes. Again and again Garry found himself staring at the actor's vivid face in a panic of unbelief.

"Garry's had a letter," said Kenny presently. "He's driving back to-night."

"Garry!"

"I'm sorry." Garry rose. "I'm afraid," he added, glancing at his watch, "that I'll have to slip upstairs and sling some odds and ends in my suit case. Mind, Kenny?"

"Run along," said Kenny. "I'll be up in a minute." He drummed an irresponsible tune upon the table and looked apologetic.

"If you'll not be mindin', Brian," he began, "I'll go along. He doesn't know the roads—"

Brian eyed him with a familiar glint of authority.

"I thought so," he said slowly. "I saw it coming. You're just in the mood for what Jan calls 'rocketing' and Garry's letter, of course, was the spark. Luckily, old boy, I'm on the job again. You've been tearing around unguarded a shade too long."

"I've got to go," barked Kenny, pushing back his chair. "I've had his car for months. Do you suppose I want him losing his way all night—"

He fumed off rebelliously, talking as he went.

Brian's eyes followed him through the doorway.

"Hum!" he said grimly. "'Richard is himself again!' You mustn't blame him, Joan," he added. "He was always like that. He can't help it. I mean, dear, tumbling in and out of love. I always knew the symptoms. Falling in, he'd whistle softly and his eyes would shine. He'd be up in the clouds and altogether gay and charming, his work would begin to pall and he'd put it aside until he began to run down. I always knew when he came to disillusion. His conscience would begin to bother him about work. He'd be moody and discontented and a desperate flurry of painting would follow until the next girl smiled."

He reached across the table and caught her hands.

"It is hard to believe it all," he said simply. "And Ireland for a honeymoon!"

The look of shining content in Joan's eyes deepened.

"Oh, Brian," she said. "I shall love it, I know!"

Kenny climbed the stairway in a daze and packed his suit case. Everywhere he felt the eyes of

Adam Craig upon him—less and less unkind. They stared at him from the windows by the orchard. They stared over the creaking banister as he stumbled down the stairway with his courage ebbing. They stared from the library where the porch light glimmered through the windows. … Fall was in the wind to-night. The old house creaked. Adam's spirit swept in always with a sighing wind. Kenny shivered. A bleak place—the ridge—and haunted.

With a shock he found himself upon the porch. At the foot of the steps Garry waited in the car, his gauntleted hands drumming nervously upon the wheel. If for a minute stark, incredulous terror swept through Kenny's veins, his laughing lips belied it. Then he kissed Joan lightly on the cheek and went, whistling, down the steps with Brian.

"And you, Brian?" he said, halting on the lower step to light a cigarette. "What shall I tell John?"

"Tell him all," said Brian. He talked hurriedly of his plans.

Kenny held out his hand.

"God speed, boy!" he said.

Garry—unsentimental Garry—blinked as the car shot down the lane. He clashed his gears and shuddered.

Brian stared.

"Phew!" he whistled as Joan came down the steps. "Garry's driving like a blacksmith."

They clung to each other in the dark and watched the headlights play upon the trees.

From the end of the lane came Kenny's final gift of reassurance. His rollicking voice swept into the quiet, soft with brogue, as care-free in song as it had been earlier in laughter:

"'I'll love thee evermore
Eileen a roon!
I'll bless thee o'er and o'er
Eileen a roon!'"

Brian laughed softly.

"Joan! Joan!" he exclaimed in a rush of feeling. Their lips met.

"'Oh! for thy sake I'll tread
Where plains of Mayo spread.'"

Brian's heart went out to the irresponsible penitent rocketing in song.

"Dear lunatic!" he said.

Fainter in the night wind came the end of Kenny's song:

"'By hope still fondly led,
Eileen a roon.'"

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