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THE WILD GEESE



BY

STANLEY J. WEYMAN

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CHAPTER

ON BOARD THE "CORMORANT" SLOOP

Midway in that period of Ireland's history during which, according to historians, the distressful country had none—to be more precise, on a spring morning early in the eighteenth century, and the reign of George the First, a sloop of about seventy tons burthen was beating up Dingle Bay, in the teeth of a stiff easterly breeze. The sun was two hours high, and the grey expanse of the bay was flecked with white horses hurrying seaward in haste to leap upon the Blasquets, or to disport themselves in the field of ocean. From the heaving deck of the vessel the mountains that shall not be removed were visible—on the northerly tack Brandon, on the southerly Carntual; the former sunlit, with patches of moss gleaming like emeralds on its breast, the latter dark and melancholy, clothed in the midst of tradition and fancy that in those days garbed so much of Ireland's bog and hill.

The sloop had missed the tide, and, close hauled to the wind, rode deep in the ebb, making little way with each tack. The breeze hummed through the rigging. The man at the helm humped a shoulder to the sting of the spray, and the rest of the crew, seven or eight in number—tarry, pigtailed, outlandish sailor men—crouched under the windward rail. The skipper sat with a companion on a coil of rope on the dry side of the skylight, and at the moment at which our story opens was oblivious alike of the weather and his difficulties. He sat with his eyes fixed on his neighbour, and in those eyes a wondering, fatuous admiration. So might a mortal look if some strange hap brought him face to face with a centaur.

"Never?" he murmured respectfully.

"Never," his companion answered.

"My faith!" Captain Augustin rejoined. He was a cross between a Frenchman and an Irishman. For twenty years he had carried wine to Ireland, and returned laden with wool to Bordeaux or Cadiz. He knew every inlet between Achill Sound and the Head of Kinsale, and was so far a Jacobite that he scorned to pay duty to King George. "Never? My faith!" he repeated, staring, if possible, harder than ever.

"No," said the Colonel. "Under no provocation, thank God!"

"But it's *drôle*," Captain Augustin rejoined. "It would bother me sorely to know what you do."

"What we all should do," his passenger answered gently. "Our duty, Captain Augustin. Our duty! Doing which we are men indeed. Doing which, we have no more to do, no more to fear, no more to question." And Colonel John Sullivan threw out both his hands, as if to illustrate the freedom from care which followed. "See! it is done!"

"But west of Shannon, where there is no law?" Augustin answered. "Eh, Colonel? And in Kerry, where we'll be, the saints helping, before noon—which is all one with Connaught? No, in Kerry, what with Sullivans, and Mahonies, and O'Beirnes, that wear coats only for a gentleman to tread upon, and would sooner shoot a friend before breakfast than spend

the day idle, *par ma foi*, I'm not seeing what you'll be doing there, Colonel."

"A man may protect himself from violence," the Colonel answered soberly, "and yet do his duty. What he may not do—is this. He may not go out to kill another in cold blood, for a point of honour, or for revenge, or to sustain what he has already done amiss! No, nor for vanity, or for the hundred trifles for which men risk their lives and seek the lives of others. I hope I make myself clear, Captain Augustin?" he added courteously.

He asked because the skipper's face of wonderment was not to be misread. And the skipper answered, "Quite clear!" meaning the reverse. Clear, indeed? Yonder were the hills and bogs of Kerry—lawless, impenetrable, abominable—a realm of Tories and rapparees. On the sloop itself was scarce a man whose hands were free from blood. He, Augustin, mild-mannered as any smuggler on the coast, had spent his life between fleeing and fighting, with his four carronades ever crammed to the muzzle, and his cargo ready to be jettisoned at sight of a cruiser. And this man talked as if he were in church! Talked—talked—the skipper fairly gasped. "Oh, quite clear!" he mumbled. "Quite clear!" he replied. "But it's an odd creed."

"Not a creed, my friend," Colonel Sullivan replied precisely. "But the result of a creed. The result, thank God, of more creeds than one."

Captain Augustin cast a wild eye at the straining, shrieking rigging; the sloop was lurching heavily. But whether he would or no, his eye fluttered back and rested, fascinated, on the Colonel's face. Indeed, from the hour, ten days earlier, which had seen him mount the side in the Bordeaux river, Colonel John Sullivan had been a subject of growing astonishment to the skipper. Captain Augustin knew his world tolerably. In his time he had conveyed many a strange passenger from strand to strand: haggard men who ground their shoulders against the bulkhead, and saw things in corners; dark, down-looking adventurers, whose hands flew to hilts if a gentleman addressed them suddenly; gay young sparks bound on foreign service and with the point of honour on their lips, or their like, returning old and broken to beg or cut throats on the highway—these, and men who carried their lives in their hands, and men who went, cloaked, on mysterious missions, and men who wept as the Irish coast faded behind them, and men, more numerous, who wept when they saw it again—he knew them all! All, he had carried them, talked with them, learned their secrets, and more often their hopes.

But such a man as this he had never carried. A man who indeed wore outlandish fur-trimmed clothes, and had seen, if his servant's sparse words went for aught, outlandish service; but who neither swore, nor drank above measure, nor swaggered, nor threatened. Who would not dice, nor game—save for trifles. Who, on the contrary, talked of duty, and had a peaceful word for all, and openly condemned the duello, and was mild as milk and as gentle as an owl. Such a one seemed, indeed, the fabled "phaynix," or a bat with six wings, or any other prodigy which the fancy, Irish or foreign, could conceive.

Then, to double the marvel, the Colonel had a servant, a close-tongued fellow, William Bale by name, and reputed an Englishman, who, if he was not like his master, was as unlike other folk. He was as quiet-spoken as the Colonel, and as precise, and as peaceable. He had even been heard to talk of his duty. But while the Colonel was tall and spare, with a gentle eye and a long, kindly face, and was altogether of a pensive cast, Bale was short and stout, of a black pallor, and very forbidding. His mouth, when he opened it—which was seldom—dropped honey. But his brow scowled, his lip sneered, and his silence invited no confidence.

Such being the skipper's passenger, and such his man, the wonder was that Captain Augustin's astonishment had not long ago melted into contempt. But it had not. For one thing, a seaman had been hurt, and the Colonel had exhibited a skill in the treatment of wounds which would not have disgraced an experienced surgeon. Then in the Bay the sloop had met with half a gale, and the passenger, in circumstances which the skipper knew to be more trying to landsmen than to himself, had maintained a serenity beyond applause. He had even, clinging to the same ring-bolt with the skipper, while the south-wester tore overhead and the gallant little vessel lay over wellnigh to her beam-ends, praised with a queer condescension the conduct of the crew.

"This is the finest thing in the world," he had shouted, amid the roar of things, "to see men doing their duty! I would not have missed this for a hundred crowns!"

"I'd give as much to be safe in Cherbourg," had been the skipper's grim reply as he watched his mast.

But Augustin had not forgotten the Colonel's coolness. A landsman, for whom the trough of the wave had no terrors, and the leeward breakers, falling mountain high on Ushant, no message, was not a man to be despised.

Indeed, from that time the skipper had begun to find a charm in the Colonel's gentleness

and courtesy. He had fought against the feeling, but it had grown upon him. Something that was almost affection began to mingle with and augment his wonder. Hence the patience with which, with Kerry on the beam, he listened while the Colonel sang his siren song.

"He will be one of the people called Quakers," the skipper thought, after a while. "I've heard of them, but never seen one. Yes, he will be a Quaker."

Unfortunately, as he arrived at this conclusion a cry from the steersman roused him. He sprang to his feet. Alas! the sloop had run too far on the northerly tack, and simultaneously the wind had shifted a point to the southward. In the open water this had advantaged her; but she had been allowed to run into a bight of the north shore and a line of foam cut her off to the eastward, leaving small room to tack. She might still clear the westerly rocks and run out to sea, but the skipper saw—with an oath—that this was doubtful, and with a seaman's quickness he made up his mind.

"Keep her on!—keep her on!" he roared, "you son of a *maudite mère*! Child of the accursed! We must run into Skull haven! And if the men of Skull take so much as an iron bolt from us, and I misdoubt them, I'll keel-haul you, son of the *Diable*! I'll not leave an inch of skin upon you!"

The man, cowering over the wheel, obeyed, and the little vessel ran up the narrowing water—in which she had become involved—on an even keel. The crew were already on their feet, they had loosened the sheet, and squared the boom; they stood by to lower the yard. All—the skipper with a grim face—stood looking forward, as the inlet narrowed, the green banks closed in, the rocks that fringed them approached. Silently and gracefully the sloop glided on, more smoothly with every moment, until a turn in the passage opened a small land-locked haven. At the head of the haven, barely a hundred yards above high-water mark, stood a ruined tower—the Tower of Skull—and below this a long house of stone with a thatched roof.

It was clear that the sloop's movements had been watched from the shore, for although the melancholy waste of moor and mountain disclosed no other habitation, a score of half-naked barefoot figures were gathered on the jetty; while others could be seen hurrying down the hillside. These cried to one another in an unknown tongue, and with shrill eldritch voices, which vied with the screams of the gulls swinging overhead.

"Stand by to let go the kedge," Augustin cried, eyeing them gloomily. "We are too far in now! Let go!—let go!"

But the order and the ensuing action at once redoubled the clamour on shore. A dozen of the foremost natives flung themselves into crazy boats, that seemed as if they could not float long enough to reach the vessel. But the men handled them with consummate skill and with equal daring. In a twinkling they were within hail, and a man, wearing a long frieze coat, a fisherman's red cap, and little besides, stood up in the bow of the nearest.

"You will be coming to the jetty, Captain?" he cried in imperfect English.

The skipper scowled at him, but did not answer.

"You will come to the jetty, Captain," the man repeated in his high, sing-song voice. "Sure, and you've come convenient, for there's no one here barring yourselves."

"And you're wanting brandy!" Augustin muttered bitterly under his breath. He glanced at his men, as if he meditated resistance.

But, "Kerry law! Kerry law!" the man cried. "You know it well, Captain! It's not I'll be answerable if you don't come to the jetty."

The skipper, who had fallen ill at Skull once before, and got away with some loss, hoping that he might never see the place again, knew that he was in the men's power. True, a single discharge of his carronades would blow the boats to pieces; but he could not in a moment warp his ship out through the narrow passage. And if he could, he knew that the act would be bloodily avenged if he ever landed again in that part of Ireland. He swore under his breath, and the steersman who had wrought the harm by holding on too long wilted under his eye. The crew looked other ways.

At length he yielded, and sulkily gave the order, the windlass was manned, and the kedge drawn up. Fenders were lowered, and the sloop slid gently to the jetty side.

In a twinkling a score of natives swarmed aboard. The man in the frieze coat followed more leisurely, and with such dignity as became the owner of a stone-walled house. He sauntered up to the skipper, a leer in his eye. "You will have lost something the last time you were here, Captain?" he said. "It is not I that will be responsible this time unless the stuff is landed."

Augustin laughed scornfully. "The cargo is for Crosby of Castlemaine," he said. And he added various things which he hoped would happen to himself if he landed so much as a single tub.

"It's little we know of Crosby here," the other replied; and he spat on the deck. "And less we'll be caring, my dear. I say it shall be landed. Here, you, Darby Sullivan, off with the hatch!"

Augustin stepped forward impulsively, as if he had a mind to throw the gentleman in the frieze coat into the sea. But he had not armed himself before he came on deck, the men of Skull outnumbered his crew two to one, and, savage and half-naked as they were, were furnished to a man with long sharp skenes and the skill to use them. If resistance had been possible at any time, he had let the moment pass. The nearest Justice lived twelve Irish miles away, and had he been on the spot he would, since he was of necessity a Protestant, have been as helpless—unless he brought the garrison of Tralee at his back—as a churchwarden in a Synod of Cardinals. The skipper hesitated, and while he hesitated the hatches were off, and the Sullivans swarmed down like monkeys. Before the sloop could be made fast, the smaller kegs were being tossed up, and passed over the side, a line was formed on land, and the cargo, which had last seen the sun on the banks of the Garonne, was swiftly vanishing in the maw of the stone house on the shore.

The skipper's rage was great, but he could only swear, and O'Sullivan Og, the man in the frieze coat, who bore him an old grudge, grinned in mockery. "For better custody, Captain!" he said. "For better custody! Under my roof, *bien!* And when you will to go again there will be the dues to be paid, the little dues over which we quarrelled last time! And all will be rendered to a stave!"

"You villain!" the Captain muttered under his breath. "I understand!" Turning—for the sight was more than he could bear—he found his passenger at his elbow.

The Colonel, if his face went for anything, liked the proceedings almost as little as the skipper. His lips were tightly closed, and he frowned.

"Ay," Augustin cried bitterly—for the first instinct of the man who is hurt is to hurt another—"now you see what it is you've come back to! It's rob, or be robbed, this side of Tralee, and as far as the devil could kick you beyond it! I wish you well out of it! But I suppose it would take more than this to make you draw that long hanger of yours?"

The Colonel cast a troubled eye on him. "Beyond doubt," he said, "it is the duty of a man to assist in defending the house of his host. And in a sense and measure, the goods of his host"—with an uneasy look at the fast-vanishing cargo, which was leaping from hand to hand so swiftly that the progress of a tub from the hold to the house was as the flight of a swallow—"are the house of his host. I do not deny that," he continued precisely, "but——"

"But in this instance," the sea-captain struck in with a sneer, contempt for the first time mastering wonder, "in this instance?"

"In this instance," the Colonel repeated with an unmistakable blush, "I am not very free to act. The truth is, Captain Augustin, these folk are of my kin. I was born not many miles from here"—his eye measured the lonely landscape as if he compared it with more recent scenes—"and, wrong or right, blood is thicker than wine. So that frankly, I am not clear that for the sake of your Bordeaux, I'm tied to shed blood that might be my forbears'!"

"Or your grandmother's," Augustin cried, with an open sneer.

"Or my grandmother's. Very true. But if a word to them in season——"

"Oh, d—n your words," the skipper retorted disdainfully.

He would have said more, but at that moment it became clear that something was happening on shore. On the green brow beside the tower a girl mounted on horseback had appeared; at a cry from her the men had stopped work. The next moment her horse came cantering down the slope, and with uplifted whip she rode in among the men. The whip fell twice, and down went all the tubs within reach. Her voice, speaking, now Erse, now Kerry English, could be heard upbraiding the nearest, commanding, threatening, denouncing. Then on the brow behind her appeared in turn a man—a man who looked gigantic against the sky, and who sat a horse to match. He descended more slowly, and reached the girl's side as O'Sullivan Og, in his frieze coat, came to the front in support of his men.

For a full minute the girl vented her anger on Og, while he stood sulky but patient, waiting for an opening to defend himself. When he obtained this, he seemed to the two on the deck of the sloop to appeal to the big man, who said a word or two, but was cut short by the girl. Her voice, passionate and indignant, reached the deck; but not her words.

"That should be Flavia McMurrrough!" the Colonel murmured thoughtfully, "And Uncle

Ulick. He's little changed, whoever's changed! She has a will, it seems, and good impulses!"

The big man had begun by frowning on O'Sullivan Og. But presently he smiled at something the latter said, then he laughed; at last he made a joke himself. At that the girl turned on him; but he argued with her. A man held up a tub for inspection, and though she struck it pettishly with her whip, it was plain that she was shaken. O'Sullivan Og pointed to the sloop, pointed to his house, grinned. The listeners on the deck caught the word "Dues!" and the peal of laughter that followed.

Captain Augustin understood naught of what was going forward. But the man beside him, who did, touched his sleeve. "It were well to speak to her," he said.

"Who is she?" the skipper asked impatiently. "What has she to do with it?"

"They are her people," the Colonel answered simply—"or they should be. If she says yea, it is yea; and if she says nay, it is nay. Or, so it should be—as far as a league beyond Morristown."

Augustin waited for no more. He was still in a fog, but he saw a ray of hope; this was the Chatelaine, it seemed. He bundled over the side.

Alas! he ventured too late. As his feet touched the slippery stones of the jetty, the girl wheeled her horse about with an angry exclamation, shook her whip at O'Sullivan Og—who winked the moment her back was turned—and cantered away up the hill. On the instant the men picked up the kegs they had dropped, a shrill cry passed down the line, and the work was resumed.

But the big man remained; and the skipper, with the Colonel at his elbow, made for him through the half-naked kernes. He saw them coming, however, guessed their errand, and, with the plain intention of avoiding them, he turned his horse's head.

But the skipper, springing forward, was in time to seize his stirrup. "Sir," he cried, "this is robbery! *Nom de Dieu*, it is thievery!"

The big man looked down at him with temper. "Oh, by G—d, you must pay your dues!" he said. "Oh yes, you must pay your dues!"

"But this is robbery."

"Sure it's not that you must be saying!"

The Colonel put the skipper on one side. "By your leave," he cried, "one word! You don't know, sir, who I am, but—"

"I know you must pay your dues!" Uncle Ulick answered, parrot-like. "Oh yes, you must pay your dues!" He was clearly ashamed of his *rôle*, however; for as he spoke he shook off the Colonel's hold with a pettish gesture, struck his horse with his stick, and cantered away over the hill. In a twinkling he was lost to sight.

"*Vaurien!*" cried Captain Augustin, shaking his fist after him. But he might as well have sworn at the moon.

CHAPTER II

MORRISTOWN

It was not until the Colonel had passed over the shoulder above the stone-walled house that he escaped from the jabber of the crowd and the jeers of the younger members of this savage tribe, who, noting something abnormal in the fashion of the stranger's clothes, followed him a space. On descending the farther slope, however, he found himself alone in the silence of the waste. Choosing without hesitation one of two tracks, ill-trodden, but such as in that district and at that period passed for roads, he took his way along it at a good pace.

A wide brown basin, bog for the most part, but rising here and there into low mounds of sward or clumps of thorn-trees, stretched away to the foot of the hills. He gazed upon it with eyes which had been strained for years across the vast unbroken plains of Central Europe, the sandy steppes of Poland, the frozen marshes of Lithuania; and beside the majesty of their boundless distances this view shrank to littleness. But it spoke to more

than his eyes; it spoke to the heart, to feelings and memories which time had not blunted, nor could blunt. The tower on the shoulder behind him had been raised by his wild forefathers in the days when the Spaniard lay at Smerwick; and, mean and crumbling, still gave rise to emotions which the stern battlements of Stralsund or of Rostock had failed to evoke. Soil and sky, the lark which sang overhead, the dark peat-water which rose under foot, the scent of the moist air, the cry of the curlew, all spoke of home—the home which he had left in the gaiety of youth, to return to it a grave man, older than his years, and with grey hairs flecking the black. No wonder that he stood more than once, and, absorbed in thought, gazed on this or that, on crag and moss, on the things which time and experience had so strangely diminished.

The track, after zig-zagging across a segment of the basin that has been described, entered a narrow valley, drained by a tolerable stream. After ascending this for a couple of miles, it disclosed a view of a wider vale, enclosed by gentle hills of no great height. In the lap of this nestled a lake, on the upper end of which some beauty was conferred by a few masses of rock partly clothed by birch-trees, through which a stream fell sharply from the upland. Not far from these rocks a long, low house stood on the shore.

The stranger paused to take in the prospect; nor was it until after the lapse of some minutes, spent in the deepest reverie, that he pursued his way along the left-hand bank of the lake. By-and-by he was able to discern, amid the masses of rock at the head of the lake, a grey tower, the twin of that Tower of Skull which he had left behind him; and a hundred paces farther he came upon a near view of the house.

"Two-and-twenty years!" he murmured. "There is not even a dog to bid me welcome!"

The house was of two stories, with a thatched roof. Its back was to the slopes that rose by marshy terraces to the hills. Its face was turned to the lake, and between it and the water lay a walled forecourt, the angle on each side of the entrance protected by a tower of an older date than the house. The entrance was somewhat pretentious, and might—for each of the pillars supported a heraldic beast—have seemed to an English eye out of character with the thatched roof. But, as if to correct this, one of the beasts was headless, and one of the gates had fallen from its hinges. In like manner the dignity of a tolerably spacious garden, laid out beside the house, was marred by the proximity of the fold-yard, which had also trespassed, in the shape of sundry offices and hovels, on the forecourt.

On the lower side of the road opposite the gates half a dozen stone steps, that like the heraldic pillars might have graced a more stately mansion, led down to the water. They formed a resting-place for as many beggars, engaged in drawing at empty pipes; while twice as many old women sat against the wall of the forecourt and, with their drugget cloaks about them, kept up a continual whine. Among these, turning herself now to one, now to another, moved the girl whom the Colonel had seen at the landing-place. She held her riding-skirt uplifted in one hand, her whip in the other, and she was bare-headed. At her elbow, whistling idly, and tapping his boots with a switch, lounged the big man of the morning.

As the Colonel approached, taking these things in with his eyes, and making, Heaven knows what comparisons in his mind, the man and the maid turned and looked at him. The two exchanged some sentences, and the man came forward to meet him.

"Sir," he said, not without a touch of rough courtesy, "if it is for hospitality you have come, you will be welcome at Morristown. But if it is to start a cry about this morning's business, you've travelled on your ten toes to no purpose, and so I warn you."

The Colonel looked at him. "Cousin Ulick," he said, "I take your welcome as it is meant, and I thank you for it."

The big man's mouth opened wide. "By the Holy Cross!" he said, "if I'm not thinking it is John Sullivan!"

"It is," the Colonel answered, smiling. And he held out his hand.

Uncle Ulick grasped it impulsively. "And it's I'm the one that's glad to see you," he said. "By Heaven, I am! Though I didn't expect you, no more than I expected myself! And, faith," he continued, grinning as if he began to see something humorous as well as surprising in the arrival, "I'm not sure that you will be as welcome to all, John Sullivan, as you are to me."

"You were always easy, Ulick," the other answered with a smile, "when you were big and I was little."

"Ay? Well, in size we're much as we were. But—Flavia!"

The girl, scenting something strange, was already at his elbow. "What is it?" she asked, her breath coming a little quickly. "Who is it?" fixing her eyes on the new-comer's face.

Uncle Ulick chuckled. "It's your guardian, my jewel," he said. "No less! And what he'll say to what's going on I'll not be foretelling!"

"My guardian?" she repeated, the blood rising abruptly to her cheek.

"Just that," Ulick Sullivan answered humorously. "Just that, my darling. It's John Sullivan come back from Sweden. And, as I've told him, I'm not sure that all at Morristown will be as glad to see him as I am." At which Uncle Ulick went off into a peal of Titanic laughter.

But that which amused him did not appear to amuse his niece, She stood staring at Colonel Sullivan as if she were far more surprised than pleased. At length, and with a childish dignity, she held out her hand.

"If you are Colonel John Sullivan," she said, in a thin voice, "you are welcome at Morristown."

He might have laughed at the distance of her tone. But he merely bowed, and with the utmost gravity. "I thank you," he answered. And then, addressing Ulick Sullivan, "I need not say that I had your communication," he continued, "with the news of Sir Michael's death and of the dispositions made by his will. I could not come at once, but when I could I did, and I am here. Having said so much," he went on, turning to the girl and looking at her with serious kindness, "may I add that I think it will be well if we leave matters of business on one side until we know one another?"

"Well, faith, I think we'd better," Ulick Sullivan replied. And he chuckled. "I do think so, bedad!"

The girl said nothing, and when he had chuckled his fill restraint fell upon the three. They turned from one another and looked across the lake, which the wind, brisk at sea, barely ruffled. Colonel Sullivan remarked that they had a little more land under tillage than he remembered, and Ulick Sullivan assented. And then again there was silence, until the girl struck her habit with her whip and cried flippantly, "Well, to dinner, if we are to have dinner! To dinner!" She turned, and led the way to the gate of the forecourt.

The man who followed was clever enough to read defiance in the pose of her head and resentment in her shoulders. When a beggar-woman, more importunate than the rest, caught hold of her skirt, and Flavia flicked her with the whip as she would have flicked a dog, he understood. And when the dogs in the court fell upon her in a troop and were kicked to right and left, and when a babe, that, clothed in a single shift, was crawling on hands and knees upon the threshold, was removed in the same manner—but more gently—still he understood.

There were other dogs in the stone-paved hall; a hen too, finding its food on the floor and strutting here and there as if it had never known another home. On the left of the door, an oak table stood laid for the mid-day meal; on the right, before a carved stone chimney-piece, under which a huge log smouldered on the andirons, two or three men were seated. These rose on the entrance of the young mistress—they were dependants of the better class, for whom open house was kept at Morristown when business brought them thither. And, so far, all was well. Yet it may be that on the instant eyes which had been blind to defects were opened by the presence of this stranger from the outer world. For Flavia's voice was hard as she asked old Darby, the butler, if The McMurrrough was in the house.

"Faith, I believe not," said he. "His honour, nor the other quality, have not returned from the fishing."

"Well, let him know when he comes in," she rejoined, "that Colonel John Sullivan has arrived from Sweden, and," she added with a faint sneer, "it were well if you put on your uniform coat, Darby."

The old butler did not hear the last words. He was looking at the new-comer. "Glory be to God, Colonel," he said; "it's in a field of peas I'd have known you! True for you, you're as like the father that bred you as the two covers of a book! It's he was the grand gentleman! I was beyond the Mahoney's great gravestone when he shot Squire Crosby in the old church-yard of Tralee for an appetite to his breakfast! More by token, he went out with the garrison officer after his second bottle that same day that ever was—and the creature shot him in the knee—bad luck to him for a foreigner and a Protestant—and he limped to his dying day!"

The girl laughed unkindly. "You're opening your mouth and putting your foot in it, Darby," she said. "If the Colonel is not a foreigner——"

"And sure he couldn't be that, and his own father's son!" cried the quick-witted Irishman. "And if, bad luck, he's a Protestant, I'll never believe he's one of them through-and-through d——d black Protestants that you and I mean! Glory be to God, it's not in the Sullivans to be one of them!"

The Colonel laughed as he shook the old servant's hand; and Uncle Ulick joined in the laugh. "You're a clever rogue, Darby," he said. "Your neck'll never be in a rope, but your fingers will untie the knot! And now, where'll you put him?"

Flavia tapped her foot on the floor; foreseeing, perhaps, what was coming.

"Put his honour?" Darby repeated, rubbing his bald head. "Ay, sure, where'll we put him? May it be long before the heavens is his bed! There's the old master's room, a grand chamber fit for a lord, but there's a small matter of the floor that is sunk and lets in the rats—bad cess to the dogs for an idle, useless pack. And there's the Count's room would do finely, but the vagabonds have never mended the thatch that was burned the last drinking, and though 'twas no more than the width of a flea's leap, the devil of a big bowl of water has it let in! The young master's friends are in the South, but the small room beyond that has the camp truckle that Sir Michael brought from the ould wars: that's dry and snug! And for the one window that's airy, sure, 'tis no drawback at this sayson."

"It will do very well for me, Darby," the Colonel said, smiling.

"Well," Darby answered, rubbing his head, "the Cross be between us and harm, I'm not so sure where's another. The young mather——"

"That will do, Darby!" the girl cried impatiently. And then, "I am sorry, Colonel Sullivan," she continued stiffly, "that you should be so poorly lodged—who are the master of all. But doubtless," with an irrepressible resentment in her voice, "you will be able presently to put matters on a better footing."

With a formal curtsy she left them then, and retreated up the stairs, which at the rear of the hall ascended to a gallery that ran right and left to the rooms on the first floor.

Colonel Sullivan turned with Uncle Ulick to the nearest window and looked out on the untidy forecourt. "You know, I suppose," he said, in a tone which the men beside the fire, who were regarding him curiously, could not hear, "the gist of Sir Michael's letters to me?"

Uncle Ulick drummed with his fingers on the window-sill. "Faith, the most of it," he said.

"Was he right in believing that her brother intended to turn Protestant for the reasons he told me?"

"It's like enough, I'm thinking."

"Does she know? The girl?"

"Not a breath! And I would not be the one to tell her," Uncle Ulick added, with some grimness.

"Yet it may be necessary?"

Uncle Ulick shook his fist at a particularly importunate beggar who had ventured across the forecourt. "It's a gift the little people never gave me to tell unpleasant things," he said. "And if you'll be told by me, Colonel, you'll travel easy. The girl has a spirit, and you'll not persuade her to stand in her brother's light, at all, at all! She has it fast that her grandfather wronged him—and old Sir Michael was queer-tempered at times, God forbid I should say the other! The gift to her will go for nothing, you'll see!"

"She must be a very noble girl."

"Devil a better has He made!"

"But if her grandfather was right in thinking so ill of his grandson?"

"I'm not saying he wasn't," Uncle Ulick muttered.

"Then we must not let her set the will aside."

Ulick Sullivan shrugged his shoulders. "Let?" he said. "Faith! it's but little it'll be a question of that! James is for taking, and she's for giving! He's her white swan, and to her mind, sleeping or waking, as Darby says, he'd tread on eggs and sorra a chick the less! Let? Who's to hinder?"

"You."

"It's easiness has been my ruin, and faith! it's too late to change."

"Then I?"

Uncle Ulick smiled. "To be sure," he said slyly, "there's you, Colonel."

"The whole estate is mine, you see, in law."

"Ay, but there's no law west of Tralee," Uncle Ulick retorted. "That's where old Sir Michael made his mistake. Anywhere through the length and breadth of old Ireland, if 'twas in the Four Courts themselves, and all the garrison round you, you'd be on honour, Colonel, to take no advantage. But here it would not be the cold shoulder and a little unpleasantness, and a meeting or two on the ground, that's neither here nor there—that you'd be like to taste. I'd not be knowing what would happen if it went about that you were ousting them that had the right, and you a Protestant. He's not the great favourite, James McMurrrough, and whether he or the girl took most 'd be a mighty small matter. But if you think to twist it, so as to play cuckoo—though with the height of fair meaning and not spying a silver penny of profit for yourself, Colonel—I take leave to tell you, he's a most unpopular bird."

"But, Sir Michael," the Colonel, who had listened with a thoughtful face, answered, "left all to me to that very end—that it might be secured to the girl."

"Sorrow one of me says no!" Ulick rejoined. "But——"

"But what?" the Colonel replied politely. "The more plainly you speak the more you will oblige me."

But all that Ulick Sullivan could be brought to say at that moment—perhaps he knew that curious eyes were on their conference—was that Kerry was "a mighty queer country," and the thief of the world wouldn't know what would pass there by times. And besides, there were things afoot—faith, and there were, that he'd talk about at another time.

Then he changed the subject abruptly, asking the Colonel if he had seen a big ship in the bay.

"What colours?" the Colonel asked—the question men ask who have been at sea.

"Spanish, maybe," Uncle Ulick answered. "Did you sight such a one?"

But the Colonel had seen no big ship.

CHAPTER III

A SCION OF KINGS

The family at Morristown had been half an hour at table, and in the interval a man of more hasty judgment than Colonel Sullivan might have made up his mind on many points. Whether the young McMurrrough was offensive of set purpose, and because an unwelcome guest was present, or whether he merely showed himself as he was—an unlicked cub—such a man might have determined. But the Colonel held his judgment in suspense, though he leaned to the latter view of the case. He knew that even in England a lad brought up among women was apt to develop a quarrelsome uncouthness, a bearishness, intolerable among men of the world. How much more likely, he reflected, was this to be the case when the youth belonged to a proscribed race, and lived, a little chieftain among his peasants, in a district wild and remote, where for a league each way his will was law. The Colonel made allowances, and, where need was, he checked his indignation. If he blamed any one, he let his censure rest on the easy temper of Uncle Ulick. The giant could have shaken the young man, who was not over robust, with a single finger; and at any time in the last ten years might have taught him a lifelong lesson.

At their first sitting down the young man had shown his churlishness. Beginning by viewing the Colonel in sulky silence, he had answered his kinsman's overtures only by a rude stare or a boorish word. His companions, two squireens of his own age, and much of his own kidney, nudged him from time to time, and then the three would laugh in such a way as to make it plain that the stranger was the butt of the jest. Presently, overcoming the reluctant impression which Colonel John's manners made upon him, the young man found his tongue, and, glancing at his companions to bring them into the joke, "Much to have where you come from, Colonel?" he asked.

"As in most places," the Colonel replied mildly, "by working for it, or earning it after one fashion or another. Indeed, my friend, country and country are more alike, except on the outside, than is thought by those who stay at home."

"You've seen a wealth of countries, I'm thinking?" the youth asked with a sneer.

"I have crossed Europe more than once."

"And stayed in none?"

"If you mean——"

"Faith, I mean you've come back!" the young man exclaimed with a loud laugh, in which his companions joined. "You'll mind the song"—and with a wink he trolled out,

"In such contempt in short I fell,
Which was a very hard thing,
They devilish badly used me there,
For nothing but a farthing.

"You're better than that, Colonel, for the worst we can say of you is, you's come back a penny!"

"If you mean a bad one, come home," the Colonel rejoined, taking the lad good-humouredly—he was not blind to the flush of indignation which dyed Flavia's cheeks—"I'll take the wit for welcome. To be sure, to die in Ireland is an Irishman's hope, all the world over."

"True for you, Colonel!" Uncle Ulick said. And "For shame, James," he continued, speaking with more sternness than was natural to him. "Faith, and if you talked abroad as you talk at home, you'd be for having a pistol-ball in your gizzard in the time it takes you to say your prayers—if you ever say them, my lad!"

"What are my prayers to you, I'd like to know?" James retorted offensively.

"Easy, lad, easy!"

The young man glared at him. "What is it to you," he cried still more rudely, "whether I pray or no?"

"James! James!" Flavia pleaded under her breath.

"Do you be keeping your feet to yourself!" he cried, betraying her kindly manoeuvre. "And let my shins be! I want none of your guiding! More by token, miss, don't you be making a sight of yourself as you did this morning, or you'll smart for it. What is it to you if O'Sullivan Og takes our dues for us—and a trifle over? And, sorra one of you doubt it, if Mounseer comes jawing here, it's in the peat-hole he'll find himself! Or the devil the value of a cork he gets out of me; that's flat! Eh, Phelim?"

"True for you, McMurrough!" the youth who sat beside him answered, winking. "We'll soak him for you."

"So do you be taking a lesson, Miss Flavvy," the young Hector continued, "and don't you go threatening honest folk with your whip, or it'll be about your own shoulders it'll fall! I know what's going on, and when I want your help, I'll ask it."

The girl's lip trembled. "But it's robbery, James," she murmured.

"To the devil with your robbery!" he retorted, casting a defiant eye round the table. "They'll pay our dues, and what they get back will be their own!"

"And it's rich they'll be with it!" Phelim chuckled.

"Ay, faith, it's the proud men they'll be that day!" laughed Morty, his brother. "Sure, when it comes!" with a wink.

"Fine words, my lad," Uncle Ulick replied quietly; "but it's my opinion you'll fall on trouble, and more than'll please you, with Crosby of Castlemaine. And why, I'd like to know? 'Tis a grand trade, and has served us well since I can remember! Why can't you take what's fair out of it, and let the poor devil of a sea-captain that's supplied many an honest man's table have his own, and go his way? Take my word for it, it's ruing it you'll be, when all's done."

"It's not from Crosby of Castlemaine I'll rue it!" James McMurrough answered arrogantly. "I'll shoot him like a bog-snipe if he's sorra a word to say to it! That for him, the black sneak of a Protestant!" And he snapped his fingers. "But his day will soon be past, and we'll be dealing with him. The toast is warming for him now!"

Phelim slapped his thigh. "True for you, McMurrough! That's the talk!"

"That's the talk!" chorussed Morty.

The Colonel opened his mouth to speak, but he caught Flavia's look of distress, and he refrained. And "For my part," Morty continued jovially, "I'd not wait—for you know what! The gentleman's way's the better; early or late, Clare or Kerry, 'tis all one! A drink of the tea, a peppered devil, and a pair of the beauties, is an Irishman's morning!"

"And many's the poor soul has to mourn it—long and bitterly," the Colonel said. His tender corn being trod upon, he could be silent no longer. "For shame, sir, for shame!" he added warmly.

Morty stared. "Begorra, and why?" he cried, in a tone which proved that he asked the question in perfect innocence.

"Why?" Colonel John repeated. And for a moment, in face of prejudices so strong, and of prepossessions so deeply rooted, he paused. Then, "Why?" he repeated. "Can you ask me when you know how many a life as young as yours—and I take you to be scarcely, sir, in your twenties—has been forfeit for a thoughtless word, an unwitting touch, a look; when you know how many a bride has been widowed as soon as wedded, how many a babe orphaned as soon as born? And for what? For what, sir?"

"For the point of honour!" The McMurrrough cried. Morty, for his part, was dumb with astonishment. What talk was this!

"The point of honour?" the Colonel repeated, more slowly, "what is it? In nine cases out of ten the fear of seeming to be afraid. In the tenth—the desire to wipe out a stain that blood leaves as deep as before!"

"Faith, and you surprise me!" Phelim cried with a genuine *naïveté* that at another time would have provoked a smile. "You do indeed!"

"And Kerry'll more than surprise you," quoth The McMurrrough rudely, "if it's that way you'll be acting! Would you let Crosby of Castlemaine call you thief?"

"I would not thief!" the Colonel replied.

There was a stricken silence for a moment. Then The McMurrrough sprang to his feet, his querulous face flushed with rage, his arm raised. But Ulick's huge hand dragged him down. "Easy, lad, easy," he cried, restraining the young man. "He's your guest! He's your guest; remember that!"

"And he spoke in haste," the Colonel said. "I withdraw my words," he continued, rising and frankly holding out his hand. "I recognise that I was wrong! I see that the act bears in your eyes a different aspect, and I beg your pardon, sir."

The McMurrrough took the hand, though he took it sullenly; and the Colonel sat down again. His action, to say nothing of his words, left Phelim and Morty in a state of amazement so profound that the two sat staring as if carved out of the same block of wood.

If Colonel John noticed their surprise he seemed in no way put out by it. "Perhaps," he said gently, "it is wrong to thrust opinions on others unasked. I think that is so! It should be enough to act upon them one's self, and refrain from judging others."

No one answered. But one thing was certain: whether he judged them or not, they were all judging him, with such of their faculties as remained to them. True, Flavia, save by a single frightened glance when a quarrel seemed imminent, had not betrayed what she thought—nor now betrayed what she was thinking. Her eyes were glued to her plate. But the impression made on the others, not excepting the dependent buckeens who sat at the board a little apart and took no part in the talk, was so apparent that an onlooker must have laughed at their bewilderment. Even Uncle Ulick, whom a steady good humour had steered clear of many a brawl—so that a single meeting on Aghrim racecourse made up the tale of his exploits—stared vacantly at his kinsman. Never before had he heard any one question the right of an Irish gentleman to fight at pleasure; and for the others whose blood was hotter and younger, for the three Kerry Cocks, the Conclave had not been more surprised if a Cardinal had risen and denounced the Papacy, nor an assembly of half-pay captains been more astonished if one of their number had denounced the pension system. The Colonel was a Sullivan and an Irishman, and it was supposed that he had followed the wars. Whence, then, these strange words, these unheard-of opinions? Morty felt his cheek flush with the shame which Colonel John should have felt; and Phelim grieved for the family. The gentleman might be mad; it was charitable to think he was. But, mad or sane, he was like, they feared, to be the cause of sad misunderstanding in the country round.

The McMurrrough, of a harder and less generous nature than his companions, felt more contempt than wonder. The man had insulted him grossly, and had apologised as abjectly; that was his view of the incident. And he was the first to break the silence. "Sure, it's very well for the gentleman it's in the family," he said dryly. "Tail up, tail down, 's all one among friends. But if he'll be so quick with his tongue in Tralee Market, he'll chance on one here and there that he'll not blarney so easily! Eh, Morty?"

"I'm fearing so, too," said Phelim pensively. Morty did not answer. "'Tis a queer world," Phelim added.

"And all sorts in it," The McMurrrough cried, his tone more arrogant than before.

Flavia glanced at him, frowning. "Let us have peace now," she said.

"Peace? Sorrow a bit of war there's like to be in the present company!" the victor cried. And he began to whistle, amid an awkward silence. The air he chose was one well known at that day, and when he had whistled a few bars, one of the buckeens at the lower end of the table began to sing the words softly.

It was a' for our rightful king
We left fair Ireland's strand!
It was a' for our rightful king
We e'er saw foreign land, my dear,
We e'er saw foreign land!

"My dear, or no, you'll be doing well to be careful!" The McMurrrough said, in a jeering tone, with his eye on the Colonel.

"Pho!" the man replied. "And I that have heard the young mistress sing it a score of times!"

"Ay, but not in this company!" The McMurrrough rejoined.

Colonel John looked round the table. "If you mean," he said quietly, "that I am a loyal subject of King George, I am that. But what is said at my host's table, no matter who he is, is safe for me. Moreover, I've lived long enough to know, gentlemen, that most said is least meant, and that the theme of a lady's song is more often—sunset than sunrise!" And he bowed in the direction of the girl.

The McMurrrough's lip curled. "Fair words," he sneered. "And easy to speak them, when you and your d—d Protestant Whigs are on top!"

"We won't talk of Protestants, d—d or otherwise!" Colonel John replied. And for the first time his glance, keen as the flicker of steel, crossed The McMurrrough's. The younger man's eyes fell. A flush of something that might have been shame tinged his brow: and though no one at table save Uncle Ulick understood the allusion, his conscience silenced him. "I hope," the Colonel continued more soberly, "that a good Protestant may still be a good Irishman."

"It's not I that have seen one, then!" The McMurrrough muttered churlishly.

"Just as a bad Protestant makes a bad Irishman," the Colonel returned, with another of those glances which seemed to prove that the old man was not quite put off.

The McMurrrough was silenced. But the cudgels were taken up in an unexpected quarter. "I know nothing of bad or good," Flavia said, in a voice vibrating with eagerness, "but only, to our sorrow, of those who through centuries have robbed us! Who, not content, shame on them! with shutting us up in a corner of the land that was ours from sea to sea, deny us even here the protection of their law! Law? Can you call it law——"

"Heaven be between us and it!" old Darby groaned.

"Can you call it law," she continued with passion, "which denies us all natural rights, all honourable employments; which drives us abroad, divides son from father, and brother from brother; which bans our priests, and forbids our worship, and, if it had its will, would leave no Catholic from Cape Clear to Killaloe?"

The Colonel looked sorrowfully at her, but made no answer; for to much of what she said no answer could be made. On the other hand, a murmur passed round the board; and more than one looked at the stranger with compressed lips. "If you had your will," the girl continued, with growing emotion; "if your law were carried out—as, thank God! it is not, no man's heart being hard enough—to possess a pistol were to be pilloried; to possess a fowling-piece were to be whipped; to own a horse, above the value of a miserable garron, were to be robbed by the first rascal who passed! We must not be soldiers, nor sailors," she continued; "nay"—with bitter irony—"we may not be constables nor gamekeepers! The courts, the bar, the bench of our fatherland, are shut to us! We may have neither school nor college; the lands that were our fathers' must be held for us by Protestants, and it's I must have a Protestant guardian! We are outlaws in the dear land that is ours; we dwell on sufferance where our fathers ruled! And men like you, abandoning their country, abandoning their creed——"

"God forbid!" the Colonel exclaimed, much moved himself.

"Men like you uphold these things!"

"God forbid!" he repeated.

"But let Him forbid, or not forbid," she retorted, rising from her seat with eyes that flashed anger through tears, "we exist, and shall exist! And the time is coming, and comes soon—ay, comes perhaps to-day!—when we who now suffer for the true faith and the rightful King will raise our heads, and the Faithful Land shall cease to mourn and honest men to pine! And, ah"—with upraised face and clasped hands—"I pray for that day! I pray for that day! I—"

She broke off amid cries of applause, fierce as the barking of wolves. She struggled for a moment with her overmastering emotion, then, unable to continue or to calm herself, she turned from the table and fled weeping up the stairs.

Colonel John had risen. He watched her go with deep feeling; he turned to his seat again with a sigh. He was a shade paler than before, and the eyes which he bent on the board were dark with thought. He was unconscious of all that passed round him, and, if aware, he was heedless of the strength of the passions which she had unbridled—until a hand fell on his arm.

He glanced up then and saw that all the men had risen, and were looking at him—even Ulick Sullivan—with dark faces. A passion of anger clouded their gaze. Without a word spoken, they were of one mind. The hand that touched him trembled, the voice that broke the silence shook under the weight of the speaker's feelings.

"You'll be leaving here this day," the man muttered.

"I?" the Colonel said, taken by surprise. "Not at all."

"We wish you no harm, but to see your back. But you'll be leaving here."

The Colonel, his first wonder subdued, looked from one to another. "I am sure you wish me no harm," he said.

"None, but to see your back," the man repeated, while his companions looked down at the Colonel with a strange fixedness. The Celtic nature, prone to sudden rage, stirred in them. The stranger who an hour before had been indifferent to them now wore the face of an enemy. The lake and the bog—ay, the secret grave yearned for him: the winding-sheet was high upon his breast. "Stay, and it's but once in your life you'll be sorry," the man growled, "and faith, that'll be always!"

"But I cannot go," the Colonel answered, as gently as before.

"And why?" the man returned. The McMurrrough was not of the speakers, but stood behind them, glowering at him with a dark face.

"Because," the Colonel answered, "I am in my duty here, my friends. And the man who is in his duty can suffer nothing."

"He can die," the man replied, breathing hard. The men who were on the Colonel's side of the table leant more closely about him.

But he seemed unmoved. "That," he replied cheerfully, "is nothing. To die is but an accident. Who dies in his duty suffers no harm. And were that not enough—and it is all," he continued slowly, "what harm should happen to me, a Sullivan among Sullivans? Because I have fared far and seen much, am I so changed that, coming back, I shall find no welcome on the hearth of my race, and no shelter where my fathers lie?"

"And are not our hearths cold over many a league? And the graves—"

"Whisht!" a voice broke in sternly, as Uncle Ulick thrust his way through the group. "The man says well!" he continued. "He's a Sullivan—"

"He's a Protestant!"

"He is a Sullivan, I say!" Uncle Ulick retorted, "were he the blackest heretic on the sod! And you, would you do the foul deed for a woman's wet eye? Are the hearts of Kerry turned as hard as its rocks? Make an end of this prating and foolishness! And you, James McMurrrough, these are your men and this is your house? Will you be telling them at once that you will be standing between him and harm, be he a heretic ten times over? For shame, man! Is it for raising the corp of old Sir Michael from his grave ye are?"

The McMurrrough looked sombrely at the big man. "On you be the risk," he said sullenly. "You know what you know."

"I know that the seal in the cave and the seal on the wave are one!" Ulick answered vehemently. "Whisht, man, whisht, and make an end! And do you, John Sullivan, give no thought to these omadhauns, but come with me and I'll show you to your chamber. A woman's tear is ever near her smile. With her the good thought treads ever on the heel of the bad word!"

"I have little knowledge of them," Colonel John answered quietly.

But when he was above with Uncle Ulick, he spoke. "I hope that this is but wild talk," he said. "You cannot remember, nor can I, the bad days. But the little that is left, it were madness and worse than madness to risk! If you've thought of a rising, in God's name put it from you. Think of your maids and your children! I have seen the fires rise from too many roofs, I have heard the wail of the homeless too often, I have seen too many frozen corpses stand for milestones by the road, I have wakened to the creak of too many gibbets—to face these things in my own land!"

Uncle Ulick was looking from the little casement. He turned and showed a face working with agitation. "And you, if you wore no sword, nor dared wear one? If you walked in Tralee a clown among gentlefolk, if you lived a pariah in a corner of pariahs, if your land were the handmaid of nations, and the vampire crouched upon her breast, what—what would you do, then?"

"Wait," Colonel John answered gravely, "until the time came."

Uncle Ulick gripped his arm. "And if it came not in your time?"

"Still wait," Colonel John answered with solemnity. "For believe me, Ulick Sullivan, there is no deed that has not its reward! Not does one thatch go up in smoke that is not paid for a hundredfold."

"Ay, but when? When?"

"When the time is ripe."

CHAPTER IV

"STOP THIEF!"

A candid Englishman must own, and deplore the fact, that Flavia McMurrrough's tears were due to the wrongs of her country. Broken by three great wars waged by three successive generations, defeated in the last of three desperate struggles for liberty, Ireland at this period lay like a woman swooning at the feet of her captors. Nor were these minded that she should rise again quickly, or in her natural force. The mastery which they had won by the sword the English were resolved to keep by the law.

They were determined that the Irishman of the old faith should cease to exist; or if he endured, should be *nemo*, no one. Confined to hell or Connaught, he must not even in the latter possess the ordinary rights. He must not will his own lands or buy new lands. If his son, more sensible than he, "*went over*," the father sank into a mere life-tenant, bound to furnish a handsome allowance, and to leave all to the Protestant heir. He might not marry a Protestant, he might not keep a school, nor follow the liberal professions. The priest who confessed him was banished if known, and hanged if he returned. In a country of sportsmen he might not own a fowling-piece, nor a horse worth more than five pounds; and in days when every gentleman carried a sword at his side, he must not wear one. Finally, his country grew but one article of great value—wool: and that he must not make into cloth, but he must sell it to England at England's price—which was one-fifth of the continental price. Was it wonderful that, such being Ireland's status, every Roman Catholic of spirit sought fortune abroad; that the wild geese, as they were called, went and came unchecked; or that every inlet in Galway, Clare, and Kerry swarmed with smugglers, who ran in under the green flag with brandy and claret, and, running out again with wool, laughed to scorn England's boast that she ruled the waves?

Nor was it surprising that, spent and helpless as the land lay, some sanguine spirits still clung to visions of a change and of revenge. A few men, living in the vague remotenesses beyond the bridling Shannon and its long string of lakes, or on the western shore where the long rollers broke in spume and the French and Spanish tongues were spoken more freely than English, still hoped for the impossible. Passing their lives far from the Castle and the Four Courts, far even from the provincial capitals, they shut their eyes to facts and dreamed of triumph. The Sullivans of Morristown and Skull were of these; as were some of their neighbours. And Flavia was especially of these. As she looked from her window a day or two after the Colonel's arrival, as she sniffed the peat reek and plumbed the soft distances beyond the lake, she was lost in such a dream; until her eyes fell on a man seated cross-legged under a tree between herself and the shore. And she frowned. The man sorted ill with her dream.

It was Bale, Colonel John's servant. He was mending some article taken from his master's wardrobe. His elbow went busily to and fro as he plied the needle, while sprawling on the sod about him half a dozen gossoons watched him inquisitively.

Perhaps it was the suggestive contrast between his diligence and their idleness which irritated Flavia; but she set down her annoyance to another cause. The man was an Englishman, and therefore an enemy: and what did he there? Had the Colonel left him on guard?

Flavia's heart swelled at the thought. Here, at least, she and hers were masters. Here, three hours west of Tralee—and God help the horse on that road that was not a "lepper"—they brooked no rival. Colonel John had awakened mixed feelings in her. At times she admired him. But, admirable or not, he should rue his insolence, if he had it in his mind to push his authority, or interfere with her plans.

In the meantime she stood watching William Bale, and a desire to know more of the man, and through him of the master, rose within her. The house was quiet. The McMurrough and his following had gone to a cocking-match and race-meeting at Joyce's Corner. She went down the stairs, took her hood, and crossed the courtyard. Bale did not look up at her approach, but he saw her out of the corner of his eye, and when she paused before him he laid down his work and made as if he would rise.

She looked at him with a superciliousness not natural to her. "Are all the men tailors where you come from?" she asked. "There, you need not rise."

"Where I came from last," he replied, "we were all trades, my lady."

"Where was that?"

"In the camp," he answered.

"In Sweden?"

"God knows," he replied. "They raise no landmarks there, between country and country, or it might be all their work to move them."

For a moment she was silent. Then, "Have you been a soldier long?" she asked, feeling herself rebuffed.

"Twenty-one years, my lady."

"And now you have done with it."

"It is as his honour pleases."

She frowned. He had a way of speaking that sounded uncivil to ears attuned to the soft Irish accent and the wheedling tone. Yet the man interested her, and after a moment's silence she fixed her eyes more intently on his work. "Did you lose your fingers in battle?" she asked. His right hand was maimed.

"No," he answered—grudgingly, as he seemed to answer all her questions—"in prison."

"In prison?" she repeated; "where?"

He cast an upward look at his questioner. "In the Grand Turk's land," he said. "Nearer than that, I can't say. I'm no scholar, my lady."

"But why?" she asked, puzzled. "I don't understand."

"Cut off," he said, stooping over his work.

Flavia turned a shade paler. "Why?" she repeated.

"'One God, and Mahomet His prophet'—couldn't swallow it. One finger!" the man answered jerkily. "Next week—same. Third week——"

"Third week?" she murmured, shuddering.

"Exchanged."

She lifted her eyes with an effort from his maimed hand. "How many were you?" she inquired.

"Thirty-four." He laughed drily. "We know one another when we meet," he said. He drew his waxed thread between his finger and thumb, held it up to the light, then looked askance at the gossoons about him, to whom what he said was gibberish. They knew only Erse.

The day was still, the mist lay on the lake, and under it the water gleamed, a smooth pale

mirror. Flavia had seen it so a hundred times, and thought naught of it. But to-day, moved by what she had heard, the prospect spoke of a remoteness from the moving world which depressed her. Hitherto the quick pulse and the energy of youth had left her no time for melancholy, and not much for thought. If at rare intervals she had felt herself lonely, if she had been tempted to think that the brother in whom were centred her hopes, her affections, and her family pride was hard and selfish, rude and overbearing, she had told herself that all men were so; that all men rode rough-shod over their women. And that being so, who had a better right to hector it than the last of the McMurrroughs, heir of the Wicklow kings, who in days far past had dealt on equal terms with Richard Plantagenet, and to whom, by virtue of that never-forgotten kingship, the Sullivans and Mahonies, some of the McCarthys, and all the O'Beirnes, paid rude homage? With such feelings Sir Michael's strange whim of disinheriting the heir of his race had but drawn her closer to her brother. To her loyalty the act was abhorrent, was unnatural, was one that could only have sprung, she was certain, from second childhood, the dotage of a man close on ninety, whose early years had been steeped in trouble, and who loved her so much that he was ready to do wrong for her sake.

Often she differed from her brother. But he was a man, she told herself; and he must be right—a man's life could not be ruled by the laws which a woman observed. For the rest, for herself, if her life seemed solitary she had the free air and the mountains; she had her dear land; above all, she had her dreams. Perhaps when these were realised—and the time seemed very near now—and a new Ireland was created, to her too a brighter world would open.

She had forgotten Bale's presence, and was only recalled to every-day life by the sound of voices. Four men were approaching the house. Uncle Ulick, Colonel John, and the French skipper were three of these; at the sight of the fourth Flavia's face fell. Luke Asgill of Batterstown was the nearest Justice, and of necessity he was a Protestant. But it was not this fact, nor the certainty that Augustin was pouring his wrongs into his ears, that affected Flavia. Asgill was distasteful to her, because her brother affected him. For why should her brother have relations with a Protestant? Why should he, a man of the oldest blood, stoop to intimacy with the son of a "middleman," the son of one of those who, taking a long lease of a great estate and under-letting at rack rents, made at this period huge fortunes? Finally, if he must have relations with him, why did he not keep him at a distance from his home—and his sister?

It was too late, or she would have slipped away. Not that Asgill—he was a stout, dark, civil-spoken man of thirty-three or four—wore a threatening face. On the contrary, he listened to the Frenchman's complaint with a droll air; and if he had not known of the matter before, his smile betrayed him. He greeted Flavia with an excess of politeness which she could have spared; and while Uncle Ulick and Colonel John looked perturbed and ill at ease, he jested on the matter.

"The whole cargo?" he said, with one eye on the Frenchman and one on his companions. "You're not for stating that, sir?"

"All the tubs," Augustin answered in a passion of earnestness. "What you call, every tub! Every tub!"

"The saints be between us and harm!" Asgill responded. "Are you hearing this, Miss Flavia? It's no less than felony that you're accused of, and I'm thinking, by rights, I must arrest you and carry you to Batterstown."

"I do not understand," she answered stiffly. "And The McMurrrough is not at home."

"Gone out of the way, eh?" Asgill replied with a deprecatory grin. "And the whole cargo was it, Captain?"

"All the tubs, perfectly!"

"You'd paid your dues, of course?"

"Dues, *mon Dieu!* But they take the goods!"

"Had you paid your dues?"

"Not already, because——"

"That's unfortunate," Asgill answered in a tone of mock condolence. "Mighty unfortunate!" He winked at Uncle Ulick. "Port dues, you know, Captain, must be paid before the ship slips her moorings."

"But——"

"Mighty unfortunate!"

"But what are the dues?" poor Augustin cried, dimly aware that he was being baited.

"Ah, you're talking now," the magistrate answered glibly. "Unluckily, that's not in my province. I'm made aware that the goods are held under lien for dues, and I can do nothing. However, upon payment, of course——"

"But how much? Eh, sir? How much? How much?"

Luke Asgill, who had two faces, and for once was minded to let both be seen, enjoyed the Frenchman's perplexity. He wished to stand well with Flavia, and here was a rare opportunity of exhibiting at once his friendliness and his powers of drollery. He was surprised, therefore, and taken aback, when a grave voice cut short his enjoyment.

"Still, if Captain Augustin," the voice interposed, "is willing to pay a reasonable sum on account of dues?"

The magistrate turned about abruptly. "Eh?" he said. "Oh, Colonel Sullivan, is it?"

"Then, doubtless, the goods will be released, so that he may perform his duty to his customer."

Asgill had only known the Colonel a few minutes, and, aware that he was one of the family, he did not see how to take it. It was as if treason lifted its head in the camp. He coughed.

"I'd not be denying it," he said. "But until The McMurrrough returns——"

"Such a matter is doubtless within Mr. Sullivan's authority," the Colonel said, turning from him to Uncle Ulick.

Uncle Ulick showed his embarrassment. "Faith, I don't know that it is," he said.

"If Captain Augustin paid, say, twenty per cent. on his bills of lading——"

"*Ma foi*, twenty per cent.!" the Captain exclaimed in astonishment. "Twenty—but yes, I will pay it. I will pay even that. Of what use to throw the handle after the hatchet?"

Luke Asgill thought the Colonel either a fool or very simple. "Well, I've nothing to say to this, at all!" he said, shrugging his shoulders. "It's not within my province."

Colonel John looked at the girl in a way in which he had not looked at her before; and she found herself speaking before she knew it. "Yes," she cried impulsively; "let that be done, and the goods be given up!"

"But The McMurrrough?" Asgill began.

"I will answer for him," she said impulsively. "Uncle Ulick, go, I beg, and see it done."

"I will go with you," Colonel Sullivan said. "And doubtless Mr. Asgill will accompany us, and lend the weight of his authority in the event of any difficulty arising."

Asgill's countenance fell, and he looked the uncertainty he felt. He was between two stools, for he had no mind to displease Flavia or thwart her brother. At length, "No," he said, "I'll not be doing anything in The McMurrrough's absence—no, I don't see that I can do that!"

Colonel John looked in the same strange fashion at Flavia. "I have legal power to act, sir," he said, "as I can prove to you in private. And that being so, I must certainly ask you to lend me the weight of your authority."

"And I will be d——d if I do!" Asgill cried. There was a change in his tone, and the reason was not far to seek. "Here's The McMurrrough," he continued, "and he'll say!"

They all turned and looked along the road which ran by the edge of the lake. With James McMurrrough, who was still a furlong away, were the two O'Beirnes. They came slowly, and something in their bearing, even at that distance, awoke anxiety.

"They're early from the cocking," Uncle Ulick muttered doubtfully, "and sober as pigs! What's the meaning of that? There's something amiss, I'm fearing."

A cry from Flavia proved the keenness of her eyes. "Where is Giralda?" she exclaimed. "Where is the mare?"

"Ay, what have they done with the mare?" Uncle Ulick said in a tone of consternation. "Have they lamed her, I'm wondering? The garron Morty's riding is none of ours."

"I begged him not to take her!" Flavia cried, anger contending with her grief. Giralda, her grey mare, ascribed in sanguine moments to the strain of the Darley Arabian, and as gentle as she was spirited, was the girl's dearest possession. "I begged him not to take

her!" she repeated, almost in tears. "I knew there was danger."

"James was wrong to take her up country," Uncle Ulick said sternly.

"They've claimed her!" Flavia wailed. "I know they have! And I shall never recover her! I shall never see her again! Oh, I'd rather—I'd far rather she were dead!"

Uncle Ulick lifted up his powerful voice. "Where's the mare?" he shouted.

James McMurrough shrugged his shoulders, and a moment later the riders came up and the tale was told. The three young men had halted at the hedge tavern at Brocktown, where their road ran out of the road to Tralee. There were four men drinking in the house, who seemed to take no notice of them. But when The McMurrough and his companions went to the shed beside the house to draw out their horses, the men followed, challenged them for Papists, threw down five pounds in gold, and seized the mare. The four were armed, and resistance was useless.

The story was received with a volley of oaths and curses. "But by the Holy," Uncle Ulick flamed up, "I'd have hung on their heels and raised the country! By G—d, I would!"

"Ay, ay! The thieves of the world!"

"They took the big road by Tralee," James McMurrough explained sulkily. "What was the use?"

"Were there no men working in the bogs?"

"There were none near by, to be sure," Morty said. "But I'd a notion if we followed them we might light on one friend or another—'twas in Kerry, after all!"

"'Twas not more than nine miles English from here!" Uncle Ulick cried.

"That was just what I thought," Morty continued with some hesitation. "Just that, but——" And his eye transferred the burden to The McMurrough.

James answered with an oath. "A nice time this to be bringing the soldiers upon us," he cried, "when, bedad, if the time ever was, we want no trouble with the Englishry! What's the use of crying over spilt milk? I'll give you another mare."

"But it'll not be Giralda!" Flavia wailed.

"Sure it's the black shame, it is!" Uncle Ulick cried, his face dark. "It's enough to raise the country! Ay, I say it, though you're listening, Asgill. It's more than blood can stand!"

"No one is more sorry than myself," Asgill replied, with a look of concern. "I don't make the laws, or they'd be other than they are!"

"True for you," Uncle Ulick answered. "I'm allowing that. And it is true, too, that to make a stir too early would ruin all. I'm afraid you must be making the best of it, Flavvy! I'd go after them myself, but the time's not convenient, as you know, and by this they're in Tralee, bad cess to it, where there's naught to be done. They'll be for selling her to one of the garrison officers, I'm thinking; and may the little gentleman in black velvet break his neck for him! Or they'll take her farther up country, maybe to Dublin."

Flavia's last hopes died with this verdict. She could not control her tears, and she turned and went away in grief to the house.

Meantime the hangers-on and the beggars pressed upon the gentry, anxious to hear. The McMurrough, not sorry to find some one on whom to vent his temper, turned upon them and drove them away with blows of his whip. The movement brought him face to face with Captain Augustin. The fiery little Frenchman disdained to give way, in a trice angry words passed, and—partly out of mischief, for the moment was certainly not propitious—Asgill repeated the proposal which Colonel John had just made. The Colonel had stood in the background during the debate about the mare, but thus challenged he stood forward.

"It's a fair compromise," he argued. "And if Captain Augustin is prepared to pay twenty per cent——"

"He'll not have his cargo, nor yet a cask!" The McMurrough replied with a curt, angry laugh. "Loss and enough we've had to-day."

"But——"

"Get me back the mare," the young man cried, cutting the Colonel short with savage ridicule. "Get me back the mare, and I'll talk. That's all I have to say."

"It seems to me," Colonel John replied quietly, "that those who lose should find. Still—still," checking the young man's anger by the very calmness of his tone, "for Captain

Augustin's sake, who can ill bear the loss, and for your sister's sake, I will see what I can do."

The McMurrough stared. "You?" he cried. "You?"

"Yes, I."

"Heaven help us, and the pigs!" the young man exclaimed. And he laughed aloud in his scorn.

But Colonel John seemed no way moved. "Yes," he replied. "Only let us understand one another"—with a look at Uncle Ulick which made him party to the bargain—"if I return to-morrow evening or on the following day—or week—with your sister's mare——"

"Mounseer shall have his stuff again to the last pennyworth," young McMurrough returned with an ironical laugh, "and without payment at all! Or stay! Perhaps you'll buy the mare?"

"No, I shall not buy her," Colonel John answered, "except at the price the man gave you."

"Then you'll not get her. That's certain! But it's your concern."

The Colonel nodded, and, turning on his heels, went away towards the house, calling William Bale to him as he passed.

The McMurrough looked at the Frenchman. He had a taste for tormenting some one. "Well, monsieur," he jeered, "how do you like your bargain?"

"I do not understand," the Frenchman answered. "But he is a man of his word, *ma foi!* And they are not—of the common."

CHAPTER V

THE MESS-ROOM AT TRALEE

If England had made of Ireland a desert and called it peace, she had not marred its beauty. That was the thought in Colonel Sullivan's mind as he rode eastward under Slieve Mish, with the sun rising above the lower spurs of the mountain, and the lark saluting the new-born radiance with a song attuned to the freshness of the morning. Where his road ascended he viewed the sparkling inlet spread far to the southward; and where the track dipped, the smooth slopes on either side ran up to grey crags that, high above, took strange shapes, now of monstrous heads, now of fantastic towers. As his sure-footed nag forded the brown bog-stream, long-shanked birds rose silently from the pools, and he marked with emotion the spots his boyhood had known: the shallow where the dog-wolf—so big that it had become a fable—died biting, and the cliff whence the sea-eagle's nest had long bidden him defiance.

Bale rode behind him, taciturn, comparing, perhaps, the folds of his native Suffolk hills with these greener vales. They reached the hedge tavern, where the mare had been seized, and they stayed to bait their horses, but got no news. About eight they rode on; and five long Irish miles nearer Tralee, though still in a wild and lonely country, they viewed from the crest of a hill a piece of road stretched ribbon-like before them, and on it a man walking from them at a great pace. He had for companion a boy, who trotted beside him.

Neither man nor boy looked back, and it did not seem to be from fear of the two riders that they moved so quickly. The man wore a loose drugget coat and an old jockey-cap, and walked with a stout six-foot staff. Thus armed and dressed he should have stood in small fear of robbers. Yet when Colonel John's horse, the tread of its hoofs deadened by the sod road, showed its head at his shoulder, and he sprang aside, he turned a face of more vivid alarm than seemed necessary. And he crossed himself.

Colonel John touched his hat. "I give you good morning, good man," he said.

The walker raised his hand to his cap as if to return the salute, but lowered it without doing so. He muttered something.

"You will be in haste?" Colonel John continued. He saw that the sweat stood in beads on the man's brow, and the lad's face was tear-stained.

"I've far to go," the man muttered. He spoke with a slight foreign accent, but in the west of Ireland this was common. "The top of the morning to you."

Plainly he wished the two riders to pass on, but he did not slacken his speed for a moment. So for a space they went abreast, the man, with every twenty paces, glancing up suspiciously. And now and again, the boy, as he ran or walked, vented a sob.

The Colonel looked about him. The solitude of the valley was unbroken. No cabin smoked, no man worked within sight, so that the haste of these two, their sweating faces, their straining steps, seemed portentous. "Shall I take up the lad?" Colonel John asked.

Plainly the man hesitated. Then, "You will be doing a kindness," he panted. And, seizing the lad in two powerful arms, he swung him to the Colonel's stirrup, who, in taking him, knocked off the other's jockey-cap.

The man snatched it up and put it on with a single movement. But Colonel John had seen what he expected.

"You walk on a matter of life and death?" he said.

"It is all that," the man answered; and this time his look was defiant.

"You are taking the offices, father?"

The man did not reply.

"To one who is near his end, I suspect?"

The priest—for such he was—glanced at the weapon Colonel John wore. "You can do what you will," he said sullenly. "I am on my duty."

"And a fine thing, that!" Colonel John answered heartily. He drew rein, and, before the other knew what he would be at, he was off his horse. "Mount, father," he said, "and ride, and God be with you!"

For a moment the priest stared dumbfounded. "Sir," he said, "you wear a sword! And no son of the Church goes armed in these parts."

"If I am not one of your Church I am a Christian," Colonel John answered. "Mount, father, and ride in God's name, and when you are there send the lad back with the beast."

"The Mother of God reward you!" the priest cried fervently, "and turn your heart in the right way!" He scrambled to the saddle. "The blessing of all——"

The rest was lost in the thud of hoofs as the horse started briskly, leaving Colonel John standing alone upon the road beside Bale's stirrup. The servant looked after the retreating pair, but said nothing.

"It's something if a man serves where he's listed," Colonel John remarked.

Bale smiled. "And don't betray his own side," he said. He slipped from his saddle.

"You think it's the devil's work we've done?" Colonel John asked.

But Bale declined to say more, and the two walked on, one on either side of the horse, master or man punching it when it showed a desire to sample the herbage. A stranger, seeing them, might have thought that they were wont to walk thus, so unmoved were their faces.

They had trudged the better part of two miles when they came upon the horse tethered by the reins to one of two gate-pillars, which stood gateless beside the road. Colonel John got to his saddle, and they trotted on. Notwithstanding which it was late in the afternoon when they approached the town of Tralee.

In those days it was a town much ruined. The grim castle of the Desmonds, scene of the midnight murder which had brought so many woes on Ireland, still elbowed the grey Templars Cloister, and looked down, as it frowned across the bay, on the crumbling aisles and squalid graves of the Abbey. To Bale, as he scanned the dark pile, it was but a keep—a mere nothing beside Marienburg or Stettin—rising above the hovels of an Irish town. But to the Irishman it stood for many a bitter memory and many a crime, besides that murder of a guest which will never be forgotten. The Colonel sighed as he gazed.

Presently his eyes dropped to the mean houses which flanked the entrance to the town; and he recognised that if all the saints had not vouchsafed their company, the delay caused by the meeting with the priest had done somewhat. For at that precise moment a man was riding into the town before them, and the horse under the man was Flavia McMurrough's lost mare.

Colonel John's eye lightened as he recognised its points. With a sign to Bale he fell in behind the man and followed him through two or three ill-paved and squalid streets. Presently the rider passed through a loop-holed gateway, before which a soldier was doing sentry-go. The two followed. Thence the quarry crossed an open space surrounded by dreary buildings which no military eye could take for aught but a barrack yard. The two still followed—the sentry staring after them. On the far side of the yard the mare and its rider vanished through a second archway, which appeared to lead to an inner court. The Colonel, nothing intimidated, went after them. Fortune, he thought, had favoured him.

But as he emerged from the tunnel-like passage he raised his head in astonishment. A din of voices, an outbreak of laughter and revelry, burst in a flood of sound upon his ears. He turned his face in the direction whence the sounds came, and saw three open windows, and at each window three or four flushed countenances. His sudden emergence from the tunnel, perhaps his look of surprise, wrought an instant's silence, which was followed by a ruder outburst.

"Cock! cock! cock!" shrieked a tipsy voice, and an orange, hurled at random, missed the Colonel's astonished face by a yard. The mare which had led him so far had disappeared, and instinctively he drew bridle. He stared at the window.

"Mark one!" cried a second roisterer, and a cork, better aimed than the orange, struck the Colonel sharply on the chin. A shout of laughter greeted the hit.

He raised his hat. "Gentlemen," he remonstrated, "gentlemen——"

He could proceed no further. A flight of corks, a renewed cry of "Cock! cock! cock!" a chorus of "Fetch him, Ponto! Dead, good dog! Find him, Ponto!" drowned his remonstrances. Perhaps in the scowling face at his elbow—for William Bale had followed him and was looking very fierce indeed—the wits of the —th found more amusement than in the master's mild astonishment.

"Who the devil is he?" cried one of the seniors, raising his voice above the uproar. "English or Irish?"

"Irish for a dozen!" a voice answered. "Here, Paddy, where's your papers?"

"Ay, be jabbers!" in an exaggerated brogue; "it's the broth of a boy he is, and never a face as long as his in ould Ireland!"

"Gentlemen," the Colonel said, getting in a word at last. "Gentlemen, I have been in many companies before this, and——"

"And by G—d, you shall be in ours!" one of the revellers retorted. And "Have him in! Fetch him in!" roared a dozen voices, amid much laughter. In a twinkling half as many young fellows had leapt from the windows, and surrounded him. "Who-whoop!" cried one, "Who-whoop!"

"Steady, gentlemen, steady!" the Colonel said, a note of sternness in his voice. "I've no objection to joining you, or to a little timely frolic, but——"

"Join us you will, whether or no!" replied one, more drunken or more turbulent than the rest. He made as if he would lay hands on the Colonel, and, to avoid violence, the latter suffered himself to be helped from his saddle. In a twinkling he was urged through the doorway, leaving his reins in Bale's hand, whose face, for sheer wrath and vindictiveness, was a picture.

Boisterous cries of "Hallo, sobersides!" and "Cock, cock, cock!" greeted the Colonel, as, partly of his own accord and partly urged by unceremonious hands, he crossed the threshold, and shot forward into the room.

The scene presented by the apartment matched the flushed faces and the wandering eyes which the windows had framed. The long table was strewn with flasks and glasses and half-peeled fruit, the floor with empty bottles. A corner of the table had been cleared for a main at hazard; but to make up for this the sideboard was a wilderness of broken meats and piled-up dishes, and an overturned card-table beside one of the windows had strewn the floor with cards. Here, there, everywhere on chairs, on hooks, were cast sword-belts, neckcloths, neglected wigs.

A peaceful citizen of that day had as soon found himself in a bear-pit; and even the Colonel's face grew a trifle longer as hands, not too gentle, conducted him towards the end of the table. "Gentlemen, gentlemen," he began, "I have been in many companies, as I said before, and——"

"A speech! Old Gravity's speech!" roared a middle-aged, bold-eyed man, who had suggested the sally from the windows, and from the first had set the younger spirits an

example of recklessness. "Hear to him!" He filled a glass of wine and waved it perilously near the Colonel's nose. "Old Gravity's speech! Give it tongue!" he cried. "The flure's your own, and we're listening."

Colonel John eyed him with a slight contraction of the features. But the announcement, if ill-meant, availed to procure silence. The more sober had resumed their seats. He raised his head and spoke.

"Gentlemen," he said—and it was strange to note the effect of his look as his eyes fell first on one and then on another, fraught with a dignity which insensibly wrought on them. "Gentlemen, I have been in many companies, and I have found it true, all the world over, that what a man brings he finds. I have the honour to speak to you as a soldier to soldiers —"

"English or Irish?" asked a tall sallow man—sharply, but in a new tone.

"Irish!"

"Oh, be jabbers!" from the man with the wineglass.

But the Colonel's eye and manner had had their effect, and "Let him speak!" the sallow man said. "And you, Payton, have done with your fooling, will you?"

"Well, hear to him!"

"I have been in many camps and many companies, gentlemen," the Colonel resumed, "and those of many nations. But wherever I have been I have found that if a man brought courtesy with him, he met with courtesy at the hands of others. And if he brought no offence, he received none. I am a stranger here, for I have been out of my own country for a score of years. On my return you welcome me," he smiled, "a little boisterously perhaps, but I am sure, gentlemen, with a good intent. And as I have fared elsewhere I am sure I shall fare at your hands."

"Well, sure," from the background, "and haven't we made you welcome?"

"Almost too freely," the Colonel replied, smiling good-humouredly. "A peaceable man who had not lived as long as I have might have found himself at a loss in face of so strenuous a welcome. Corks, perhaps, are more in place in bottles——"

"And a dale more in place out of them!" from the background.

"But if you will permit me to explain my errand, I will say no more of that. My name, gentlemen, is Sullivan, Colonel John Sullivan of Skull, formerly of the Swedish service, and much at your service. I shall be still more obliged if any of you will be kind enough to inform me who is the purchaser——"

Payton interrupted him rudely. "Oh, d—n! We have had enough of this!" he cried. "Sink all purchasers, I say!" And with a drunken crow he thrust his neighbour against the speaker, causing both to reel. How it happened no one saw—whether Payton himself staggered in the act, or flung the wine wantonly; but somehow the contents of his glass flew over the Colonel's face and neckcloth.

Half a dozen men rose from their seats. "Shame!" an indignant voice cried.

Among those who had risen was the sallow man. "Payton," he said sharply, "what did you do that for?"

"Because I chose, if you like!" the stout man answered. "What is it to you? I am ready to give him satisfaction when he likes, and where he likes, and no heel-taps! And what more can he want? Do you hear, sir?" he continued in a bullying tone. "Sword or pistols, before breakfast or after dinner, drunk or sober, Jack Payton's your man. D—n me, it shall never be said in my time that the —th suffered a crop-eared Irishman to preach to them in their own mess-room! You can send your friend to me when you please. He'll find me!"

The Colonel was wiping the wine from his chin and neckcloth. He had turned strangely pale at the moment of the insult. More than one of those who watched him curiously—and of such were all in the room, Payton excepted—and who noted the slow preciseness of his movements and the care with which he cleansed himself, albeit his hand shook, expected some extraordinary action.

But no one looked for anything so abnormal or so astonishing as the course he took when he spoke. Nothing in his bearing had prepared them for it; nor anything in his conduct which, so far, had been that of a man of the world not too much at a loss even in the unfavourable circumstances in which he was placed—circumstances which would have unnerved many a one.

"I do not fight," he said. "Your challenge is cheap, sir, as your insult."

Payton stared. He had never been more astonished in his life. "Good L—d!" he cried. "You do not fight? Heaven and earth! and you a soldier!"

"I do not fight."

"After that, man! Not—after——" He did not finish the sentence, but laughed with uplifted chin, as at some great joke.

"No," Colonel John said between his teeth.

And then no one spoke. A something in Colonel John's tone and manner, a something in the repression of his voice, sobered the spectators, and turned that which might have seemed an ignominy, a surrender, into a tragedy. And a tragedy in which they all had their share. For the insult had been so wanton, so gross, so brutal, that there was not one of the witnesses who had not felt shame, not one whose sympathy had not been for a moment with the victim, and who did not experience a pang on his account as he stood, mild and passive, before them.

Payton alone was moved only by contempt. "Lord above us, man!" he cried, finding his voice again. Are you a Quaker? If so, why the devil do you call yourself a soldier?"

"I am no Quaker," Colonel John answered, "but I do not fight duels."

"Why?"

"If I killed you," the Colonel replied, eyeing him steadily, "would it dry my neckcloth or clean my face?"

"No!" Payton retorted with a sneer, "but it would clean your honour!" He had felt the reprehension in the air, he had been conscious for a few seconds that he had not the room with him; but the perception made him only the more arrogant now that he felt his feet again. "It would prove, man, that, unlike the beasts that perish, you valued something more than your life!"

"I do."

"What?" Payton asked with careless disdain.

"Among other things, my duty." Payton laughed brutally. "Why, by the powers, you *are* a preacher!" he retorted. "Hang your duty, sir, and you for a craven! Give me acts, not words! It's a man's duty to defend his honour, and you talk of your neckcloth! There's for a new neckcloth!" He pulled out a half-crown and flung it, with an insulting gesture, upon the table. "Show us your back, and for the future give gentlemen of honour—a wide berth! You are no mate for them!"

The act and the words were too strong for the stomachs of the more generous among his hearers. A murmur, an undoubted murmur rose—for if Payton was feared he was not loved; and the sallow-faced man, whose name was Marsh, spoke out. "Easy, Payton," he said. "The gentleman—"

"The gentleman, eh?"

"Did not come here of his own accord, and you've said enough, and done enough! For my part—"

"I didn't ask for your interference!" the other cried insolently.

"Well, anyway—"

"And I don't want it! And I won't have it; do you hear, Marsh?" Payton repeated menacingly. "You know me, and I know you."

"I know that you are a better fencer and a better shot than I am," Marsh replied, shrugging his shoulders, "and I daresay than any of us. We are apt to believe it, anyway. But—"

"I would advise you to let that be enough," Payton sneered.

It was then that the Colonel, who had stood silent during the altercation of which he was the subject, spoke—and in a tone somewhat altered. "I am much obliged to you, sir," he said, addressing the sallow-faced man, "but I will cause no further trouble. I crave leave to say one word only, which may come home to some among you. We are all, at times, at the mercy of mean persons. Yes, sir, of mean persons," the Colonel repeated, raising his voice and speaking in a tone so determined—he seemed another man—that Payton, in the act of seizing a decanter to hurl at him, hesitated. "For any but a mean person," Colonel John continued, drawing himself up to his full height, "finding that he had insulted one who could not meet him on even terms—one who could not resent the insult in the manner intended—would have deemed it all one as if he had insulted a one-armed man, or a blind

man, and would have set himself right by an apology."

At that word Payton found his voice. "Hang your apology!" he cried furiously.

"By an apology," the Colonel repeated, fixing him with eyes of unmeasured contempt, "which would have lowered him no more than an apology to a woman or a child. Not doing so, his act dishonours himself only, and those who sit with him. And one day, unless I mistake not, his own blood, and the blood of others, will rest upon his head."

With that word the speaker turned slowly, walked with an even pace to the door, and opened it, none gainsaying him. On the threshold he paused and looked back. Something, possibly some chord of superstition in his breast which his adversary's last words had touched, held Payton silent: and silent the Colonel's raised finger found him.

"I believe," Colonel John said, gazing solemnly at him, "that we shall meet again." And he went out.

Payton turned to the table, and, with an unsteady hand, filled a glass. He read disapprobation in the eyes about him, but he had shaken the momentary chill from his own spirits, and he stared them down. "Sink the old Square-Toes!" he cried. "He got what he deserved! Who'll throw a main with me?"

"Thirty guineas against your new mare, if you like?"

"No, confound you," Payton retorted angrily. "Didn't I say she wasn't for sale?"

CHAPTER VI

THE MAÎTRE D'ARMES

Beyond doubt Colonel John had got himself off the scene with a certain amount of dignity. But with all that he had done and suffered in the lands beyond the Baltic and the Vistula, he had not yet become so perfect a philosopher as to be indifferent to the opinion held of him by others. He was, indeed, as he retired, as unhappy as a more ordinary man might have been in the same case. He knew that he was no craven, that he had given his proofs a score of times. But old deeds and a foreign reputation availed nothing here. And it was with a deep sense of vexation and shame that he rode out of the barrack-yard. Why, oh why! had he been so unlucky as to enter it? He was a man, after all, and the laughter of the mess-room, the taunts of the bully, burned his ears.

Nor were his spirits low on his account only. The cruelty of man to man, the abuse of strength by those who had it, and the pains of those who had it not, the crookedness of the world in which the weak go to the wall—thoughts of these things weighed him down. But more, and more to the purpose, he saw that after what had happened, his chances of success in the enterprise which had brought him to town, and which was itself but a means to an end, were lessened. It might not be possible to pursue that enterprise any farther. This was a mortifying thought, and accounted for the melancholy face with which he sought the inn, and supped; now wishing that he had not done this or that, now pondering how he might turn the flank of a misfortune which threatened to shatter all his plans.

For if he was anxious to recover the mare, his anxiety did not rest there. Her recovery was but a step to other things; to that influence at Morrystown which would make him potent for good; to that consideration which would enable him to expel foolish councils, and silence that simmering talk of treason which might at any moment boil up into action and ruin a countryside. But he knew that he could only get the mare from those who held her by imposing himself upon them; and to do this after what had happened seemed impossible. The story would be told, must be told: it would be carried far and wide. Such things were never hid; and he had come off so ill, as the world viewed things, he had cut so poor a figure, that after this he could hope for nothing from his personal influence here or at Morrystown. Nothing, unless he could see himself right at Tralee.

He brooded long over the matter, and at length—but not until after his meal—he hit on a plan, promising, though distasteful. He called Bale, and made inquiries through that taciturn man; and next morning he sat late at his breakfast. He had learned that the garrison used the inn much, many of the officers calling there for their "morning"; and the information proved correct. About ten he heard heavy steps in the stone-paved passage, spurs rang out an arrogant challenge, voices called for Patsy and Molly, and demanded

this or that. By-and-by two officers, almost lads, sauntered into the room in which he sat, and, finding him there, moved with a wink and a grin to the window. They leant out, and he heard them laugh; he knew that they were discussing him before they turned to the daily fare—the neat ankles of a passing "colleen," the glancing eyes of the French milliner over the way, or the dog-fight at the corner. The two remained thus, half eclipsed as far as the Colonel was concerned, until presently the sallow-faced man sauntered idly into the room.

He did not see the Colonel at once, but the latter rose and bowed, and Marsh, a little added colour in his face, returned the salute—with an indifferent grace. It was clear that, though he had behaved better than his fellows on the previous day, he had no desire to push the acquaintance farther.

Colonel John, however, gave him no chance. Still standing, and with a grave, courteous face, "May I, as a stranger," he said, "trouble you with a question, sir?"

The two lady-killers at the window heard the words and nudged one another, with a stifled chuckle at their comrade's predicament. Captain Marsh, with one eye on them, assented stiffly.

"Is there any one," the Colonel asked, "in Tralee—I fear the chance is small—who gives fencing lessons?—or who is qualified to do so?"

The Captain's look of surprise yielded to one of pitying comprehension. He smiled—he could not help it; while the young men drew in their heads to hear the better.

"Yes," he answered, "there is."

"In the regiment, I presume?"

"He is attached to it temporarily. If you will inquire at the Armoury for Lemoine, the Maître d'Armes, he will oblige you, I have no doubt. But——"

"If you please?" the Colonel said politely, seeing that Marsh hesitated.

"If you are not a skilled swordsman, I fear that it is not one lesson, or two, or a dozen, will enable you to meet Captain Payton, if you have such a thing in your mind, sir. He is but little weaker than Lemoine, and Lemoine is a fair match with a small-sword for any man out of London. Brady in Dublin, possibly, and perhaps half a dozen in England are his betters, but——" he stopped abruptly, his ear catching a snigger at the window. "I need not trouble you with that," he concluded lamely.

"Still," the Colonel answered simply, "a long reach goes for much, I have heard, and I am tall."

Captain Marsh looked at him in pity, and he might have put his compassion into words, but for the young bloods at the window, who, he knew, would repeat the conversation. He contented himself, therefore, with saying rather curtly, "I believe it goes some way." And he turned stiffly to go out.

But the Colonel had a last question to put to him. "At what hour," he asked, "should I be most likely to find this—Lemoine, at leisure?"

"Lemoine?"

"If you please."

Marsh opened his mouth to answer, but found himself anticipated by one of the youngsters. "Three in the afternoon is the best time," the lad said bluntly, speaking over his shoulder. He popped out his head again, that his face, swollen by his perception of the jest, might not betray it.

But the Colonel seemed to see nothing. "I thank you," he said, bowing courteously.

And re-seating himself, as Marsh went out, he finished his breakfast. The two at the window, after exploding once or twice in an attempt to stifle their laughter, drew in their heads, and, still red in the face, marched solemnly past the Colonel, and out of the room. His seat, now the window was clear, commanded a view of the street, and presently he saw the two young bloods go by in the company of four or five of their like. They were gesticulating, nor was there much doubt, from the laughter with which their tale was received, that they were retailing a joke of signal humour.

That did not surprise the Colonel. But when the door opened a moment later, and Marsh came hastily into the room, and with averted face began to peer about for something, he was surprised.

"Where the devil's that snuff-box!" the sallow-faced man exclaimed. "Left it somewhere!"

Then, looking about him to make sure that the door was closed. "See, here sir," he said awkwardly, "it's no business of mine, but for a man who has served as you say you have, you're a d—d simple fellow. Take my advice and don't go to Lemoine's at three, if you go at all."

"No?" the Colonel echoed.

"Can't you see they'll all be there to guy you?" Marsh retorted impatiently. He could not help liking the man, and yet the man seemed a fool! The next moment, with a hasty nod, he was gone. He had found the box in his pocket.

Colonel Sullivan smiled, and, after carefully brushing the crumbs from his breeches, rose from the table. "A good man," he muttered. "Pity he has not more courage." The next moment he came to attention, for slowly past the window moved Captain Payton himself, riding Flavia's mare, and talking with one of the young bloods who walked at his stirrup.

The man and the horse! The Colonel began to understand that something more than wantonness had inspired Payton's conduct the previous night. Either he had been privy from the first to the plot to waylay the horse; or he had bought it cheaply knowing how it had been acquired; or—a third alternative—it had been placed in his hands, to the end that his reputation as a fire-eater might protect it. In any event, he had had an interest in nipping inquiry in the bud; and, learning who the Colonel was, had acted on the instant, and with considerable presence of mind.

The Colonel looked thoughtful; and though the day was fine for Ireland—that is, no more than a small rain was falling—he remained within doors until five minutes before three o'clock. Bale had employed the interval in brushing the stains of travel from his master's clothes, and combing his horseman's wig with particular care; so that it was a neat and spruce gentleman who at five minutes before three walked through Tralee, and, attending to the directions he had received, approached a particular door, a little within the barrack gate.

Had he glanced up at the windows he would have seen faces at them; moreover, a suspicious ear might have caught, as he paused on the threshold, a scurrying of feet, mingled with stifled laughter. But he did not look up. He did not seem to expect to see more than he found, when he entered—a great bare room with its floor strewn with sawdust and its walls adorned here and there by a gaunt trophy of arms. In the middle of the floor, engaged apparently in weighing one foil against another, was a stout, dark-complexioned man, whose light and nimble step, as he advanced to meet his visitor, gave the lie to his weight.

Certainly there came from a half-opened door at the end of the room a stealthy sound as of rats taking cover. But Colonel John did not look that way. His whole attention was bent upon the Maître d'Armes, who bowed low to him. Clicking his heels together, and extending his palms in the French fashion, "Good-morning, sare," he said, his southern accent unmistakable. "I make you welcome."

The Colonel returned his salute less elaborately. "The Maître d'Armes Lemoine?" he said.

"Yes, sare, that is me. At your service!"

"I am a stranger in Tralee, and I have been recommended to apply to you. You are, I am told, accustomed to give lessons."

"With the small-sword?" the Frenchman answered, with the same gesture of the open hands. "It is my profession."

"I am desirous of brushing up my knowledge—such as it is."

"A vare good notion," the fencing-master replied, his black beady eyes twinkling. "Vare good for me. Vare good also for you. Always ready, is the gentleman's motto; and to make himself ready, his high recreation. But, doubtless, sare," with a faint smile, "you are proficient, and I teach you nothing. You come but to sweat a little." An observant person would have noticed that as he said this he raised his voice above his usual tone.

"At one time," Colonel John replied with simplicity, "I was fairly proficient. Then—this happened!" He held out his right hand. "You see?"

"Ah!" the Frenchman said in a low tone, and he raised his hands. "That is ogly! That is vare ogly! Can you hold with that?" he added, inspecting the hand with interest. He was a different man.

"So, so," the Colonel answered cheerfully.

"Not strongly, eh? It is not possible."

"Not very strongly," the Colonel assented. His hand, like Bale's, lacked two fingers.

Lemoine muttered something under his breath, and looked at the Colonel with a wrinkled brow. "Tut—tut!" he said, "and how long are you like that, sare?"

"Seven years."

"Pity! pity!" Lemoine exclaimed. Again he looked at his visitor with perplexed eyes. After which, "Dam!" he said suddenly.

The Colonel stared.

"It is not right!" the Frenchman continued, frowning. "I—no! Pardon me, sare, I do not fence with *les estropiés*. That is downright! That is certain, sare. I do not do it."

If the Colonel had been listening he might have caught the sound of a warning cough, with a stir, and a subdued murmur of voices—all proceeding from the direction of the inner room. But he had his back to the half-opened door and he seemed to be taken up with the fencing-master's change of tone. "But if," he objected, "I am willing to pay for an hour's practice?"

"Another day, sare. Another day, if you will."

"But I shall not be here another day. I have but to-day. By-and-by," he continued with a smile as kindly as it was humorous, "I shall begin to think that you are afraid to pit yourself against a *manchot*!"

"Oh, la! la!" The Frenchman dismissed the idea with a contemptuous gesture.

"Do me the favour, then," Colonel John retorted. "If you please?"

Against one of the walls were three chairs arranged in a row. Before each stood a boot-jack, and beside it a pair of boot-hooks; over it, fixed in the wall, were two or three pegs for the occupant's wig, cravat, and cane. The Colonel, without waiting for a further answer, took his seat on one of the chairs, removed his boots, and then his coat, vest, and wig, which he hung on the pegs above him.

"And now," he said gaily, as he stood up, "the mask!"

He did not see the change—for he seemed to have no suspicion—but as he rose, the door of the room behind him became fringed with grinning faces. Payton, the two youths who had leant from the window of the inn and who had carried his words, a couple of older officers, half a dozen subalterns, all were there—and one or two civilians. The more grave could hardly keep the more hilarious in order. The curtain was ready to go up on what they promised themselves would be the most absurd scene. The stranger who fought no duels, yet thought that a lesson or two would make him a match for a dead-hand like Payton—was ever such a promising joke conceived? The good feeling, even the respect which the Colonel had succeeded in awakening for a short time the evening before, were forgotten in the prospect of such a jest.

The Frenchman made no further demur. He had said what he could, and it was not his business to quarrel with his best clients. He took his mask, and proffered a choice of foils to his antagonist, whose figure, freed from the heavy coat and vest of the day, and the overshadowing wig, seemed younger and more supple than the Frenchman had expected. "A pity, a pity!" the latter said to himself. "To have lost, if he ever was professor, the joy of life!"

"Are you ready?" Colonel John asked.

"At your service, sare," the Maître d'Armes replied—but not with much heartiness. The two advanced each a foot, they touched swords, then saluted with that graceful and courteous engagement which to an ignorant observer is one of the charms of the foil. As they did so, and steel grated on steel, the eavesdroppers in the inner room ventured softly from ambush—like rats issuing forth; soon they were all standing behind the Colonel, the sawdust, and the fencers' stamping feet as they lunged or gave back, covering the sound of their movements.

They were on the broad grin when they came out. But it took them less than a minute to discover that the entertainment was not likely to be so extravagantly funny as they had hoped. The Colonel was not, strictly speaking, a tyro; moreover, he had, as he said, a long reach. He was no match indeed for Lemoine, who touched him twice in the first bout and might have touched him thrice had he put forth his strength. But he did nothing absurd. When he dropped his point, therefore, at the end of the rally, and, turning to take breath came face to face with the gallery of onlookers, the best-natured of these felt rather foolish. But Colonel John seemed to find nothing surprising in their presence. He saluted them courteously with his weapon. "I am afraid I cannot show you much sport, gentlemen," he said.

One or two muttered something—a good day, or the like. The rest grinned unmeaningly. Payton said nothing, but, folding his arms with a superior air, leant, frowning haughtily, against the wall.

"*Parbleu*," said Lemoine, as they rested. "It is a pity. The wrist is excellent, sare. But the pointing finger is not—is not!"

"I do my best," the Colonel answered, with cheerful resignation. "Shall we engage again?"

"At your pleasure."

The Frenchman's eye no longer twinkled; his gallantry was on its mettle. He was grave and severe, fixing his gaze on the Colonel's attack, and remaining blind to the nods and shrugs and smiles of amusement of his patrons in the background. Again he touched the Colonel, and, alas! again; with an ease which, good-natured as he was, he could not mask.

Colonel John, a little breathed, and perhaps a little chagrined also, dropped his point. Some one coughed, and another tittered.

"I think he will need another lesson or two," Payton remarked, speaking ostensibly to one of his companions, but loudly enough for all to hear.

The man whom he addressed made an inaudible answer. The Colonel turned towards them.

"And—a new hand," Payton added in the same tone.

Even for his henchman the remark was almost too much. But the Colonel, strange to say—perhaps he really was very simple—seemed to find nothing offensive in it. On the contrary, he replied to it.

"That was precisely," he said, "what I thought when this"—he indicated his maimed hand—"happened to me. And I did my best to procure one."

"Did you succeed?" Payton retorted in an insolent tone.

"To some extent," the Colonel replied, in the most matter-of-fact manner. And he transferred the foil to his left hand.

"Give you four to one," Payton rejoined, "Lemoine hits you twice before you hit him once."

Colonel John had anticipated some of the things that had happened. But he had not foreseen this. He was quick to see the use to which he might put it, and it was only for an instant that he hesitated. Then "Four to one?" he repeated.

"Five, if you like!" Payton sneered.

"If you will wager," the Colonel said slowly, "if you will wager the grey mare you were riding this morning, sir——"

Payton uttered an angry oath. "What do you mean?" he said.

"Against ten guineas," Colonel John continued carelessly, bending the foil against the floor and letting it spring to its length again, "I will make that wager."

Payton scowled at him. He was aware of the other's interest in the mare, and suspected, at least, that he had come to town to recover her. And caution would have had him refuse the snare. But his toadies were about him, he had long ruled the roast, to retreat went against the grain; while to suppose that the man had the least chance against Lemoine was absurd. Yet he hesitated. "What do you know about the mare?" he said coarsely.

"I have seen her. But of course, if you are afraid to wager her, sir——"

Payton answered to the spur. "Bah! Afraid?" he cried contemptuously. "Done, with you!"

"That is settled," the Colonel replied. "I am at your service," he continued, turning to the Maître d'Armes. "I trust," indicating that he was going to fence with his left hand, "that this will not embarrass you?"

"No! But it is interesting, by G—d, it is vare interesting," the Frenchman replied. "I have encountered *les gauchers* before, and——"

He did not finish the sentence, but saluting, he assumed an attitude a little more wary than usual. He bent his knees a trifle lower, and held his left shoulder somewhat more advanced, as compared with his right. The foils felt one another, and "Oh, va, va!" he muttered. "I understand, the droll!"

For half a minute or so the faces of the onlookers reflected only a mild surprise, mingled with curiosity. But the fencers had done little more than feel one another's blades, they

had certainly not exchanged more than half a dozen serious passes, before this was changed, before one face grew longer and another more intent. A man who was no fencer, and therefore no judge, spoke. A fierce oath silenced him. Another murmured an exclamation under his breath. A third stooped low with his hands on his hips that he might not lose a lunge or a parry. For Payton, his face became slowly a dull red. At length, "Ha!" cried one, drawing in his breath. And he was right. The Maître d'Armes' button, sliding under the Colonel's blade, had touched his opponent. At once, Lemoine sprang back out of danger, the two points dropped, the two fencers stood back to take breath.

For a few seconds the Colonel's chagrin was plain. He looked, and was, disappointed. Then he conquered the feeling, and he smiled. "I fear you are too strong for me," he said.

"Not at all," the Frenchman made answer. "Not at all! It was fortune, sare. I know not what you were with your right hand, but you are with the left vare strong, of the first force. It is certain."

Payton, an expert, had been among the earliest to discern, with as much astonishment as mortification, the Colonel's skill. With a sudden sinking of the heart, he had foreseen the figure he would cut if Lemoine were worsted; he had endured a moment of great fear. But at this success he choked down his apprehensions, and, a sanguine man, he breathed again. One more hit, one more success on Lemoine's part, and he had won the wager! But with all he could do he could no longer bear himself carelessly. Pallid and troubled, he watched, biting his lip; and though he longed to say something cutting, he could think of nothing. Nay, if it came to that, he could not trust his voice, and while he still faltered, seeking for a gibe and finding none, the two combatants had crossed their foils again. Their tense features, plain through the masks, as well as their wary movements, made it clear that they played for a victory of which neither was confident.

By this time the rank and file of the spectators had been reinforced by the arrival of Marsh; who, discovering a scene so unexpected, and quickly perceiving that Lemoine was doing his utmost, wondered what Payton's thoughts were. Apart from the wager, it was clear that if Lemoine had not met his match, the Captain had; and in the future would have to mend his manners in respect to one person present. Doubtless many of those in the room, on whose toes Payton had often trodden, had the same idea, and felt secret joy, pleased that the bully of the regiment was like to meet with a reverse and a master.

Whatever their thoughts, a quick rally diverted them, and riveted all eyes on the fencers. For a moment thrust and parry followed one another so rapidly that the untrained gaze could not distinguish them or trace the play. The spectators held their breath, expecting a hit with each second. But the rally died away again, neither of the players had got through the other's guard; and now they fell to it more slowly, the Colonel, a little winded, giving ground, and Lemoine pressing him.

Then, no one saw precisely how it happened, whiff-whaff, Lemoine's weapon flew from his hand and struck the wall with a whirr and a jangle. The fencing-master wrung his wrist. "*Sacre!*" he cried, between his teeth, unable in the moment of surprise to control his chagrin.

The Colonel touched him with his button for form's sake, then stepped rapidly to the wall, picked up the foil by the blade, and courteously returned it to him. Two or three cried "Bravo," but faintly, as barely comprehending what had happened. The greater part stood silent in sheer astonishment. For Payton, he remained dumb with mortification and disgust; and if he had the grace to be thankful for anything, he was thankful that for the moment attention was diverted from him.

Lemoine, indeed, the person more immediately concerned, had only eyes for his opponent, whom he regarded with a queer mixture of approval and vexation. "You have been at Angelo's school in Paris, sare?" he said, in the tone of one who stated a fact rather than asked a question.

"It is true," the Colonel answered, smiling. "You have guessed it."

"And learned that trick from him?"

"I did. It is of little use except to a left-handed man."

"Yet in play with one not of the first force it succeeds twice out of three times," Lemoine answered. "Twice out of three times, with the right hand. *Ma foi!* I remember it well! I offered the master twenty guineas, Monsieur, if he would teach it me. But because"—he held out his palms pathetically—"I was right-handed, he would not."

"I am fortunate," Colonel John answered, bowing, and regarding his opponent with kind eyes, "in being able to requite your good nature. I shall be pleased to teach it you for nothing, but not now. Gentlemen," he continued, giving up his foil to Lemoine, and removing his mask, "gentlemen, you will bear me witness, I trust, that I have won the

wager?"

Some nodded, some murmured an affirmative, others turned towards Payton, who, too deeply chagrined to speak, nodded sullenly. How willingly at that moment would he have laid the Colonel dead at his feet, and Lemoine, and the whole crew, friends and enemies! He gulped something down. "Oh, d—n you!" he said, "I give it you! Take the mare, she's in the stable!"

At that a brother officer touched his arm, and, disregarding his gesture of impatience, drew him aside. The intervener seemed to be reminding him of something; and the Colonel, not inattentive, and indeed suspicious, caught the name "Asgill" twice repeated. But Payton was too angry to care for minor consequences, or to regard anything but how he might most quickly escape from the scene of defeat and the eyes of those who had witnessed his downfall. He shook off his adviser with a rough hand.

"What do I care?" he answered with an oath. "He must shoe his own cattle!" Then, with a poor show of hiding his spite under a cloak of insouciance, he addressed the Colonel. "The mare is yours," he said. "You've won her. Much good may she do you!"

And he turned on his heel and went out of the armoury.

CHAPTER VII

BARGAINING

The melancholy which underlies the Celtic temperament finds something congenial in the shadows that at close of day fall about an old ruin. On fine summer evenings, and sometimes when the south-wester was hurling sheets of rain from hill to hill, and the birch-trees were bending low before its blast, Flavia would seek the round tower that stood on the ledge beside the waterfall. It was as much as half a mile from the house, and the track which scaled the broken ground to its foot was rough. But from the narrow terrace before the wall the eye not only commanded the valley in all its length, but embraced above one shoulder a distant view of Brandon Mountain, and above the other a peep of the Atlantic. Thither, ever since she could remember, she had carried her dreams and her troubles; there, with the lake stretched below her, and the house a mere Noah's ark to the eye, she had cooled her hot brow or dried her tears, dwelt on past glories, or bashfully thought upon the mysterious possibilities of that love, of that joint life, of that rosy-hued future, to which the most innocent of maidens must sometimes turn their minds.

It was perhaps because she often sought the tower at sunset, and he had noted the fact, that Luke Asgill's steps bore him thither on an evening three days after the Colonel's departure for Tralee. Asgill had remained at Morristown, though the girl had not hidden her distaste for his presence. But to all her remonstrances The McMurrough had replied, with his usual churlishness, that the man was there on business—did she want to recover her mare, or did she not? And she had found nothing more to say. But the most slavish observance on the guest's part, and some improvement in her brother's conduct—which she might have rightly attributed to Asgill's presence—had not melted her. She, who had scarcely masked her reluctance to receive a Protestant kinsman, was not going to smile on a Protestant of Asgill's past and reputation; on a man whose father had stood hat in hand before her grandfather, and whose wealth had been wrung from the sweat of his fellow peasants.

Be that as it might, Asgill did not find her at the tower. But he was patient; he thought that she might still come, and he waited, sitting low, with his back against the ruined wall, that she might not see him until it was too late for her to retreat. By-and-by he heard footsteps mounting the path; his face reddened, and he made as if he would rise. Remembering himself, however, he sat down again, with such a look in his eyes as comes into a dog's when it expects to be beaten. But the face that rose above the brow was not Flavia's, but her brother's. And Asgill swore.

The McMurrough understood, grinned, and threw himself on the ground beside him. "You'll be wishing me in the devil's bowl, I'm thinking," he said. "Yet, faith, I'm not so sure—if you're not a fool. For it's certain I am, you'll never touch so much as the sole of her foot without me."

"I'm not denying it," the other answered sulkily.

"So it's mighty little use your wishing me away!" The McMurrrough continued, stretching himself at his ease. "You can't get her without me; nor at all, at all, but on my terms! It would be a fine thing for you, no doubt, if you could sneak round her behind my back! Don't I know you'd be all for old Sir Michael's will then, and I might die in a gutter, for you! But an egg, and an egg's fair sharing."

"Have I said it was any other?" Asgill asked gloomily.

"The old place is mine, and I'm minded to keep it."

"And if any other marries her," Asgill said quietly, "he will want her rights."

"Well, and do you think," the younger man answered in his ugliest manner, "that if it weren't for that small fact, Mister Asgill—"

"And the small fact," Asgill struck in, "that before your grandfather died I lent you a clear five hundred, and I'm to take that, that's my own already, in quittance of all!"

"Well, and wasn't it that same I'm saying?" The McMurrrough retorted. "If it weren't for that, and the bargain we've struck, d'you think that I'd be letting my sister and a McMurrrough look at the likes of you? No, not in as many Midsummer Days as are between this and world without end!"

The look Asgill shot at him would have made a wiser man tremble. But The McMurrrough knew the strength of his position.

"And if I were to tell her?" Asgill said slowly.

"What?"

"That we've made a bargain about her."

"It's the last strand of hope you'd be breaking, my man," the younger man answered briskly. "For you'd lose my help, and she'd not believe you—though every priest in Douai backed your word!"

Asgill knew that that was true, and though his face grew dark he changed his tone. "Enough said," he replied pacifically. "Where'll we be if we quarrel? You want the old place that is yours by right. And I want—your sister." He swallowed something as he named her; even his tone was different. "'Tis one and one. That's all."

"And you're the one who wants the most," James replied cunningly. "Asgill, my man, you'd give your soul for her, I'm thinking."

"I would."

"You would, I believe. By G—d," he continued, with a leer, "you're that fond of her I'll have to look to her! Hang me, my friend, if I let her be alone with you after this. Safe bind, safe find. Women and fruit are easily bruised."

Asgill rose slowly to his feet. "You scoundrel!" he said in a low tone. And it was only when The McMurrrough, surprised by his movement, turned to him, that the young man saw that his face was black with passion—saw, indeed, a face so menacing, that he also sprang to his feet. "You scoundrel!" Asgill repeated, choking on the words. "If you say a thing like that again—if you say it again, do you hear?—I'll do you a mischief. Do you hear? Do you hear?"

"What in the saints' names is the matter with you?" The McMurrrough faltered.

"You're not fit to breathe the air she breathes!" Asgill continued, with the same ferocity. "Nor am I! But I know it, thank God! And you don't! Why, man," he continued, still fighting with the passion that possessed him, "I wouldn't dare to touch the hem of her gown without her leave! I wouldn't dare to look in her face if she bade me not! She's as safe with me as if she were an angel in heaven! And you say—you; but you don't understand!"

"Faith and I don't," The McMurrrough answered, his tone much lowered. "That's true for you!" When it came to a collision of wills the other was his master.

"No," Asgill repeated. "But don't you talk like that again, or harm will come of it. I may be what you say—I may be! But I wouldn't lay a finger on your sister against her will—no, not to be in Paradise!"

"I thought you didn't believe in Paradise," the younger man muttered sulkily, striving to cover the check he had received.

"There's a Paradise I do believe in," Asgill answered. "But never mind that." He sat down again.

Strange to relate, he meant what he said. Many changes corrupt loyalty, and of evil times evil men are the natural fruit. In nearly all respects Asgill was as unscrupulous a man as the time in which he lived and the class from which he sprang could show. Following in the steps of a griping, miserly sire, he had risen to his present station by oppression and chicanery; by crushing the weak and cajoling the strong. And he was prepared to maintain his ground by means as vile and a hand as hard. But he loved; and—strange anomaly, bizarre exception, call it what you will—somewhere in the depths of his earthly nature a spark of good survived, and fired him with so pure an ardour that at the least hint of disrespect to his mistress, at a thought of injury to her, the whole man rose in arms. It was a strange, yet a common inconsistency; an inconstancy to evil odd enough to set The McMurrrough marvelling, while common enough to commend itself to a thinking mind.

"Enough of that!" Asgill repeated after a moment's pause. While he did not fear, it did not suit him to break with his companion. "And, indeed, it was not of your sister I was thinking when I said where'd we be if we quarrelled. For it's not I'll be the cuckoo to push you out, McMurrrough, lad. But a man there is will play the old grey bird yet, if you let him be. And him with the power and all."

"D'you mean John Sullivan?"

"I mean that same, my jewel."

The young man laughed derisively. He had resumed his seat by the other's side. "Pho!" he said, "you'll be jesting. For the power, it's but a name. If he were to use, were it but the thin end of it, it would run into his hand! The boys would rise upon him, and Flavvy'd be the worst of them. It's in the deep bog he'd be, before he knew where he was, and never'd he come out, Luke Asgill! Sure, I'm not afraid of him!"

"You've need to be!" Asgill said soberly.

"Pho! It takes more than him to frighten me! Why, man, he's a soft thing, if ever there was one! He'll not say boh! to a goose with a pistol in its hand!"

"And that might be, if you weren't such a fool as ye are, McMurrrough!" Asgill answered. "No, but hear me out, lad!" he continued earnestly. "I say he might not harm you, if you had not the folly we both know of in your mind. But I tell you freely I'll be no bonnet to it while he stands by. 'Tis too dangerous. Not that I believe you are much in earnest, my lad, whatever others may think—what's your rightful king to you, or you to him, that you should risk aught? But whether you go into it out of pure devilment, or just to keep right with your sister—"

"Which is why you stand bonnet for it," McMurrrough struck in, with a grin.

"That's possible. But I do that, my lad, because I hope naught may come of it, but just a drinking of healths and the like. So, why should I play the informer and get myself misliked? But you—you may find yourself deeper in it than you think, and quicker than you think, while all the time, if the truth were told"—with a shrewd look at the other—"I believe you've little more heart for it than myself."

The young man swore a great oath that he was in it body and soul, swore it by the bones of his ten toes. But he laughed before the words were out of his mouth. And "I don't believe you," Asgill said coolly. "You know, and I know, what you were ready to do when the old man was alive, and if it had paid you properly. And you'd do the same now, if it paid you now. So what are the wrongs of the old faith to you that you should risk all for them? Or the rights of the old Irish, for the matter of that? But this being so, and you but half-hearted, I tell you, it is too dangerous a game to play for groats. And while John Sullivan's here, that makes it more dangerous, I'll not play bonnet!"

"What'll he know of it, at all, at all?" James McMurrrough asked contemptuously. And he took up a stone and flung it over the edge.

"With a Spanish ship off the coast," Asgill answered, "and you know who likely to land, and a preaching, may be, next Sunday, and pike-drill at the Carraghalin to follow—man, in three days you may have smoking roof-trees, and 'twill be too late to cry 'Hold!' Stop, I say, stop while you can, and before you've all Kerry in a flame!"

James McMurrrough turned with a start. His face—but the light was beginning to fail—seemed a shade paler. "How did you know there was pike-drill?" he cried sharply. "I didn't tell you."

"Hundreds know it."

"But you!" McMurrrough retorted. It was plain that he was disagreeably surprised.

"Did you think I meant nothing when I said I played bonnet to it?"

"You know a heap too much, Luke Asgill!"

"And could make a good market of it?" Asgill answered coolly. "That's what you're thinking, is it? And it's Heaven's truth I could—if you'd not a sister."

"And a care for your own skin."

"Faith," Asgill answered with humorous frankness, "and I'm plain with you, that stands for something in it. For it's a weary way west of Athlone we are!"

"And the bogs are deep," McMurrough said, with a sidelong look.

"Maybe," Asgill replied, shrugging his shoulders. "But that I've not that in my mind—I'm giving you proof, James McMurrough. Isn't it I am praying you to draw out of it in time, for all our sakes? If you mean nothing but to keep sweet with your sister, you're playing with fire, and so am I! And we'd best see it's not carried too far, as it's like to be before we know it. But if you are fool enough to be in earnest, which I'll never believe, d'you think to overturn the Protestant Succession with a few foreigners and a hundred of White-boys that wouldn't stand before the garrison of Tralee? You've neither money nor men nor powder. Half a dozen broken captains who must starve if there's no fighting afoot, as many more who've put their souls in the priests' hands and see with their eyes—these and a few score boys without a coat to their backs or breeches to their nakedness—d'you think to oust old Malbrouk with these?"

"He's dead!"

"He's not, my jewel; and if he be he's left more of his kidney. No; if you must be a fool, be a fool with your eyes open! I tell you old Ireland had her lesson thirty years back, and if you were Sarsfield himself, and called on 'em to rise against the Saxon to-day, you'd not find as many follow you as would take a sessions town!"

"You know a heap of things, Asgill," James McMurrough answered disdainfully. But he looked his discomfiture.

"I do. And more by token, I know this!" Asgill retorted. He had risen to depart, and the two stood with their faces close together. "This!" he repeated, clapping one hand on the other. "If you're a fool, I'm a bigger! By Heaven, I am! Or what would I be doing? Why, I'd be pressing you into this, by the Lord, I would, in place of holding you back! And then when the trouble came, as come it would, and you'd to quit, my lad, and no choice but to make work for the hangman or beg a crust over seas, and your sister 'd no more left than she stood up in, and small choice either, it's then she'd be glad to take Luke Asgill, as she'll barely look at now! Ay, my lad, I'd win her then, if it were but as the price of saving your neck! There's naught she'd not do for you, and I'd ask but herself."

James McMurrough stared at him, confounded. For Asgill spoke with a bitterness as well as a vehemence that betrayed how little he cared for the man he addressed—whether he swung or lived, begged or famished. His tone, his manner, his black look, all made it plain that the scheme he outlined was no sudden thought, but a plan long conceived, often studied, and put aside with reluctance. For the listener it was as if, the steam clearing away, he'd a glimpse of the burning pit of a volcano, on the shelving side of which he stood. He shuddered, and his countenance changed. A creature of small vanities and small vices, utterly worthless, selfish, and cruel, but as weak as water, he quailed before this glimpse of elemental passion, before this view of a soul darker than his own. And it was with a poor affectation of defiance that he made his answer.

"And what for, if it's as easy as you say, don't you do it?" he stammered.

Asgill groaned. "Because—but there, you wouldn't understand—you wouldn't understand! Still, if you must be knowing, there's ways of winning would be worse than losing!"

The McMurrough's confidence began to return. "You're grown scrupulous," he sneered, half in jest, half in earnest.

Asgill's answer flung him down again. "You may thank your God I am!" he replied, with a look that scorched the other.

"Well—well," McMurrough made an effort to mutter—he was thoroughly disconcerted—"at any rate, I'm obliged to you for your warning."

"You will be obliged to me," Asgill replied, resuming his ordinary manner, "if you take my warning, as to the big matter; and also as to your kinsman, John Sullivan. For, I tell you, I'm afraid of him."

"Of him?" James cried.

"Ay, of him. Have a care, have a care, man, or he'll out-general you. See if he doesn't poison your sister against you! See if he does not make this hearth too hot for you! As

long as he's in the house there's danger. I know the sort," Asgill continued shrewdly, "and little by little, you'll see, he'll get possession of her—and it's weak is your position as it is, my lad."

"Pho!"

"'Tis not 'pho'! And in a week you'll know it, and be as glad to see his back as I should be to-day!"

"What, a man who has not the spirit to go out with a gentleman!"

"A man you mean," Asgill retorted, showing his greater shrewdness, "who has the spirit to say that he won't go out!"

"Sure, and I've not much opinion of a man of that kind," McMurrrough exclaimed.

"I have. He'll stand, or I'm mistaken, for more than'll spoil your sport—and mine," Asgill replied. "I'd not have played the trick about your sister's mare, good trick as it was, if I'd known he'd be here. It seemed the height of invention when you hit upon it, and no better way of commending myself. But I misdoubt it now. Suppose this Colonel brings her back?"

"But Payton's staunch."

"Ah, I hold Payton, sure enough," Asgill answered, "in the hollow of my hand, James McMurrrough. But there's accident, and there's what not, and if in place of my restoring the mare to your sister, John Sullivan restored her—faith, my lad, I'd be laughing on the other side of my face. And if he told what I'll be bound he knows of you, it would not suit you either!"

"It would not," The McMurrrough replied, with an ugly look which the gloaming failed to mask. "It would not. But there's small chance of that."

"Things happen," Asgill answered in a sombre tone. "Faith, my lad, the man's a danger. D'you consider," he continued, his voice low, "that he's owner of all—in law; and if he said the word, devil a penny there'd be for you! And no marriage for your sister but with his good will. And if Morrystown stood as far east of Tralee as it stands west—glory be to God for it!—I'm thinking he'd say that word, and there'd be no penny for you, and no marriage for her, but you'd both be hat in hand to him!"

McMurrrough's face showed a shade paler through the dusk.

"What would you have me do?" he muttered.

"Quit this fooling, this plan of a rising, and give him no handle. That, any way."

"But that won't rid us of him?" McMurrrough said, in a low voice.

"True for you. And I'll be thinking about that same. If it is to be done, it's best done soon—I'm with you there. He's no footing yet, and if he vanished 'twould be no more than if he'd never come. See the light below? There! It's gone. Well, that way he'd go, and little more talk, if 'twere well plotted."

"But how?" The McMurrrough asked nervously.

"I will consider," Asgill answered.

CHAPTER VIII

AN AFTER-DINNER GAME

Easiness, the failing of the old-world Irishman, had been Uncle Ulick's bane through life. It was easiness which had induced him to condone a baseness in his nephew which he would have been the first to condemn in a stranger. And again it was easiness which had beguiled him into standing idle while the brother's influence was creeping like strangling ivy over the girl's generous nature; while her best instincts were being withered by ridicule, her generosity abused by meanness, and her sense of right blunted by such acts of lawlessness as the seizure of the smuggling vessel. He feared, if he did not know, that things were going ill. He saw the blighting shadow of Asgill begin to darken the scene. He believed that The McMurrrough, unable to raise money on the estate—since he had no title—was passing under Asgill's control. And still he had not raised his voice.

But, above all, it was easiness which had induced Uncle Ulick to countenance in Flavia those romantic notions, now fast developing into full-blown plans, which he, who had seen the world in his youth, should have blasted; which he, who could recall the humiliation of Boyne Water and the horrors of '90, he, who knew somewhat, if only a little, of the strength of England and the weakness of Ireland, should have been the first to nip in the bud.

He had not nipped them. Instead, he had allowed the reckless patriotism of the young O'Beirnes, the predatory instincts of O'Sullivan Og, the simulated enthusiasm—of simulated he knew it to be—of the young McMurrrough to guide the politics of the house and to bring it to the verge of a crisis. The younger generation and their kin, the Sullivans, the Mahoneys, the O'Beirnes, bred in this remote corner, leading a wild and almost barbarous life, deriving such sparks of culture as reached them from foreign sources and through channels wilder than their life, were no judges of their own weakness or of the power opposed to them. But he was. He knew, and had known, that it became him, as the Nestor of the party, to point out the folly of their plans. Instead, he had bowed to the prevailing feeling. For—be it his excuse—he, too, was Irish! He, too, felt his heart too large for his bosom when he dwelt on his country's wrongs. On him, too, though he knew that successful rebellion was out of the question, Flavia's generous indignation, her youth, her enthusiasm, wrought powerfully. And at times, in moments of irritation, he, too, saw red, and dreamed of a last struggle for freedom.

At this point, at a moment when the crisis, grown visible, could no longer be masked, had arrived John Sullivan, a man of experience. His very aspect sobered Uncle Ulick's mind. The latter saw that only a blacker and more hopeless night could follow the day of vengeance of which he dreamt; and he sat this evening—while Asgill talked on the hill with The McMurrrough—he sat this evening by the light of the peat-fire, and was sore troubled. Was it, or was it not, too late? He occupied the great chair in which Sir Michael had so often conned his Scudery of winter evenings; but though he filled the chair, he knew that he had neither the will nor the mastery of its old owner. If it had not passed already, the thing might easily pass beyond his staying. Meanwhile, Flavia sat on a stool on the farther side of the blaze—until supper was on the board they used no other light—brooding bitterly over the loss of her mare; and he knew that that incident would not make things more easy. For here was tyranny brought to an every-day level; oppression that pricked to the quick! The Saxons, who had risen for a mere poundage against their anointed king, did not scruple to make slaves, ay, real slaves, of a sister and a more ancient people! But the cup was full and running over, and they should rue it! A short day and they would find opposed to them the wrath, the fury, the despair of a united people and an ancient faith. Something like this Flavia had been saying to him.

Then silence had fallen. And now he made answer.

"I'm low at heart about it, none the less," he said. "War, my girl, is a very dreadful thing." He had in his mind the words Colonel John had used to him on that subject.

"And what is slavery?" she replied. There were red spots in her cheeks, and her eyes shone.

"But if the yoke be made heavier, my jewel, and not lighter?"

"Then let us die!" she answered. "Let there be an end! For it is time. But let us die free! As it is, do we not blush to own that we are Irish? Is not our race the handmaid among nations? Then let us die! What have we to live for? Our souls they will not leave us, our bodies they enslave, they take our goods! What is left, Uncle Ulick?" she continued passionately.

"Just to endure," he said sadly, "till better times. Or what if we make things worse? Believe me, Flavvy, the last rising——"

"Rising!" she cried. "Rising! Why do you call it that? It was no rising! It was the English who rose, and we who remained faithful to our king. It was they who betrayed, and we who paid the penalty for treason! Rising!"

"Call it what you like, my dear," he answered patiently, "'tis not forgotten."

"Nor forgiven!" she cried fiercely.

"True! But the spirit is broken in us. If it were not, we should have risen three years back, when the Scotch rose. There was a chance then. But for us by ourselves there is no chance and no hope. And in this little corner what do we know or hear? God forgive us, 'tis only what comes from France and Spain by the free-traders that we'll be hearing."

"Uncle Ulick!" she answered, looking fixedly at him, "I know where you get that from! I know who has been talking to you, and who"—her voice trembled with anger—"has upset the house! It's meet that one who has left the faith of his fathers, and turned his back on

his country in her trouble—it is well that he should try to make others act as he has acted, and be false as he has been false! Caring for nothing himself, cold, and heartless——"

He was about to interrupt her, but on the word the door opened and her brother and Asgill entered, shaking the moisture from their coats. It had begun to rain as they returned along the edge of the lake. She dashed the tears from her eyes and was silent.

"Sure, and you've got a fine colour, my girl," The McMurrough said. "Any news of the mare?" he continued, as he took the middle of the hearth and spread his skirts to the blaze, Asgill remaining in the background. Then, as she shook her head despondently—the presence of Asgill had driven her into herself—"Bet you a hundred crowns to one, Asgill," he said, with a grin, "cousin Sullivan don't recover her!"

"I couldn't afford to take it," Asgill answered, smiling. "But if Miss Flavia had chosen me for her ambassador in place of him that's gone——"

"She might have had a better, and couldn't have had a worse!" James said, with a loud laugh. "It's supper-time," he continued, after he had turned to the fire, and kicked the turfs together, "and late, too! Where's Darby? There's never anything but waiting in this house. I suppose you are not waiting for the mare? If you are, it's empty insides we'll all be having for a week of weeks."

"I'm much afraid of that," Uncle Ulick answered, as the girl rose. Uncle Ulick could never do anything but fall in with the prevailing humour.

Flavia paused half-way across the floor and listened. "What's that?" she asked, raising her hand for silence. "Didn't you hear something? I thought I heard a horse."

"You didn't hear a mare," her brother retorted, grinning. "In the meantime, miss, I'd be having you know we're hungry. And——"

He stopped, startled by a knock on the door. The girl hesitated, then she stepped to it, and threw it wide. Confronting her across the threshold, looking ghostly against the dark background of the night, a grey horse threw up its head and, dazzled by the light, started back a pace—then blithered gently. In a twinkling, before the men had grasped the truth, Flavia had sprung across the threshold, her arms were round her favourite's neck, she was covering its soft muzzle with kisses.

"The saints defend us!" Uncle Ulick cried. "It is the mare!"

In his surprise The McMurrough forgot himself, his rôle, the company. "D—n!" he said. Fortunately Uncle Ulick was engrossed in the scene at the door, and the girl was outside. Neither heard.

Asgill's mortification, as may be believed, was a hundred times deeper. But his quicker brain had taken in the thing and its consequences on the instant. And he stood silent.

"She's found her way back!" The McMurrough exclaimed, recovering himself.

"Ay, lad, that must be it," Uncle Ulick replied. "She's got loose and found her way back to her stable, heaven be her bed! And them that took her are worse by the loss of five pounds!"

"Broken necks to them!" The McMurrough cried viciously.

But at that moment the door, which led to the back of the house and the offices, opened, and Colonel John stepped in, a smile on his face. He laid his damp cloak on a bench, hung up his hat and whip, and nodded to Ulick.

"The Lord save us! is it you've brought her back?" the big man exclaimed.

The Colonel nodded. "I thought"—he looked towards the open door—"it would please her to find the creature so!"

The McMurrough stood speechless with mortification. It was Asgill who stepped forward and spoke. "I give you joy, Colonel Sullivan," he said. "It is small chance I thought you had."

"I can believe you," the Colonel answered quietly. If he did not know much he suspected a good deal.

Before more could be said Flavia McMurrough turned herself about and came in and saw Colonel Sullivan. Her face flamed hotly, as the words which she had just used about him recurred to her; she could almost have wished the mare away again, if the obligation went with her. To owe the mare to him! Yes, she would have preferred to lose the mare!

But the thing was done, and she found words at last; but cold words. "I am very much obliged to you," she said, "if it was really you who brought her back."

"It was I who brought her back," he answered quietly, hurt by her words and manner, but hiding the hurt. "You need not thank me, however; I did it very willingly."

She felt the meanness of her attitude, and "I do thank you!" she said, straining at warmth, but with poor success. "I am very grateful to you, Colonel Sullivan, for the service you have done me."

"And wish another had done it!" he answered, with the faintest tinge of reproach in his voice. It was a slip from his usual platform, but he could not deny himself.

"No! But that you would serve another as effectively," she responded.

He did not see her drift. And "What other?" he asked.

"Your country," she replied. And, turning to the door again, she went out into the night, to see that the mare was safely disposed.

The four men looked at one another, and Uncle Ulick shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say, "We all know what women are!" Then feeling a storm in the air, he spoke for the sake of speaking. "Well, James," he said, "she's got her mare, and you've lost your wager. It's good-bye to the brandy, anyway. And, faith, it'll be good news for the little French captain. For you, John Sullivan, I give you joy. You'll amend us all at this rate, and make Kerry as peaceable as the Four Courts out of term time! Sure, and I begin to think you're one of the Little People!" As he spoke he slapped Colonel John on the shoulders.

"About the brandy," The McMurrrough said curtly. "Things are by way of being changed, I'd have you know. And I'm not going to forgo a good ship——"

"No, no, a bet's a bet," Uncle Ulick interposed hurriedly. "Mr. Asgill was here, and——"

"I'm with you," Asgill said. "Colonel Sullivan's won the right to have his way, and it's better so too, and safer. Faith and I'm glad," he continued cordially, "for there might have been trouble, and now there'll be none!"

"Well, it's not I'll tell O'Sullivan Og," James McMurrrough retorted. "It's little he'll like to give up the stuff, and, in my opinion," he added sullenly, "there's more than us will have a word to say to it before it's given up. But you can judge of that for yourselves."

"Mr. Crosby, of Castlemaine——"

"Oh, d—n! It's little he'll count in a week from this!"

"Still, I've no doubt Colonel Sullivan will arrange it," Asgill answered smoothly. It was evident that he thought The McMurrrough was saying too much. "Sure he's managed a harder thing."

There was a gleam in his eye and a something sinister in the tone as he said it; but the words were hearty, and Colonel John made no demur. And Darby, entering at that moment with a pair of lights in tall candlesticks—which were silver, but might have been copper—caused a welcome interruption. A couple of footboys, with slipshod feet and bare ankles, bore in the meats after him and slapped them down on the table; at the same moment the O'Beirnes and two or three more of the "family" entered from the back. Their coming lightened the air. They had to hear the news, and pass their opinion upon it. Questions were asked: Where'd the Colonel light on the cratur, and how'd he persuaded the Protestant rogues—ah, be jabbers, begging his honour's pardon entirely!—how'd he persuaded the rogues to give her up? Colonel John refused to say, but laughingly. The O'Beirnes and the others were in a good humour, pleased that the young mistress had recovered her favourite, and inclined to look more leniently on the Colonel. "Faith, and it's clear that you're a Sullivan!" quoth one. "There's none like them to put the comether on man and beast!"

This was not much to the taste of The McMurrrough or of Asgill, who, inwardly raging, saw the interloper founding a reputation on the ruse which they had devised for another end. It was abruptly and with an ill grace that the master of the house cut short the scene and bade all sit down if they wanted their meat.

"What are we waiting for?" he continued querulously. "Where's the girl? Stop your jabbering, Martin! And Phelim——"

"Sure, I believe the mare's got from her," Uncle Ulick cried. "I heard a horse, no farther back than this moment."

"I'm wishing all horses in Purgatory," The McMurrrough replied angrily. "And fools too! Where's the wench gone? Anyway, I'm beginning. You can bide her time if you like!"

And begin he did. The others, after looking expectantly at the door—for none dared treat Flavia as her brother treated her—and after Asgill had said something about waiting for

her, fell to also, one by one. Presently the younger of the slipshod footboys let fall a dish—fortunately the whole service was of pewter, so no harm was done—and was cursed for awkwardness. Where was Darby? He also had vanished.

The claret began to go round in the old Spanish silver jug—for no house in the west lacked Bordeaux in those days; it was called in London coffee-houses Irish wine. Still, neither Flavia nor the butler returned, and many were the glances cast at the door. By-and-by the Colonel—who felt that a cloud hung over the board, as over his own spirits—saw, or fancied that he saw, an odd thing. The door—that which led to the back of the house—opened, as if the draught moved it; it remained open a space, then in a silent, ghostly fashion it fell to again. The Colonel laid down his knife, and Uncle Ulick, whose eyes had followed his, crossed himself. "That's not lucky," the big man said, his face troubled. "The saints send it's not the white horse of the O'Donoghues has whisked her off!"

"Don't be for saying such unchancy things, Mr. Sullivan!" Phelim answered, with a shiver. And he, too, crossed himself. "What was it, at all, at all?"

"The door opened without a hand," Uncle Ulick explained. "I'm fearing there's something amiss."

"Not with this salmon," James McMurrrough struck in contemptuously. "Eat your supper and leave those tales to the women!"

Uncle Ulick made no reply, and a moment later Darby entered, slid round the table to Uncle Ulick's side, and touched his shoulder. Whether he whispered a word or not Colonel John did not observe, but forthwith the big man rose and went out.

This time it was James McMurrrough who laid down his knife. "What in the name of the Evil One is it?" he cried, in a temper. "Can't a man eat his meat in peace, but all the world must be tramping the floor?"

"Oh, whisht! whisht!" Darby muttered, in a peculiar tone.

James leapt up. He was too angry to take a hint. "You old fool!" he cried, heedless of Asgill's hand, which was plucking at his skirts. "What is it? What do you mean with your 'whisht' and your nods? What——"

But the old butler had turned his back on his master, and gone out in a panic. Fortunately at this moment Flavia showed at the door. "The fault's mine, James," she said, in a clear, loud tone. And the Colonel saw that her colour was high and her eyes were dancing. "I couldn't bear to leave her at once, the darling! That was it; and besides, I took a fear——"

"The pastern's right enough," Uncle Ulick struck in, entering behind her and closing the door with the air of a big man who does not mean to be trifled with. "Sound as your own light foot, my jewel, and sounder than James's head! Be easy, be easy, lad," he continued, with a trifle of sternness. "Sure, you're spoiling other men's meat, and forgetting the Colonel's present, not to speak of Mr. Asgill, that, being a Justice, is not used to our Kerry tantrums!"

Possibly this last was a hint, cunningly veiled. At any rate, The McMurrrough took his seat again with a better grace than usual, and Asgill made haste to take up the talk. The Colonel reflected; nor did he find it the least odd thing that Flavia, who had been so full of distress at the loss of her mare, said little of the rescuer's adventures, nor much of the mare herself. Yet the girl's eyes sparkled, and her whole aspect was changed in the last hour. She seemed, as far as he could judge, to be in a state of the utmost excitement; she had shaken off the timidity which her brother's temper too often imposed on her, and with it her reticence and her shyness before strangers. All the Irish humour in her fluttered to the surface, and her tongue ran with an incredible gaiety. Uncle Ulick, the O'Beirnes, the buckeens, laughed frank admiration—sometimes at remarks which the Colonel could not understand, sometimes at more obvious witticisms. Asgill was her slave. Darby, with the familiarity of the old servant, chuckled openly and rubbed his hands at her sallies; the footboys guffawed in corners, and more than one dish rolled on the floor without drawing down a rebuke. Even her brother regarded her with unwilling amusement, and did not always refrain from applause.

Could all this, could the change in her spring from the recovery of the mare, of which she said scarce a word? Colonel John could hardly believe it; and, indeed, if such were the case, she was ungrateful. For, for the recoverer of her favourite she had no words, and scarce a look. Rather, it seemed to him that there must be two Flavias: the one shy, modest, and, where her country was not assailed, of a reserve beyond reproach; the other Flavia, a shoot of the old tree, a hoyden, a castback to Sir Michael's wild youth and the gay days of the Restoration Court.

He listened to her drollery, her ringing laugh, her arch sayings with some blame, but

more admiration. After all, what had he a right to expect in this remote corner of the land, cut off by twenty leagues of bog and mountain from modern refinement, culture, thought, in this old tribal house, the last refuge of a proscribed faith and a hated race? Surely, no more than he found—nay, not a tithe of that he found. For, listening with a kindlier heart—even he, hurt by her neglect, had judged her for a while too harshly—he discerned that at her wildest and loudest, in the act of bandying cryptic jests with the buckeens, and uttering much that was thoughtless—Flavia did not suffer one light or unmaidenly word to pass her lips.

He gave her credit for that; and in the act he learned, with a reflection on his stupidity, that there was method in her madness; ay, and meaning—but he had not hitherto held the key to it—in her jests. On a sudden—he saw now that this was the climax to which she had been leading up—she sprang to her feet, carried away by her excitement. Erect, defiant—nay, triumphant—she flung her handkerchief into the middle of the table, strewn as it was with a medley of glasses and flasks and disordered dishes.

"Who loves me, follows me!" she cried, a queer exultation in her tone—"across the water!"

They pounced on the kerchief, like dogs let loose from the leash—every man but the astonished Colonel. For an instant the place was a pandemonium, a Babel. In a twinkling the kerchief was torn, amid cries of the wildest enthusiasm, into as many fragments as there were men round the table.

"All!—all!" she cried, still standing erect, and hounding them on with the magic of her voice, while her beautiful face blazed with excitement. "All—but you?"—with which, for the briefest space, she turned to Colonel John. Her eyes met his. They asked him a defiant question: they challenged the answer.

"I do not understand," he replied, taken by surprise. But indeed he did understand only too well. "Is it a game?"

The men were pinning the white shreds on their coats above their hearts—even her brother, obedient for once. But at that word they turned as one man to him, turned flushed, frowning faces and passionate eyes on him. But Flavia was before them; excitement had carried her farther than she had meant to go, yet prudence had not quite left her. "Yes, a game!" she cried, laughing, a note too high. "Don't you know the Lady's Kerchief?"

"No," he said soberly; he was even a little out of countenance.

"Then no more of it," Uncle Ulick cried, interposing, with a ring of authority in his voice. "For my part, I'm for bed. Bed! We're all children, bedad, and as fond of a frolic! And I'm thinking I'm the worst. The lights, Darby, the lights, and pleasant dreams to you! After all

—
The spoke that is to-day on top,
To-morrow's on the ground.

Sure, and I'll swear that's true!"

"And no treason!" The McMurrough answered him, with a grin. "Eh, Asgill?"

And so between them they removed Colonel John's last doubt—if he had one.

CHAPTER IX

EARLY RISERS

Colonel Sullivan had returned from Tralee in high spirits. He had succeeded beyond his hopes in the task he had set himself to perform, and he counted with confidence on gaining by that means a sound footing and a firm influence in the house. But as he sat in his room that evening, staring at the rushlight, with the night silent about him, he feared, nay, he almost knew, that his success came too late. Something had happened behind his back, some crisis, some event; and that which he had done was as if it were undone, and that which he had gained availed nothing.

It was plain—whatever was obscure—that the play of the Lady's Kerchief was a cover for matter more serious. Those who had taken part in it had scarcely deigned to pretend. Colonel John had been duller than the dullest if he had not seen in the white shreds for

which the men had scrambled, and which they had affixed with passion to their coats, the white Cockade of the Pretender; or found in Uncle Ulick's couplet—uttered while in a careless fashion he affected disguise,

The spoke that is to-day on top,
To-morrow's on the ground,

one of those catchwords which suited the taste of the day, and served at once for a passport and a sentiment.

But Colonel John knew that many a word was said over the claret which meant less than nothing next morning; and that many a fair hand passed the wine across the water-bowl—the very movement did honour to a shapely arm—without its owner having the least intention of endangering those she loved for the sake of the King across the Water. He knew that a fallen cause has ever two sets of devotees—those who talk and those who act: the many, in other words, who sing the songs and drink the toasts, and delight in the badges of treason—in the sucked orange, the sprig of oak, the knot of white ribbon, the fir-planting; and the few who mean more than they say, who mean, and sternly, to be presently the Spoke on Top.

Consequently he knew that he might be wrong in dotting the i's and crossing the t's of the scene which he had witnessed. Such a scene might mean no more than a burst of high spirits: in nine cases out of ten it would not be followed by action, nor import more than that singing of "'Twas a' for our rightful King!" which had startled him on his arrival. In that house, in the wilds of Kerry, sheer loyalty could not be expected. The wrongs of the nation were too recent, the high seas were too near, the wild geese came and went too freely—wild geese of another feather than his. Such outbursts as he had witnessed were no more than the safety-valves of outraged pride. The ease with which England had put down the Scotch rising a few years before—to say nothing of the fate of those who had taken part in it—must deter all reasonable men, whatever their race or creed, from entering on an undertaking beyond doubt more hopeless.

For Ireland was not as Scotland. Scarcely a generation had passed since she had felt the full weight of the conqueror's hand; and if she possessed, in place of the Highland mountains, vast stretches of uncharted bog and lake, to say nothing of a thousand obscure inlets, she had neither the unbroken clan-feeling nor the unbroken national spirit of the sister country. Scotland was still homogeneous, she still counted for a kingdom, her soil was still owned by her own lords and worked by her own peasants. She had suffered no massacre of Drogheda or of Wexford; no Boyne, no Aghrim, no vast and repeated confiscations. Whereas Ireland, a partitioned and subject land, which had suffered during the last two centuries horrors unspeakable, still cowered like a whipped dog before its master, and was as little likely to rebel.

Colonel John leant upon such arguments; and, disappointed and alarmed as he was by Flavia's behaviour, he told himself that nothing was seriously meant, and that with the morning light things would look more cheerful.

But when he awoke, after a feverish and disturbed sleep, the faint grisly dawn that entered the room was not of a character to inspirit. He turned on his side to sleep again if he could; but in the act, he discovered that the curtain which he had drawn across the window was withdrawn. He could discern the dark mass of his clothes piled on a chair, of his hat clinging like some black bat to the whitewashed wall, of his valise and saddle-bags in the corner—finally of a stout figure bent, listening, at the door.

An old campaigner, Colonel John was not easily surprised. Repressing the exclamation on his lips, he rose to his elbow and waited until the figure at the door straightened itself, and, turning towards him, became recognisable as Uncle Ulick. The big man crossed the floor, saw that he was awake, and, finger on lip, enjoined silence. Then he pointed to the clothes on the chair, and brought his mouth near the Colonel's ear.

"The back-door!" he whispered. "Under the yews in the garden! Come!" And leaving the Colonel staring and mystified, he crept from the room with a stealth and lightness remarkable in one so big. The door closed, the latch fell, and made no sound.

Colonel John reflected that Uncle Ulick was no romantic young person to play at mystery for effect. There was a call for secrecy therefore. The O'Beirnes slept in a room divided from his only by a thin partition; and to gain the stairs he must pass the doors of other chambers, all inhabited. As softly as he could, and as quickly, he dressed himself. He took his boots in his hand; his sword, perhaps from old habit, under his other arm; in this guise he crept from the room and down the dusky staircase. Old Darby and an underling were snoring in the cub, which in the daytime passed for a pantry, and both by day and night gave forth a smell of sour corks and mice: but Colonel John slid by the open door as noiselessly as a shadow, found the back-door—which led to the fold-yard—on the latch, and stepped out into the cool, dark morning, into the sobering freshness and the clean,

rain-washed air.

The grass was still grey-hued, the world still colourless and mysterious, the house a long black bulk against a slowly lightening sky. Only the earliest sparrows were twittering; in the trees only the most wakeful rooks were uttering tentative caws. The outburst of joy and life and music which would attend the sun's rising was not yet.

Colonel John paused on the doorstep to draw on his boots, then he picked his way delicately to the leather-hung wicket that broke the hedge which served for a fence to the garden. On the right of the wicket a row of tall Florence yews, set within the hedge, screened the pleasaunce, such as it was, from the house. Under the lee of these he found Uncle Ulick striding to and fro and biting his finger-nails in his impatience.

He wrung the Colonel's hand and looked into his face. "You'll do me the justice, John Sullivan," he said, with a touch of passion, "that never in my life have I been overhasty? Eh? Will you do me that?"

"Certainly, Ulick," Colonel John answered, wondering much what was coming.

"And that I'm no coward, where it's not a question of trouble?"

"I'll do you that justice, too," the Colonel answered. He smiled at the reservation.

The big man did not smile. "Then you'll take my word for it," he replied, "that I'm not speaking idly when I say you must go."

Colonel John lifted his eyebrows. "Go?" he answered. "Do you mean now?"

"Ay, now, or before noon!" Uncle Ulick retorted. "More by token," he continued with bitterness, "it's not that you might go on the instant that I've brought you out of our own house as if we were a couple of rapparees or horse-thieves, but that you might hear it from me who wish you well, and would warn you not to say nay—instead of from those who may be 'll not put it so kindly, nor be so wishful for you to be taking the warning they give."

"Is it Flavia you're meaning?"

"No; and don't you be thinking it," Uncle Ulick replied with a touch of heat. "Nor the least bit of it, John Sullivan! The girl, God bless her, is as honest as the day, if——"

"If she's not very wise!" Colonel John said, smiling.

"You may put it that way if you please. For the matter of that, you'll be thinking she's not the only fool at Morristown, nor the oldest, nor the biggest. And you'll be right, more shame to me that I didn't use the prudent tongue to them always, and they young! But the blood must run slow, and the breast be cold, that sees the way the Saxons are mocking us, and locks the tongue in silence. And sure, there's no more to be said, but just this—that there's those here you'll be wise not to see! And you'll get a hint to that end before the sun's high."

"And you'd have me take it?"

"You'd be mad not to take it!" Uncle Ulick replied, frowning. "Isn't it for that I'm out of my warm bed, and the mist not off the lake?"

"You'd have me give way to them and go?"

"Faith, and I would!"

"Would you do that same yourself, Ulick?"

"For certain."

"And be sorry for it afterwards!"

"Not the least taste in life!" Uncle Ulick asseverated.

"And be sorry for it afterwards," Colonel John repeated quietly. "Kinsman, come here," he continued with unusual gravity. And taking Uncle Ulick by the arm he led him to the end of the garden, where the walk looked on the lake and bore some likeness to a roughly made terrace. Pausing where the black masses of the Florence yews, most funereal of trees, still sheltered their forms from the house, he stood silent. The mist moved slowly on the surface of the water and crawled about their feet. But the sky to eastward was growing red, the lower clouds were flushed with rose-colour, the higher hills were warm with the coming of the sun. Here and there on the slopes which faced them a cotter's hovel stood solitary in its potato patch or its plot of oats. In more than one place three or four cottages made up a tiny hamlet, from which the smoke would presently rise. To English eyes, to our eyes, the scene, these oases in the limitless brown of the bog, had

been wild and rude; but to Colonel John, long familiar with the treeless plains of Poland and the frozen flats of Lithuania, it spoke of home, it spoke of peace and safety and comfort, and even of a narrow plenty. The soft Irish air lapped it, the distances were mellow, memories of boyhood rounded off all that was unsightly or cold.

He pointed here and there with his hand; and with seeming irrelevance. "You'd be sorry afterwards," he said, "for you'd think of this, Ulick. God forbid that I should say there are no things for which even this should be sacrificed. God forbid I should deny that even for this too high a price may be paid. But if you play this away in wantonness—if that which you are all planning come about, and you fail, as they failed in Scotland three years back, and as you will, as you must fail here—it is of this, it is of the women and the children under these roofs that will go up in smoke, that you'll be thinking, Ulick, at the last! Believe me or not, this is the last thing you'll see! It's to a burden as well as an honour you're born where men doff caps to you; and it's that burden will lie the black weight on your soul at the last. There's old Darby and O'Sullivan Og's wife—and Pat Mahony and Judy Mahony's four sons—and Mick Sullivan and Tim and Luke the Lamiter—and the three Sullivans at the landing, and Phil the crowder, and the seven tenants at Killabogue—it's of them, it's of them"—as he spoke his finger moved from hovel to hovel—"and their like I'm thinking. You cry them and they follow, for they're your folks born. But what do they know of England or England's strength, or what is against them, or the certain end? They think, poor souls, because they land their spirits and pay no dues, and the Justices look the other way, and a bailiffs life here, if he'd a writ, would be no more worth than a woodcock's, and the laws, bad and good, go for naught—they think the black Protestants are afraid of them! While you and I, you and I know, Ulick," he continued, dropping his voice, "'tis because we lie so poor and distant and small, they give no heed to us! We know! And that's our burden."

The big man's face worked. He threw out his arms. "God help us!" he cried.

"He will, in His day! I tell you again, as I told you the hour I came, I, who have followed the wars for twenty years, there is no deed that has not its reward when the time is ripe, nor a cold hearth that is not paid for a hundredfold!"

Uncle Ulick looked sombrely over the lake. "I shall never see it," he said. "Never, never! And that's hard. Notwithstanding, I'll do what I can to quiet them—if it be not too late."

"Too late?"

"Ay, too late, John. But anyway, I'll be minding what you say. On the other hand, you must go, and this very day that ever is."

"There are some here that I must not be seeing?" Colonel John said shrewdly.

"That's it."

"And if I do not go, Ulick? What then, man?"

"Whisht! Whisht!" the big man cried in unmistakable distress. "Don't say the word! Don't say the word, John, dear."

"But I must say it," Colonel John answered, smiling. "To be plain, Ulick, here I am and here I stay. They wish me gone because I am in the way of their plans. Well, and can you give me a better reason for staying?"

What argument Ulick would have used, what he was opening his mouth to say, remains unknown. Before he could reply the murmur of a voice near at hand startled them both. Uncle Ulick's face fell, and the two turned with a single movement to see who came.

They discerned, in the shadow of the wall of yew, two men, who had just passed through the wicket into the garden.

The strangers saw them at the same moment, and were equally taken by surprise. The foremost of the two, a sturdy, weather-beaten man, with a square, stern face and a look of power, laid his hand on his cutlass—he wore a broad blade in place of the usual rapier. The other, whom every line of his shaven face, as well as his dress, proclaimed a priest—and perhaps more than a priest—crossed himself, and muttered something to his companion. Then he came forward.

"You take the air early, gentlemen," he said, the French accent very plain in his speech, "as we do. If I mistake not," he continued, looking with an easy smile at Colonel John, "your Protestant kinsman, of whom you told me, Mr. Sullivan? I did not look to meet you, Colonel Sullivan; but I do not doubt you are man of the world enough to excuse, if you cannot approve, the presence of the shepherd among his sheep. The law forbids, but—" still smiling, he finished the sentence with a gesture in the air.

"I approve all men," Colonel John answered quietly, "who are in their duty, father."

"But wool and wine that pay no duty?" the priest replied, turning with a humorous look to his companion, who stood beside him unsmiling. "I'm not sure that Colonel Sullivan extends the same indulgence to free-traders, Captain Machin."

Colonel John looked closely at the man thus brought to his notice. Then he raised his hat courteously. "Sir," he said, "the guests of the Sullivans, whoever they be, are sacred to the Sullivans."

Uncle Ulick's eyes had met the priest's, as eyes meet in a moment of suspense. At this he drew a deep breath of relief. "Well said," he muttered. "Bedad, it is something to have seen the world!"

"You have served under the King of Sweden, I believe?" the ecclesiastic continued, addressing Colonel John with a polite air. He held a book of offices in his hand, as if his purpose in the garden had been merely to read the service.

"Yes."

"A great school of war, I am told?"

"It may be called so. But I interrupt you, father, and with your permission I will bid you good-morning. Doubtless we shall meet again."

"At breakfast, I trust," the ecclesiastic answered, with a certain air of intention. Then he bowed and they returned it, and the two pairs gave place to one another with ceremony, Colonel John and Ulick passing out through the garden wicket, while the strangers moved on towards the walk which looked over the lake. Here they began to pace up and down.

With his hand on the house door Uncle Ulick made a last attempt. "For God's sake, be easy and go," he muttered, his voice unsteady, his eyes fixed on the other's, as if he would read his mind. "Leave us to our fate! You cannot save us—you see what you see, you know what it means. And for what I know, you know the man. You'll but make our end the blacker."

"And the girl?"

Uncle Ulick tossed his hands in the air. "God help her!" he said.

"Shall not we too help her?"

"We cannot."

"It may be. Still, let us do our duty," Colonel John replied. He was very grave. Things were worse, the plot was thicker, than he had feared.

Uncle Ulick groaned. "You'll not be bidden?" he said.

"Not by an angel," Colonel John answered steadfastly. "And I've seen none this morning, but only a good man whose one fault in life is to answer to all men 'Sure, and I will!'"

Uncle Ulick started as if the words stung him. "You make a jest of it!" he said. "Heaven send we do not sorrow for your wilfulness. For my part, I've small hope of that same." He opened the door, and, turning his back upon his companion, went heavily, and without any attempt at concealment, past the pantry and up the stairs to his room. Colonel John heard him slip the bolt, and, bearing a heavy heart himself, he knew that the big man was gone to his prayers.

To answer "Yes" to all comers and all demands is doubtless, in the language of Uncle Ulick, a mighty convenience, and a great softener of the angles of life. But a time comes to the most easy when he must answer "No," or go open-eyed to ruin. Then he finds that from long disuse the word will not shape itself; or if uttered, it is taken for naught. That time had come for Uncle Ulick. Years ago his age and experience had sufficed to curb the hot blood about him. But he had been too easy to dictate while he might; he had let the reins fall from his hands; and to-day he must go the young folks' way—ay, go, seeing all too plainly the end of it.

It was not his fate only. Many good men in the '15 and the '45, ay, and in the war of La Vendée, went out against their better judgment, borne along by the energy of more vehement spirits—went out, aware, as they rode down the avenue, and looked back at the old house, that they would see it no more; that never again except in dreams would they mount from the horse-block which their grandsires' feet had hollowed, walk through the coverts which their fathers had planted, or see the faces of the aged serving-men who had taught their childish fingers to hold the reins and level the fowling-piece!

But Colonel John was of another kind and another mind. Often in the Swedish wars had he seen a fair country-side changed in one day into a waste, from the recesses of which naked creatures with wolfish eyes stole out at night, maddened by their wrongs, to wreak

a horrid vengeance on the passing soldier. He knew that the fairest parts of Ireland had undergone such a fate within living memory; and how often before, God and her dark annals alone could tell! Therefore he was firmly minded, as firmly minded as one man could be, that not again should the corner of Kerry under his eyes, the corner he loved, the corner entrusted to him, suffer that fate.

Yet when he descended to breakfast, his face told no tale of his thoughts, and he greeted with a smile the unusual brightness of the morning. As he stood at the door, that looked on the courtyard, he had a laughing word for the beggars—never were beggars lacking at the door of Morristown. Nor as he sunned himself and inhaled with enjoyment the freshness of the air did any sign escape him that he marked a change.

But he was not blind. Among the cripples and vagrants who lounged about the entrance he detected six or eight ragged fellows whose sunburnt faces were new to him and who certainly were not cripples. In the doorway of one of the two towers that fronted him across the court stood O'Sullivan Og, whittling a stick and chatting with a sturdy idler in seafaring clothes. The Colonel could not give his reason, but he had not looked twice at these two before he got a notion that there was more in that tower this morning than the old ploughs and the broken boat which commonly filled the ground floor, or the grain which was stored above. Powder? Treasure? He could not say which or what; but he felt that the open door was a mask that deceived no one.

And there was a stir, there was a bustle in the court; a sparkle in the eyes of some as they glanced slyly and under their lashes at the house, a lilt in the tread of others as they stepped to and fro. He divined that hands would fly to caubeens and knees seek the ground if a certain face showed at a window: moreover, that that at which he merely guessed was no secret to the barefooted colleens who fed the pigs, or the barelegged urchins who carried the potatoes. Some strange change had fallen upon Morristown, and imbued it with life and hope and movement.

He was weighing this when he caught the sound of voices in the house, and he turned about and entered. The priest and Captain Machin had descended and were standing with Uncle Ulick warming themselves before the wood fire. The McMurrough, the O'Beirnes, and two or three strangers—grim-looking men who had followed, a glance told him, the trade he had followed—formed a group a little apart, yet near enough to be addressed. Asgill was not present, nor Flavia.

"Good-morning, again," Colonel John said. And he bowed.

"With all my heart, Colonel Sullivan," the priest answered cordially. And Colonel John saw that he had guessed aright: the speaker no longer took the trouble to hide his episcopal cross and chain, or the ring on his finger. There was an increase of dignity, too, in his manner. His very cordiality seemed a condescension.

Captain Machin bowed silently, while The McMurrough and the O'Beirnes looked darkly at the Colonel. They did not understand: it was plain that they were not in the secret of the morning encounter.

"I see O'Sullivan Og is here," the Colonel said, addressing Uncle Ulick. "That will be very convenient."

"Convenient?" Uncle Ulick repeated, looking blank.

"We can give him the orders as to the Frenchman's cargo," the Colonel said calmly.

Uncle Ulick winced. "Ay, to be sure! To be sure, lad," he answered. But he rubbed his head, like a man in a difficulty.

The Bishop seemed to be going to ask a question. Before he could speak, however, Flavia came tripping down the stairs, a gay song on her lips. Half way down, the song, light and sweet as a bird's, came to a sudden end.

"I am afraid I am late!" she said. And then—as the Colonel supposed—she saw that more than the family party were assembled: that the Bishop and Captain Machin were there also, and the strangers—and, above all, that he was there. She descended the last three stairs silently, but with a heightened colour, moved proudly into the middle of the group, and curtsied before the ecclesiastic till her knee touched the floor.

He gave her his hand to kiss, with a smile and a murmured blessing. She rose with sparkling eyes.

"It is a good morning!" she said, as one who having done her duty could be cheerful.

"It is a very fine morning," the Bishop answered in the same spirit. "The sun shines on us, as we would have him shine. And after breakfast, with your leave, my daughter, and your brother's leave, we will hold a little council. What say you, Colonel Sullivan?" he

continued, turning to the Colonel. "A family council? Will you join us?"

The McMurrough uttered an exclamation, so unexpected and strident, that the words were not articulate. But the Bishop understood them, for, as all turned to him, "Nay," he said, "it shall be for the Colonel to say. But it's ill arguing with a fasting man," he continued genially, "and by your leave we will return to the matter after breakfast!"

"I am not for argument at all," Captain Machin said. It was the first time he had spoken.

CHAPTER X

A COUNCIL OF WAR

The meal had been eaten, stolidly by some, by others with a poor appetite, by Colonel John with a thoughtful face. Two men of family, but broken fortunes, old Sir Donny McCarthy of Dingle, and Timothy Burke of Maamtrasna, had joined the party—under the rose as it were, and neither giving nor receiving a welcome. Now old Darby kept the door and the Bishop the hearth; whence, standing with his back to the glowing peat, he could address his audience with eye and voice. The others, risen from the table, had placed themselves here and there, Flavia near the Bishop and on his right hand, Captain Machin on his left; The McMurrough, the two O'Beirnes, Sir Donny and Timothy Burke, with the other strangers, sat in a knot by the window. Uncle Ulick with Colonel Sullivan formed a third group. The courtyard, visible through the windows, seethed with an ever-increasing crew of peasantry, frieze-coated or half bare, who whooped and jabbered, now about one of their number, now about another. Among them moved some ten or twelve men of another kidney—seamen with ear-rings and pigtails, bronzed faces and gaudy kerchiefs, who listened but idly, and with the contempt of the mercenary, but whose eyes seldom left the window behind which the conference sat, and whose hands were never far from the hilt of a cutlass or the butt of a pistol. The sun shone on the crowd and the court, and now and then those within the house caught through the gateway the shimmer of the lake beyond. The Irish air was soft, the hum of voices cheerful; nor could anything less like a secret council, less like a meeting of men about to commit themselves to a dark and dangerous enterprise, be well imagined.

But no one was deceived. The courage, the enthusiasm, that danced in Flavia's eyes were reflected more darkly and more furtively in a score of faces, within the room and without. To enjoy one hour of triumph, to wreak upon the cursed English a tithe of the wrongs, a tithe of the insults, that their country had suffered, to be the spoke on top, were it but for a day, to die for Ireland if they could not live for her, to avenge her daughters outraged and her sons beggared—could man own Irish blood, and an Irish name, and not rise at the call?

If there were such a man, oh! cowardly, mean, and miserable he seemed to Flavia McMurrough. And much she marvelled at the patience, the consideration, the arguments which the silver-tongued ecclesiastic brought to bear upon him. She longed, with a face glowing with indignation, to disown him—in word and deed. She longed to denounce him, to defy him, to bid him begone, and do his worst.

But she was a young plotter, and he who spoke from the middle of the hearth with so much patience and forbearance, was an old one, proved by years of peril, and tempered by a score of failures; a man long accustomed to play with the lives and fortunes of men. He knew better than she what was at stake to win or lose; nor was it without forethought that he had determined to risk much to gain Colonel Sullivan. The same far-sight and decision which had led him to take a bold course on meeting the Colonel in the garden, now lent him patience to win, if win he might, one whose value in the enterprise on which they were embarking he set at the highest. To his mind, and to Machin's mind, the other men in the room, ay, and the woman, so fair and enthusiastic, were but tools to be used, puppets to be danced. But this man—for among soldiers of fortune there is a camaraderie, so that they are known to one another by repute from the Baltic to Cadiz—was a coadjutor to be gained. He was one whose experience, joined with an Irish name, might well avail them much.

Colonel John might refuse, he might be obdurate. But in that event the Bishop's mind was made up. Flavia supposed that if the Colonel held out, he would be dismissed; that he would go out from among them a cowardly, mean, miserable creature—and so an end. But the speaker made no mistake. He had chosen to grip the nettle danger, and he knew that gentle measures were no longer possible. He must enlist Colonel Sullivan, or—but it has

been said that he was one hardened by long custom, and no novice in dealing with the lives of men.

"If it be a question only of the chances," he said, after some beating about the bush, "if I am right in supposing that it is only that which withholds Colonel Sullivan from joining us —"

"I do not say it is," Colonel John replied very gravely. "Far from it, sir. But to deal with it on that basis: while I can admire, reverend sir, the man who is ready to set his life on a desperate hazard to gain something which he sets above that life, I take the case to be different where it is a question of the lives of others. Then I say the chances must be weighed—carefully weighed, and tried in the balance."

"However sacred the cause and high the aim?"

"I think so."

The Bishop sighed, his chin sinking on his breast. "I am sorry," he said, in a voice that sufficiently declared his depression—"I am sorry."

"That we cannot see alike in a matter so grave? Yes, sir, so am I."

"No. That I met you this morning."

"I am not sorry," Colonel John replied, stoutly refusing to see the other's meaning. "For—hear me out, I beg. You and I have seen the world and can weigh the chances. Your friend, too, Captain Machin"—he pronounced the name in an odd tone—"he too knows on what he is embarked and how he will stand if the result be failure. It may be that he already has his home, his rank, and his fortune in foreign parts, and will be little the worse if the worst befall."

"I?" Machin cried, stung out of his taciturnity. And he rose with an air of menace from his seat. "Let me tell you, sir, that I fling back the insinuation!"

But the Colonel refused to listen. He proceeded as if the other were not speaking. "You, reverend sir, yourself," he continued, "you too know, and well, on what you are embarking, its prospects and the issue for you, if it fail. But, you—I give you credit for it—are by your profession and choice devoted to a life of danger. You are willing, day by day and hour by hour, to run the risk of death. But these, my cousin there"—looking with a kind eye at Flavia—"she——"

"Leave me out!" she cried passionately. And she rose to her feet, her face on fire. "I separate myself from you! I, for my part, ask no better than to suffer for my country!"

"She thinks she knows, but she does not know," the Colonel continued quietly, unmoved by her words. "She cannot guess what it is to be cast adrift—alone, a woman, penniless, in a strange land. And yet that at the best—and the worst may be unspeakably worse—must be her fate if this plot miscarry! For others, The McMurrrough and his friends yonder"—he indicated the group by the window—"they also are ignorant."

The McMurrrough sprang to his feet, spluttering with rage. "D—n you, sir, speak for yourself!" he cried.

"They know nothing," the Colonel continued, quite unmoved, "of that force against which they are asked to pit themselves, of that stolid power over sea, never more powerful than now! And so to pit themselves, that losing they will lose their all!"

"The saints will be between us and harm!" the eldest of the O'Beirnes cried, rising in his wrath. "It's speak for yourself I say too!"

"And I!"

"And I!" others of the group roared with gestures of defiance. "We are not the boys to be whistled aside! To the devil with your ignorance!"

And one, stepping forward, snapped his fingers close to the Colonel's face. "That for you!—that for you!" he cried. "Now, or whenever you will, day or night, and sword or pistol! To the devil with your impudence, sir; I'd have you know you're not the only man has seen the world! The shame of the world on you, talking like a schoolmaster while your country cries for you, and 'tis not your tongue but your hand she's wanting!"

Uncle Ulick put his big form between Colonel John and his assailant. "Sure and be easy!" he said. "Sir Donny, you're forgetting yourself! And you, Tim Burke! Be easy, I say. It's only for himself the Colonel's speaking!"

"Thank God for that!" Flavia cried in a voice which rang high.

They were round him now a ring of men with dark, angry faces, and hardly restrained

hands. Their voices cried tumultuously on him, in defiance of Ulick's intervention. But the Bishop intervened.

"One moment," he said, still speaking smoothly and with a smile. "Perhaps it is for those he thinks he speaks!" And the Bishop pointed to the crowd which filled the forecourt, and of which one member or another was perpetually pressing his face against the panes to learn what his sacredness, God bless him! would be wishing. "Perhaps it is for those he thinks he speaks!" he repeated in irony—for of the feeling of the crowd there could be no doubt.

"You say well," Colonel John replied, rising to his feet and speaking with gloomy firmness. "It is on their behalf I appeal to you. For it is they who foresee the least, and they who will suffer the most. It is they who will follow like sheep, and they who like sheep will go to the butcher! Ay, it is they," he continued with deeper feeling, and he turned to Flavia, "who are yours, and they will pay for you. Therefore," raising his hand for silence, "before you name the prize, sum up the cost! Your country, your faith, your race—these are great things, but they are far off and can do without you. But these—these are that fragment of your country, that tenet of your faith, that handful of your race which God has laid in the palm of your hand, to cherish or to crush, and——"

"The devil!" Machin ejaculated with sudden violence. Perhaps he read in the girl's face some shadow of hesitation, of thought, of perplexity. "Have done with your preaching, sir, I say! Have done, man! Try us not too far! If we fail——"

"You must fail!" Colonel John retorted—with that narrowing of the nostrils that in the pinch of fight men long dead had seen for a moment in distant lands, and seen no more. "You will fail! And failing, sir, his reverence will stand no worse than now, for his life is forfeit already! While you——"

"What of me? Well, what of me?" the stout man cried truculently. His brows descended over his eyes, and his lips twitched.

"For you, Admiral Cammock——"

The other stepped forward a pace. "You know me?"

"Yes, I know you."

There was silence for an instant, while those who were in the secret eyed Colonel Sullivan askance, and those who were not gaped at Cammock.

Soldiers of fortune, of fame and name, were plentiful in those days, but seamen of equal note were few. And with this man's name the world had lately rung. An Irishman, he had risen high in Queen Anne's service; but at her death, incited by his devotion to the Stuarts, he had made a move for them at a critical moment. He had been broken, being already a notable man; on which, turning his back on an ungrateful country, as he counted it, he had entered the Spanish marine, which the great minister Alberoni was at that moment reforming. He had been advanced to a position of rank and power—Spain boasted no stouter seaman; and in the attempt on which Alberoni was bent, to upset the Protestant succession in England, Admiral Cammock was a factor of weight. He was a bold, resolute man, restrained by no fine scruples, prepared to take risks himself, and not too prone to think for others. In Ireland his life was forfeit, Great Britain counted him renegade and traitor. So that to find himself recognised, though grateful to his vanity, was a shock to his discretion.

"Well, and knowing me?" he replied at last, with the tail of his eyes on the Bishop, as if he would gladly gain a hint from his subtlety. "What of me?"

"You have your home, your rank, your relations abroad," Colonel Sullivan answered firmly. "And if a descent on the coast be a part of your scheme, then you do not share the peril equally with us. You are here to-day and elsewhere to-morrow. We shall suffer, while you sail away."

"I fling that in your teeth!" Cammock cried. "I know you too, sir, and——"

"Know no worse of me than of yourself!" Colonel Sullivan retorted. "But if you do indeed know me, you know that I am not one to stand by and see my friends led blindfold to certain ruin. It may suit your plans to make a diversion here. But that diversion is a part of larger schemes, and the fate of those who make it is little to you."

Cammock's hand flew to his belt, he took a step forward, his face suffused with passion.

"For half as much I have cut a man down!" he cried.

"May be, but——"

"Peace, peace, my friends," the Bishop interposed. He laid a warning hand on Cammock's

arm. "This gentleman," he continued smoothly, "thinks he speaks for our friends outside."

"Let me speak, not for them, but to them," Colonel Sullivan replied impulsively. "Let me tell them what I think of this scheme, of its chances, of its certain end! I will tell them no more than I have told you, and no more than I think justified."

He moved, whether he thought they would let him or not, towards the window. But he had not taken three steps before he found his progress barred. "What is this?" he exclaimed.

"Needs must with so impulsive a gentleman," the Bishop said. He had not moved, but at a signal from him The McMurrrough, the O'Beirnes and two of the other young men had thrust themselves forward. "You must give up your sword, Colonel Sullivan," he continued.

The Colonel retreated a pace, and evinced more surprise than he felt. "Give up—do you mean that I am a prisoner?" he cried. He had not drawn, but two or three of the young men had done so, and Flavia, in the background by the fire, was white as paper—so suddenly had the shadow of violence fallen on the room. Uncle Ulick could be heard protesting, but no one heeded him.

"You must surrender!" the Bishop repeated firmly. He too was a trifle pale, but he was used to such scenes and he spoke with decision.

"Resistance is vain. I hope that with this lady in the room——"

"One moment!" the Colonel cried, raising his hand. But as The McMurrrough and the others hesitated, he whipped out his sword and stepped two paces to one side with an agility no one had foreseen. He now had the table behind him and Uncle Ulick on his left hand. "One moment!" he repeated, raising his hand in deprecation and keeping his point lowered. "Do you consider——"

"We consider our own safety," Cammock answered grimly. And signing to one of the men to join Darby at the door, he drew his cutlass. "You know too much to go free, sir, that is certain."

"Ay, faith, you do," The McMurrrough chimed in with a sort of glee. "He was at Tralee yesterday, no less. And for a little we'll have the garrison here before the time!"

"But by the powers," Uncle Ulick cried, "ye shall not hurt him! Your reverence!"—the big man's voice shook—"your reverence, this shall not be! It's not in this house they shall murder him, and him a Sullivan! Flavia, speak, girl," he continued, the perspiration standing on his brow. "Say ye'll not have it. After all, it's your house! By G—d, it is your house. And, by the Holy Cross, there shall be no Sullivan blood spilt in it while I am standing by to prevent it!"

"Then let him give up his sword!" Cammock answered doggedly.

"Yes, let him give up his sword," Flavia said in a small voice.

"Colonel Sullivan," the Bishop interposed, stepping forward, "I hope you'll hear reason. Resistance is vain. You know as well as I do that at a word from us our friends outside would deal with you, and roughly. Give up your sword and——"

"And *presto!*" Cammock cried, "or take the consequences!" He had edged his way, while the Bishop spoke, round Ulick and round the head of the table. Now, with his foot on the bench, he was ready at a word to spring on the table, and take the Colonel in the rear. It was clear that he was a man of action. "Down with your sword, sir," he cried flatly.

Colonel John recognised the weakness of his position. Before him the young men were five to one, with old Sir Donny and Timothy Burke in the rear. On his flank the help which Ulick might give was discounted by the move Cammock had made. He saw that he could do no more at present, that he must base his hope on the future; this, though he was not blind to the fact that there might be no future. Suddenly as the storm had blown up, he knew that he was dealing with desperate men, who from this day onward would act with their necks in a noose, and whom his word might send to the scaffold. They had but to denounce him to the rabble who waited outside, and, besides the Bishop, one only there, as he believed, would have the influence to save him.

Colonel John had confronted danger many times; to confront it had been his trade. And it was with coolness and a clear perception of the position that he turned to Flavia. "I will give up my sword," he said, "but to my cousin only. This is her house, and I yield myself"—with a smile and a bow—"her prisoner."

Before they knew what he would be at, he stepped forward and tendered his hilt to the girl, who took it with flaccid fingers. "I am in your hands now," he said, fixing his eyes on hers and endeavouring to convey his meaning to her. For surely, with such a face, she

must have, with all her recklessness, some womanliness, some tenderness of feeling in her.

"D—n your impudence!" The McMurrough cried.

"A truce, a truce," the Bishop interposed. "We are all agreed that Colonel Sullivan knows too much to go free. He must be secured," he continued smoothly, "for his own sake. Will two of these gentlemen see him to his room, and see also that his servant is placed under guard in another room?"

"But," the Colonel objected, looking at Flavia, "my cousin will surely allow me to give——"

"She will be guided by us in this," the Bishop rejoined with asperity. "Let what I have said be done."

Flavia, very pale, holding the Colonel's sword as if it might sting her, did not speak. Colonel Sullivan, after a moment's hesitation, followed one of the O'Beirnes from the room, the other bringing up the rear.

When the door had closed upon them, Flavia's was not the only pale face in the room. The scene had brought home to more than one the fact that here was an end of peace and law, and a beginning of violence and rebellion. The Rubicon was passed. For good or for ill, they were committed to an enterprise fraught, it might be, with success and glory, fraught also, it might be, with obloquy and death. Uncle Ulick stared at the floor with a lowering face, and sighed, liking neither the past nor the prospect. The McMurrough, the Squireens, Sir Donny, and Burke, secretly uneasy, put on a reckless air to cover their apprehensions. The Bishop and Cammock, though they saw themselves in a fair way to do what they had come to do, looked thoughtful also. And only Flavia—only Flavia, shaking off the remembrance of Colonel John's face, and Colonel John's existence—closed her grip upon his sword, and in the ardour of her patriotism saw with her mind's eye not victory nor acclaiming thousands—no, nor the leaping line of pikemen charging for *his* glory that her brother saw—but the scaffold, and a death for her country. Sweet it seemed to her to die for the cause, for the faith, to die for Ireland! To die as young Lord Derwentwater had died a year or two before; as Lady Nithsdale had been ready to die; as innumerable men and women had died, lifted above common things by the love of their country.

True, her country, her Ireland, was but this little corner of Kerry beaten by the Atlantic storms and sad with the wailing cries of seagulls; the rudest province of a land itself provincial. But if she knew no more of Ireland than this, she had read her story; and naught is more true than that the land the most down-trodden is also the best beloved. Wrongs beget a passion of affection; and from oppression springs sacrifice. This daughter of the windswept shore, of the misty hills and fairy glens, whose life from infancy had been bare and rugged and solitary, had become, for that reason, a dreamer of dreams and a worshipper of the ideal Ireland, her country, her faith. The salt breeze that lashed her cheeks and tore at her hair, the peat reek and the soft shadows of the bogland—ay, and many an hour of lonely communing—had filled her breast with love; such love as impels rather to suffering and to sacrifice than to enjoyment. Nor had she yet encountered the inevitable disappointments. Her eyes had not yet been opened to the seamy side of patriotism; to the sordid view of every great adventure that soon or late saddens the experienced and dispels the glamour of the dreamer.

For one moment she had recoiled before the shock of impending violence, the clash of steel, the reality of things. But that had passed; now her one thought, as she stood with dilated eyes, unconsciously clutching the Colonel's sword, was that the time was come, the thing was begun—henceforth she belonged not to herself, but to Ireland and to God.

Deep in such thoughts, the girl was not aware that the others had got together and were discussing the Colonel's fate until mention was made of the French sloop and of Captain Augustin. "Faith, and let him go in that!" she heard Uncle Ulick urging. "D'ye hear me, your reverence? 'Twill be a week before they land him, and the fire we'll be lighting will be no secret at all at all by then."

"May be, Mr. Sullivan," the Bishop replied—"may be. But we cannot spare the sloop."

"No, by the Holy Bones, and we'll not spare her!" The McMurrough chimed in. "She's heels to her, and it's a godsend she'll be to us if things go ill."

"And an addition to our fleet anyway," Cammock said. "We'd be mad to let her go—just to make a man safe, we can make safe a deal cheaper!"

Flavia propped the sword carefully in an angle of the hearth, and moved forward. "But I do not understand," she said timidly. "We agreed that the sloop and the cargo were to go free if Colonel Sullivan—but you know!" she added, breaking off and addressing her brother. "You were there."

"Is it dreaming you are?" he retorted contemptuously. "Is it we'll be taking note of that now?"

"It was a debt of honour," she said.

"The girl's right," Uncle Ulick said, "and we'll be rid of him."

"We'll be rid of him without that," The McMurrrough muttered.

"I am fearing, Mr. Sullivan," the Bishop said, "that it is not quite understood by all that we are embarked upon a matter of the utmost gravity, upon a matter of life and death. We cannot let bagatelles stand in the way. The sloop and her cargo can be made good to her owners—at another time. For your relative and his servant——"

"The shortest way with them!" some one cried. "That's the best and the surest!"

"For them," the Bishop continued, silencing the interruption by a look, "we must not forget that some days must pass before we can hope to get our people together, or to be in a position to hold our own. During the interval we lie at the mercy of an informer. Your own people you know, and can trust to the last gossoon, I'm told. But the same cannot be said of this gentleman—who has very fixed ideas—and his servant. Our lives and the lives of others are in their hands, and it is of the last importance that they be kept secure and silent."

"Ay, silent's the word," Cammock growled.

"There could be no better place than one of the towers," The McMurrrough suggested, "for keeping them safe, bedad!"

"And why'll they be safer there than in the house?" Uncle Ulick asked suspiciously. He looked from one speaker to another with a baffled face, trying to read their minds. He was sure that they meant more than they said.

"Oh, for the good reason!" the young man returned contemptuously. "Isn't all the world passing the door upstairs? And what more easy than to open it?"

Cammock's eyes met the Bishop's. "The tower'll be best," he said. "Devil a doubt of it! Draw off the people, and let them be taken there, and a guard set. We've matters of more importance to discuss now. This gathering to-morrow, to raise the country—what's the time fixed for it?"

But Flavia, who had listened with a face of perplexity, interposed. "Still, he is my prisoner, is he not?" she said wistfully. "And if I answer for him?"

"By your leave, ma'am," Cammock replied, with decision, "one word. Women to women's work! I'll let no woman weave a halter for me!"

The room echoed low applause. And Flavia was silent.

CHAPTER XI

A MESSAGE FOR THE YOUNG MASTER

James McMurrrough was young, but he was a slave to as few of the generous ambitions of youth as any man of his years. At heart he cared little for his country, and nothing for his Faith—which indeed he had been ready to barter for an allowance, and a certain succession. He cared only for himself; and but for the resentment which the provisions of his grandfather's will had bred in him, he would have seen the Irish race in Purgatory, and the Roman faith in a worse place, before he would have risked a finger to right the one or restore the other. Even under the influence of that resentment, that bitterness, he had come into the conspiracy with but half a heart; without enthusiasm, and with an eye not so much to its ultimate success as to the gain he might make out of it in the meantime.

Once embarked, however, on the enterprise, vanity, the failing of light minds, and particularly of the Celtic mind, swept him onward. The night which followed Colonel Sullivan's arrest was a night long remembered at Morristown—a night to uplift the sanguine and to kindle the short-sighted; nor was it a wonder that the young chief—as he strode among his admiring tenants, his presence greeted, when he entered, with Irish acclamations, and his skirts kissed, when he passed, by devoted kernes—sniffed the pleasing incense, and trod the ground to the measure of imagined music. He felt himself a

greater man this night than he had ever been before. The triumph that was never to be intoxicated him. He was Montrose, he was Claverhouse—a Montrose whom no Philiphaugh awaited, a Claverhouse whom no silver bullet would slay. He saw himself riding in processions, acclaimed by thousands, dictating to senates, the idol of a rejoicing Dublin.

His people had kindled a huge bonfire in the middle of the forecourt, and beside this he extended a gracious welcome to a crowd of strong tenants, whose picturesque figures, as they feasted, sang, drank, and fought, the fire silhouetted on the house front and the surrounding walls; now projecting them skywards, gigantic and menacing, now reducing them to dwarfs. A second fire, for the comfort of the baser sort, had been kindled outside the gates, and was the centre of merriment less restrained; while a third, which served as a beacon to the valley, and a proclamation of what was being done, glowed on the platform before the ruined tower at the head of the lake. From this last the red flames streamed far across the water; and now revealed a belated boat shooting from the shadow on its way across, now a troop of countrymen, who, led by their priest, came limping along the lake-side road; ostensibly to join in the religious services of the morrow, but in reality, as they knew, to hear something, and, God willing, to do something towards freeing old Ireland and shaking off the grip of the cursed Saxon.

In the more settled parts of the land, such a summons as had brought them from their rude shielings among the hills or beside the bogs, would have passed for a dark jest. But in this remote spot, the notion of overthrowing the hated power by means of a few score pikes, stiffened by half as many sailors from the Spanish ship in the bay, did not seem preposterous, either to these poor folk or to their betters. Cammock, of course, knew the truth, and the Bishop. Asgill, too, the one man cognisant of the movement who was not here, and of whom some thought with distrust—he, too, could appraise the attempt at its true worth. But of these men, the two first aimed merely at a diversion which would further their plans in Europe; and the last cared only for Flavia.

But James McMurrough and Flavia herself, and Sir Donny and old Timothy Burke and the O'Beirnes and the two or three small gentry, Sullivans or McCarthys, who had also come in—and in a degree Uncle Ulick—these saw nothing hopeless in the plan. That plan, as announced, was first to fall upon Tralee in combination with a couple of sloops said to be lying in Galway Bay; and afterwards to surprise Kenmare. Masters of these places, they would have the Kerry peninsula behind them, and no enemy within it; for the Crosbys and the Pettys, and the handful of English settlers who lived there, could offer no resistance. So much done, they proposed to raise the old standard, to call Connaught to their aid, to cry a crusade. Spain would reinforce them through a score of ports—was not Galway City half Spanish already?—Ireland would rise as one man. And faith, as Sir Donny said, before the Castle tyrants could open their eyes, or raise their heads from the pillow, they'd be seeing themselves driven into the salt ocean!

So, while the house-walls gave back the ruddy glare of the torches, and the bare-footed, bare-headed, laughing colleens damped the thatch, and men confessed in one corner and kissed their girls in another, and the smiths in a third wrought hard at the pike-heads—so the struggle depicted itself to more than one! Among others to Flavia, as, half trembling, half triumphant, she looked down from a window on the strange riot, and told herself that the time was come! To James as he strode to and fro, fancying himself Montrose, sweeping eastwards like a flame. To the O'Beirnes and the O'Loughlins and their like. Great when the fight was done would be the glory of Kerry! The cocks of Clare would crow no more, and undying would be the fame of the McMurrough line, descended from the old Wicklow kings!

Meanwhile Cammock and the Bishop walked in the dark in the garden, a little apart from the turmoil, and, wrapped in their cloaks, talked in low voices; debating much of Sicily and Naples and the Cardinal and the Mediterranean fleet, and at times laughing at some court story. But they said, strange to tell, no word of Tralee, or of Kenmare, or of Dublin Castle, or even of Connaught. They were no visionaries. They had to do with greater things than these, and in doing them knew that they must spend to gain. The lives of a few score peasants, living in wretchedness already, the ruin of half a dozen hamlets, the desolation of such a God-forsaken country-side as this, which was but bog and hill at best, and where it rained two days in three—what were these beside the diversion of a single squadron from the great pitched fight, already foreseen, where the excess of one battleship might win an empire, and its absence might ruin nations?

So while the fire at the head of the lake blazed high, and band after band of the "boys" came in, thirsting for fight, and while song and revelry lorded it in the forecourt and on the strand, and not whisky only but cognac, taken from Captain Augustin's sloop, flowed freely, the two men pacing the walk behind the Florence yews gave scarce a thought to the present moment. They had planned this move in conjunction with other and more important moves. It was made or in the making; and forthwith their thoughts and their speech left it, to deal with the next move and the one beyond, and with the end of all their

moves—St. Germain's or St. James's. And one other man, and one only, because his life had been passed on their wider plane, and he could judge of the relative value of Connaught and Kent, divined the trend of their thoughts, and understood the deliberation, almost the sense of duty with which they prepared to sacrifice their pawns.

Colonel Sullivan sat in the upper room of one of the two towers that flanked the entrance to the forecourt. Bale was with him, and the two, with the door doubly locked upon them and guarded by a sentry whose crooning they could hear, shared such comfort as a pitcher of water and a gloomy outlook afforded. The darkness hid the medley of odds and ends, of fishing-nets, broken spinning-wheels and worn-out sails, which littered their prison; but the inner of the two slit-like windows that lighted the room admitted a thin shaft of firelight that, dancing among the uncovered rafters, told of the orgy below. Bale, staring morosely at the crowd about the fire, crouched in the splay of the window, while the Colonel, in the same posture at the other window, gazed with feelings not more cheerful on the dark lake.

He was concerned for himself and his companion; for he knew that frightened folk are ever the most cruel. But he was more gravely concerned for those whose advocate he had made himself—for the ignorant cotters in their lowly hovels, the women, the children, upon whom the inevitable punishment would fall. He doubted, now that it was too late, the wisdom of the course he had taken; and, blaming himself for precipitation, he fancied that if he had acted with a little more guile, a little more reticence, a little less haste, his remonstrance might have had greater weight.

There are some whom a life spent in camps and amid bloody scenes, hardens; and others, a few, who emerge from the ordeal with souls passionately inclined to mercy and justice. Colonel John was of the latter—a black swan. For at this moment, lying, and aware that he lay, in some peril of his life, he was more troubled by the evil plight of the helpless, whose cabins had given him a foster-mother, and made him welcome in his youth, whose blood, too, he shared, than by his own uncertain prospects.

William Bale, as was natural, was far from sharing this view. "May the fire burn them!" he muttered, his ire excited by some prank of the party below. "The Turks were polite beside these barefoot devils!"

"You'd have said the other thing at Bender," the Colonel answered, turning his head.

"Ay, your honour," Bale returned; "a man never knows when he is well off."

His master laughed. "I'd have you apply that now," he said.

"So I would if it weren't that I've a kind of a scunner of those black bog-holes," Bale said. "To be planted head first 's no proper end of a man, to my thinking; and if there's not something of the kind in these ragamuffins' minds I'm precious mistaken.

"Pooh, man, you're frightening yourself," the Colonel answered. But the room was dank and chill, the lake without lay lonely, and the picture which Bale's words called up was not pleasant to the bravest. "It's a civilised land, and they'd not think of it!"

"There's one, and that's the young lady's brother," Bale answered darkly, "would not pull us out by the feet! I'll swear to that. Your honour's too much in his way, if what they say in the house is true."

"Pooh!" the Colonel answered again. "We're of one blood."

"Cain and Abel," Bale said. "There's example for it." And he chuckled.

The Colonel scolded him anew. But having done so he could not shake off the impression which the man's words had made on him. While he lived he was a constant and an irritating check upon James McMurrough. If the young man saw a chance of getting rid of that check, was he one to put it from him? Colonel John's face grew long as he pondered the question; he had seen enough of James to feel considerable doubt about the answer. The fire on the height above the lake had died down, the one on the strand was a bed of red ashes. The lake lay buried in darkness, from which at intervals the cry of an owl as it moused along the shore rose mournfully.

But Colonel John was not one to give way to fears that might be baseless. "Let us sleep," he said, shrugging his shoulders. And he lay down where he was, pillowing his head on a fishing-net. Bale said nothing, but examined the door before he stretched himself across the threshold.

Half an hour after dawn they were roused. It was a heavy trampling on the stairs that awakened them. The door was quickly unlocked, it was thrown open, and the hairy face of O'Sullivan Og, who held it wide, looked in. Behind him were two of the boys with pikes—frowsy, savage, repellent figures, with drugget coats tied by the sleeves about their necks.

"You'll be coming with us, Colonel, no less," Og said.

Colonel John looked at him. "Whither, my man?" he asked coolly. He and Bale had got to their feet at the first alarm.

"Och, sure, where it will be best for you," Og replied, with a leer.

"Both of us?" the Colonel asked, in the same hard tone.

"Faith, and why'd we be separating you, I'd be asking."

Colonel John liked neither the man's tone nor his looks. But he was far above starting at shadows, and he guessed that resistance would be useless. "Very good," he said. "Lead on."

"Bedad, and if you'll be doing that same, we will," O'Sullivan Og answered with a grin.

The Colonel and Bale found their hats—they'd been allowed to bring nothing else with them—and they went down the stairs. In the gloom before the door of the tower waited two sturdy fellows, barefoot and shock-headed, with musketoons on their shoulders, who seemed to be expecting them. Round the smouldering embers of the fire a score of figures lay sleeping in the open, wrapped in their frieze coats. As many others sat with their backs against the wall, and their chins sunk on their breasts. The sun was not yet up, and all things were wrapt in a mist that chilled to the bone. Even within the narrow bounds of the forecourt, objects at a distance put on queer shapes and showed new faces. Nothing in all that was visible took from the ominous aspect of the two men with the firearms. One for each, Bale thought. And his face, always pallid, showed livid in the morning light.

Without a word the four men formed up round their prisoners, and at once O'Sullivan Og led the way at a brisk pace towards the gate. Colonel John was following, but he had not taken three steps before a thought struck him, and he halted. "Are we leaving the house at once?" he asked.

"We are. And why not, I'm asking."

"Only that I've a message for the McMurrrough it will be well for him to have."

"Sure," O'Sullivan Og answered, his manner half wheedling, half truculent, "'tis no time for messages and trifles and the like now, Colonel. No time at all, I tell you. Ye can see that for yourself, I'm thinking, such a morning as this."

"I'm thinking nothing of the kind," the Colonel answered, and he hung back, looking towards the house. Fortunately Darby chose that minute to appear at the door. The butler's face was pale, and showed fatigue; his hair hung in wisps; his clothes were ill-fastened. He threw a glance of contempt, the contempt of the indoor servant, at the sleeping figures, lying here and there in the wet. Thence his eyes travelled on and took in the group by the gate. He started, and wrung his hands in sudden, irrepressible distress. It was as if a spasm seized the man.

The Colonel called him. "Darby," he cried. "Come here, my man."

O'Sullivan Og opened his mouth; he was on the point of interposing, but he thought better of it, and shrugged his shoulders, muttering something in the Erse.

"Darby," the Colonel said gravely, "I've a message for the young master, and it must be given him in his bed. Will you give it?"

"I will, your honour."

"You will not fail?"

"I will not, your honour," the old servant answered earnestly.

"Tell him, then, that Colonel Sullivan made his will as he passed through Paris, and 'tis now in Dublin. You mind me, Darby?"

The old man began to shake—he had an Irish man's superstition. "I do, your honour. But the saints be between us and harm," he continued, with the same gesture of distress. "Who's speaking of wills?"

"Only tell him that in his bed," Colonel John repeated, with an urgent look. "That is all."

"And by your leave, it is now we'll be going," Og interposed sharply. "We are late already for what we've to do."

"There are some things," the Colonel replied with a steady look, "which it is well to be late about."

Having fired that shot, he turned his eyes once more on the house. Then, without further remonstrance, he and Bale, with their guard, marched out through the gate, and took the road along the lake—that same road by which the Colonel had come some days before from the French sloop. The men with the firelocks walked beside them, one on either flank, while the pikemen guarded them behind, and O'Sullivan Og brought up the rear.

They had not taken twenty paces before the fog swallowed up the party; and henceforth they walked in a sea of mist, like men moving in a nightmare from which they cannot awake. The clammy vapour chilled them to the bone: while the unceasing wailing of seagulls, borne off the lough, the whistle of an unseen curlew on the hillside, the hurtle of wings as some ghostly bird swept over them—these were sounds to deepen the effect, and depress men who had reason to suspect that they were being led to a treacherous end.

The Colonel, though he masked his apprehensions under an impenetrable firmness, began to fear no less than that—and with cause. He observed that O'Sullivan Og's followers were of the lowest type of kerne, islanders in all probability, and half starved; men whose hands were never far from their skenes, and whose one orderly instinct consisted in a blind obedience to their chief. O'Sullivan Og himself he believed to be The McMurrough's agent in his more lawless business; a fierce, unscrupulous man, prospering on his lack of scruple. The Colonel could augur nothing but ill from the hands to which he had been entrusted; and worse from the manner in which these savage, half-naked creatures, shambling beside him, stole from time to time a glance at him, as if they fancied they saw the winding-sheet high on his breast.

Some, so placed, and feeling themselves helpless, isolated by the fog, and entirely at these men's mercy, might have lost their firmness. But he did not; nor did Bale, though the servant's face betrayed the keenness of his anxiety. They weighed indeed, certainly the former, the chances of escape: such chances as a headlong rush into the fog might afford to unarmed men, uncertain where they were. But the Colonel reflected that it was possible that that was the very course upon which O'Sullivan Og counted for a pretext and an excuse. And, for a second objection, the two could not, so closely were they guarded, communicate with each other in such a way as to secure joint action.

After all, The McMurrough's plan might amount to no more than their detention in some secret place among the hills. Colonel John hoped so.

Yet he could not persuade himself that this was the worst that was intended. He could not but think ill of things; of O'Sullivan Og's silence, of the men's stealthy glances, of the uncanny hour. And when they came presently to a point where a faintly marked track left the road, and the party, at a word from their leader, turned into it, he thought worse of the matter. Was it his fancy—he was far from nervous—or were the men beginning to look impatiently at one another? Was it his fancy, or were they beginning to press more closely on their prisoners, as if they sought a quarrel? He imagined that he read in one man's eyes the question "When?" and in another's the question "Now?" And a third, he thought, handled his weapon in an ominous fashion.

Colonel John was a brave man, inured to danger and trained to emergencies, one who had faced death in many forms. But the lack, of arms shakes the bravest, and it needed even his nerve to confront without a quiver the fate that, if his fears were justified, lay before them: the sudden, violent death, and the black bog-water which would swallow all traces of the crime. But he did not lose his firmness or lower his crest for a moment.

By-and-by the track, which for a time had ascended, began to run downward. The path grew less sound. The mist, which was thicker than before, and shut them in on the spot where they walked, as in a world desolate and apart, allowed nothing to be seen in front; but now and again a ragged thorn-tree or a furze bush, dripping with moisture, showed ghostlike to right or left. There was nothing to indicate the point they were approaching, or how far they were likely to travel; until the Colonel, peering keenly before them, caught the gleam of water. It was gone as soon as seen, the mist falling again like a curtain; but he had seen it, and he looked back to see what Og was doing. He caught him also in the act of looking over his shoulder. Was he making sure that they were beyond the chance of interruption?

It might be so; and Colonel John wheeled about quickly, thinking that while O'Sullivan Og's attention was directed elsewhere, he might take one of the other men by surprise, seize his weapon and make a fight for his life and his servant's life. But he met only sinister looks, eyes that watched his smallest movement with suspicion, a point ready levelled to strike him if he budged. And then, out of the mist before them, loomed the gaunt figure of a man, walking apace towards them.

The meeting appeared to be as little expected by the stranger as by Og's party. For not only did he spring aside and leave the track to give them a wider berth, but he went by warily, with his feet in the bog. Some word was cried to him in the Erse, he answered, for a moment he appeared to be going to stop. Then he passed on and was lost in the mist.

But he left a change behind him. One of the firelock-men broke into hasty speech, glancing, the Colonel noticed, at him and Bale, as if they were the subjects of his words. O'Sullivan Og answered the man curtly and harshly; but before the reply was off his lips a second man broke in vehemently in support of the other. They all halted; for a few seconds all spoke at once. Then, just as Colonel John was beginning to hope that they would quarrel, O'Sullivan Og gave way with sullen reluctance, and a man ran back the way they had come, shouting a name. Before the prisoners could decide whether his absence afforded a chance of escape, he was back again, and with him the man who had passed in the bog.

Colonel John looked at the stranger, and recognised him; and, a man of quick wit, he knew on the instant that he had to face the worst. His face set more hard, more firm—if it turned also a shade paler. He addressed his companion. "They've called him back to confess us," he muttered in Bale's ear.

"The devils!" Bale exclaimed. He choked on the word and worked his jaw, glaring at them; but he said no more. Only his eyes glanced from one to another, wild and full of rage.

Colonel John did not reply, for already O'Sullivan Og was addressing him. "There's no more to it," The McMurrrough's agent said bluntly; "but you've come your last journey, Colonel, and we'll go back wanting you. There's no room in Ireland from this day for them that's not Irish at heart! nor safety for honest men while you're walking the sod. But——"

"Will you murder us?" Colonel John said. "Do you know, man," he continued sternly, "what you do? What have we done to you, or your master?"

"Done?" O'Sullivan Og answered with sudden ferocity. "And murder, say you? Ay, faith, I would, and ten thousand like you, for the sake of old Ireland! You may make your peace, and have five minutes to that—and no more, for time presses, and we've work to do. These fools would have a priest for you"—he turned and spat on the ground—"but it is I, and none better, know you are black Protestants, and 'twould take the Holy Father, God bless him, and no less, to make your souls!"

Colonel John looked at him with a strange light in his eyes. "It is little to you," he said, "and much to me. Yet think, think, man, what you do. Or if you will not, here is my servant. Let him go at least. Spare his life at least. Put him, if you please, on board the French sloop that's in the bay——"

"Faith, and you're wasting the little breath that is left you," the ruffian answered, irritated rather than moved by the other's calmness. "It's to take or leave. I told the men a heretic had no soul to make, but——"

"God forgive you!" Colonel John said—and was silent; for he saw that remonstrance would not help him, nor prayer avail. The man's mind was made up, his heart steeled. For a brief instant, something, perhaps that human fear which he had so often defied, clutched Colonel John's heart. For a brief instant human weakness had its way with him, and he shuddered—in the face of the bog, in the face of such an end as this. Then the mist passed from his eyes, if not from the landscape; the gracious faith that was his returned to him: he was his grave, unyielding self again. He took Bale's hand and begged his forgiveness. "Would I had never brought you!" he said. "Why did I, why did I? Yet, God's will be done!"

Bale did not seem able to speak. His jaw continued to work, while his eyes looked sideways at Og. Had the Irishman known his man, he would have put himself out of reach, armed as he was.

"But I will appeal for you to the priest!" Colonel John continued; "he may yet prevail with them to spare you."

"He will not!" O'Sullivan Og said naïvely.

CHAPTER XII

THE SEA MIST

Father O'Hara looked at the two prisoners, and the tears ran down his face. He was the man whom Colonel Sullivan and Bale had overtaken on their way to Tralee. In spite of his life and his wrongs, he was a merciful man, and with all his heart he wished that, if he could do no good, God had been pleased to send him another way through the mist. Not

that life was to him aught but a tragedy at any time, on whichever road he took. What but a tragedy could it be to a man bred at Douay and reared on Greek, and now condemned to live in loneliness and squalor among unlettered, unwashed creatures; to one who, banned by the law, moved by night, and lurked in some hiding-place by day, and, waking or sleeping, was ever in contact with the lawless and the oppressed, the wretched and the starving—whose existence was spent in shriving, christening, burying among the hills and bogs?

Yet, even in such a life this was a tragedy beyond the common. And—"What can I do?" he cried. "*Non mihi, domine, culpa!* Oh, what can I do?"

"You can do nothing, father," O'Sullivan Og said grimly. "They're heretics, no less! And we're wasting your time, blessed man." He whispered a few words in the priest's ear.

The latter shuddered. "God forgive us all!" he wailed. "And most, those who need it most! God keep us from high place!"

"Sure and we're in little peril!" O'Sullivan Og replied.

Colonel John looked at the priest with solemn eyes. Nor did aught but a tiny pulse beating in his cheek betray that every sense was on the stretch; that he was listening, watching, ready to seize the least chance, that he might save, at any rate, poor Bale. Then, "You are a Christian, father," he said gravely. "I ask nothing for myself. But this is my servant. He has done nothing, he knows nothing. Prevail with them to spare him!"

Bale uttered a fierce remonstrance. No one understood it, or what he said, or meant. His eyes looked askance, like the eyes of a beast in a snare—seeking a weapon, or a throat! To be butchered thus! To be butchered thus!

Perhaps Colonel John, notwithstanding his calm courage, had the same thought, and found it bitter. Death had been good in the face of silent thousands, with pride and high resolve for cheer. Or in the heat of a fight for the right, where it came unheeded and almost unfelt. But here on the bog, in the mist, unknown, unnoticed, to perish and be forgotten in a week, even by the savage hands that took their breath! Perhaps to face this he too had need of all his Christian stoicism.

"My God! My God!" the priest said. And he fell on his knees and raised his hands. "Have pity on these two, and soften the hearts of their murderers!"

"Amen," said Colonel John quietly.

"Faith, and 'tis idle, this," O'Sullivan Og cried irritably. He gave a secret sign to his men to draw to one side and be ready. "We've our orders, and other work to do. Kneel aside, father, 'tis no harm we mean you, God forbid! But you're wasting breath on these same. And you," he continued, addressing the two, "say what prayer you will, if you know one, and then kneel or stand—it's all one to us—and, God willing, you'll be in purgatory and never a knowledge of it!"

"One moment," Colonel John interposed, his face pale but composed, "I have something to say to my friend."

"And you may, if you'll play no tricks."

"If you would spare him——"

"'Tis idle, I say! Sorra a bit of good is it! But there, ye shall be having while the blessed man says three Paternosters, and not the least taste of time beyond! Devil a bit!"

Colonel John made a sign to the priest, who, bowing himself on the wet sod, covered his eyes with his hand and began to pray. The men, at a sign from O'Sullivan, had drawn to either side, and the firelock-men were handling their pieces, with one eye on their leader and one on the prisoners.

Colonel John took Bale's hand. "What matter, soon or late?" he said gently "Here, or on our beds we die in our duty. Let us say, *In manus tuas*——"

"Popish! Popish!" Bale muttered, shaking his head. He spoke hoarsely, his tongue cleaving to his mouth. His eyes were full of rage.

"Into Thy hands!" Colonel John said. He stooped nearer to his man's ear. "When I shout, jump and run!" he breathed. "I will hold two." Again he lifted his head and looked calmly at the threatening figures standing about them, gaunt and dark, against the curtain of mist. They were waiting for the signal. The priest was half way through his second Paternoster. His trembling tongue was stumbling, lagging more and more. As he ended it—the two men still standing hand in hand—Colonel John gripped Bale's fingers hard, but held him.

"What is that?" he cried, in a loud voice—but still he held Bale tight that he might not move. "What is that?" he repeated. On the ear—on his ear first—had fallen the sound of hurrying feet.

They strained their eyes through the mist.

"And what'll this be?" O'Sullivan Og muttered suspiciously, looking first in the direction of the sound, and then, still more suspiciously, at his prisoners. "If you budge a step," he growled, "I'll drive this pike——"

"A messenger from The McMurrrough," Colonel John said, speaking as sternly as if he and not The McMurrrough's henchman commanded the party. If he was human, as indeed he was, if his heart, at the hope of respite, beat upon his ribs as the heart of a worse man might have beaten, he did not betray it save by a light in his eyes. "You will see if I am not right," he added.

They had not to wait. As he spoke a tall, lathy form emerged from the mist. It advanced with long leaps, the way they had come. A moment, and the messenger saw them—almost as soon as they had seen him. He pulled up, and walked the intervening distance, his arms drooping, and his breath coming in gasps. He had run apace, and he could not speak. But he nodded—as he wiped the saliva from his parted lips—to O'Sullivan Og to come aside with him; and the two moved off a space. The others eyed them while the message was given. The suspense was short. Quickly O'Sullivan Og came back.

"Ye may be thankful," he said drily. "Ye've cheated the pikes for this time, no less. And 'tis safe ye are."

"You have the greater reason to be thankful," Colonel John replied solemnly. "You have been spared a foul crime."

"Faith, and I hope I may never do worse," Og answered hardily, "than rid the world of two black Protestants, an' them with a priest to make their souls! Many's the honest man's closed his eyes without that same. But 'tis no time for prating! I wonder at your honour, and you no more than out of the black water! Bring them along, boys," he continued, "we've work to do yet!"

"*Laus Deo!*" the priest cried, lifting up his hands. "Give Him the glory!"

"Amen," the Colonel said softly. And for a moment he shut his eyes and stood with clasped hands. Perhaps even his courage was hardly proof against so sudden, so late a respite. He looked with a hardly repressed shudder on the dreary face of the bog, on the gleaming water, on the dripping furze bushes. "I thank you kindly, father, for your prayers!" he said. "The words of a good man avail much!"

No more was said. For a few yards Bale walked unsteadily, shaken by his escape from a death the prospect of which had evoked as much rage as fear. But he recovered himself speedily, and, urged by O'Sullivan's continual injunctions to hasten, the party were not long in retracing their steps. They reached the road, and went along it, but in the direction of the landing-place. In a few minutes they were threading their way in single file across the saucer-like waste which lay to landward of the hill overlooking the jetty and the inlet.

"Are you taking us to the French sloop?" Colonel John asked.

"You'll be as wise as the lave of us by-and-by!" Og answered sulkily.

They crossed the shoulder near the tower, which loomed uncertainly through the fog, and they strode down the slope to the stone pier. The mist lay low on the water, and only the wet stones of the jetty, and a boat or two floating in the angle between the jetty and the shore, were visible. The tide was almost at the flood. Og bade the men draw in one of the boats, ordered Colonel Sullivan and Bale to go into the bow, and the pikemen to take the oars. He and the two firelock-men—the messenger had vanished—took their seats in the stern.

"Pull out, you cripples," he said. "And be pulling stout, and there'll be flood enough to be bringing us back."

The men bent to the clumsy oars, and the boat slid down the inlet, and passed under the beam of the French sloop, which lay moored farther along the jetty. Not a sign of life appeared on deck as they passed; the ship seemed to be deserted. Half a dozen strokes carried the boat beyond view of it, and the little party were alone on the bosom of the water, that lay rocking smoothly between its unseen banks. Some minutes were spent in stout rowing, and the oily swell began to grow longer and slower. They were near the mouth of the inlet, and abreast of the east-and-west-running shore of the bay. Smoothly as the sea lapped the beach under the mist, the boat began to rise and fall on the Atlantic rollers.

"Tis more deceitful than a pretty colleen," O'Sullivan Og said, "is the sea-fog, bad cess to it! My own father was lost in it. Will you be seeing her, boys?"

"Ye'll not see her till ye touch her!" one of the rowers answered.

"And the tide running?" the other said. "Save us from that same!"

"She's farther out by three gunshots!" struck in a firelock-man. "We'll be drifting back, ye thieves of the world, if ye sit staring there! Pull, an' we'll be inshore an' ye know it."

For some minutes the men pulled steadily onwards, while one of the passengers, apprised that their destination was the Spanish war-vessel which had landed Cammock and the Bishop, felt anything but eager to reach it. A Spanish war-ship meant imprisonment and hardship without question, possibly the Inquisition, persecution, and death. When the men lay at last on their oars, and swore that they must have passed the ship, and they would go no farther, he alone listened indifferently, nay, felt a faint hope born in him.

"Tis a black Protestant fog!" O'Sullivan cried. "Where'll we be, I wonder?"

"Sure, ye can make no mistake," one answered. "The wind's light off the land."

"We'll be pulling back, lads."

"That's the word."

The men put the boat about, a little sulkily, and started on the return journey. The sound of barking dogs and crowing cocks came off the land with that clearness which all sounds assume in a fog. Suddenly Colonel John, crouching in the bow, where was scant room for Bale and himself, saw a large shape loom before him. Involuntarily he uttered a warning cry, O'Sullivan echoed it, the men tried to hold the boat. In doing this, however, one man was quicker than the other, the boat turned broadside on to her former course, and before the cry was well off O'Sullivan Og's lips, it swept violently athwart a cable hauled taut by the weight of a vessel straining to the flow of the tide. In a twinkling the boat careened, throwing its occupants into the water.

Colonel John and Bale were nearest to the hawser, and managed, suddenly as the thing happened, to seize it and cling to it. But the first wave washed over them, blinding them and choking them; and, warned by this, they worked themselves desperately along the rope until their shoulders were clear of the water and they could twist a leg over their slender support.

That effected, they could spit out the water, breathe again, and look about them. They shouted for help once, twice, thrice, thinking that some on the great ship looming dim and distant to shoreward of them must hear. But their shouts were merged in the wail of despair, of shrieks and cries that floated away into the mist. The boat, travelling with the last of the tide, had struck the cable with force, and was already drifting a gunshot away. Whether any saved themselves on it, the two clinging to the hawser could not see.

Bale, shivering and scared, would have shouted again, but Colonel John stayed him. "God rest their souls!" he said solemnly. "The men aboard can do nothing. By the time they'll have lowered a boat it will be done with these."

"They can take us aboard," Bale said.

"Ay, if we want to go to Cadiz gaol," Colonel John answered slowly. He was peering keenly towards the land.

"But what can we do, your honour?" Bale asked with a shiver.

"Swim ashore."

"God forbid!"

"But you can swim?"

"Not that far. Not near that far, God knows!" Bale repeated with emphasis, his teeth chattering. "I'll go down like a stone."

"Cadiz gaol! Cadiz gaol!" Colonel John muttered. "Isn't it worth a swim to escape that?"

"Ay, ay, but——"

"Do you see that oar drifting? In a twinkling it will be out of reach. Off with your boots, man, off with your clothes, and to it! That oar is freedom! The tide is with us still, or it would not be moving that way. But let the tide turn and we cannot do it."

"It's too far!"

"If you could see the shore," Colonel John argued, "you'd think nothing of it! With your chin on that oar, you can't sink. But it must be done before we are chilled."

He was stripping himself to his underclothes while he talked: and in haste, fearing that he might feel the hawser slacken and dip—a sign that the tide had turned. Or if the oar floated out of sight—then too the worst might happen to them. Already Colonel John had plans and hopes, but freedom was needful if they were to come to anything.

"Come!" he cried impulsively. "Man, you are not a coward, I know it well! Come!"

He let himself into the water as he spoke, and after a moment of hesitation, and with a shiver of disgust, Bale followed his example, let the rope go, and with quick, nervous strokes bobbed after him in the direction of the oar. Colonel John deserved the less credit, as he was the better swimmer. He swam long and slow, with his head low: and his eyes watched his follower. A half minute of violent exertion, and Bale's outstretched hand clutched the oar. It was a thick, clumsy implement, and it floated high. In curt, clipped sentences Colonel John bade him rest his hands on it, and thrust it before him lengthwise, swimming with his feet.

For five minutes nothing was said, but they proceeded slowly and patiently, rising a little above each wave and trusting—for they could see nothing, and the light wind was in their faces—that the tide was still seconding their efforts. Colonel John knew that if the shore lay, as he judged, about half a mile distant, he must, to reach it, swim slowly and reserve his strength. Though a natural desire to decide the question quickly would have impelled him to greater exertion, he resisted it as many a man has resisted it, and thereby has saved his life. At the worst, he reflected that the oar would support them both for a short time. But that meant remaining stationary and becoming chilled.

They had been swimming for ten minutes, as he calculated, when Bale, who floated higher, cried joyfully that he could see the land. Colonel John made no answer, he needed all his breath. But a minute later he too saw it loom low through the fog; and then, in some minutes afterwards, they felt bottom and waded on to a ledge of rocks which projected a hundred yards from the mainland eastward of the mouth of the inlet. The tide had served them well by carrying them a little to the eastward. They sat a moment on the rocks to recover their strength—while the seagulls flew wailing over them—and for the first time they took in the full gravity of the catastrophe. Every other man in the boat had perished—so they judged, for there was no stir on shore. On that they uttered some expressions of pity and of thankfulness; and then, stung to action by the chill wind, which set their teeth chattering, they got to their feet and scrambled painfully along the rocks until they reached the marshy bank of the inlet. Thence a pilgrimage scarcely less painful, through gorse and rushes, brought them at the end of ten minutes to the jetty.

Here, too, all was quiet. If any of O'Sullivan Og's party had saved themselves they were not to be seen, nor was there any indication that the accident was known on shore. It was still early, but little after six, the day Sunday; and apart from the cackling of poultry, and the grunting of hogs, no sound came from O'Sullivan's house or the hovels about it.

While Colonel John had been picking his way over the rocks and between the gorse bushes, his thoughts had not been idle; and now, without hesitation, he made along the jetty until the masts of the French sloop loomed beside it. He boarded the vessel by a plank and looked round him. There was no watch on deck, but a murmur of talk came from the fore-castle and a melancholy voice piping a French song rose from the depths of the cabin. Colonel John bade Bale follow him—they were shivering from head to foot—and descended the companion.

The singer was Captain Augustin. He lay on his back in his bunk, while his mate, between sleep and waking, formed an unwilling audience.

Tout mal chaussé, tout mal vêtu,

sang the Captain in a doleful voice,

Pauvre marin, d'où reviens-tu?
Tout doux! Tout doux!

With the last word on his lips, he called on the name of his Maker, for he saw two half-naked, dripping figures peering at him through the open door. For the moment he took them, by the dim light, for the revenants of drowned men; while his mate, a Breton, rose on his elbow and shrieked aloud.

It was only when Colonel John called them by name that they were reassured, lost their fears, and recognised in the pallid figures before them their late passenger and his attendant. Then, as the two Frenchmen sprang to their feet, the cabin rang with oaths and invocations, with *Mon Dieu!* and *Ma foi!* Immediately clothes were fetched, and rough

cloths to dry the visitors and restore warmth to their limbs, and cognac and food—for the two were half starved. Meantime, and while these comforts were being administered, and half the crew, crouching about the companion, listened, and volleys of questions rained upon him, Colonel John told very shortly the tale of their adventures, of the fate that had menaced them, and their narrow escape. In return he learned that the Frenchmen were virtually prisoners.

"They have taken our equipage, cursed dogs!" Augustin explained, refraining with difficulty from a dance of rage. "The rudder, the sails, they are not, see you! They have locked all in the house on shore, that we may not go by night, you understand. And by day the ship of war beyond, Spanish it is possible, pirate for certain, goes about to sink us if we move! Ah, *sacré nom*, that I had never seen this land of swine!"

"Have they a guard over the rudder and the sails?" Colonel John asked, pausing to speak with the food half way to his mouth.

"I know not. What matter?"

"If not, it were not hard to regain them," Colonel John said, with an odd light in his eyes.

"And the ship of war beyond? What would she be doing?"

"While the fog lies?" Colonel John replied. "Nothing."

"The fog?" Augustin exclaimed. He clapped his hand to his head, ran up the companion and as quickly returned. A skipper is in a low way who, whatever his position, has no eye for the weather; and he felt the tacit reproach. "Name of Names!" he cried. "There is a fog like the inside of Jonah's whale! For the ship beyond I snap the finger at her! She is not! Then forward, *mes braves*! Yet tranquil! They have taken the arms!"

"Ay?" Colonel John said, still eating. "Is that so? Then it seems to me we must retake them. That first."

"What, you?" Augustin exclaimed.

"Why not?" Colonel John responded, looking round him, a twinkle in his eye. "The goods of his host are in a manner of speaking the house of his host. And it is the duty—as I said once before."

"But is it not that they are—of your kin?"

"That is the reason," Colonel John answered cryptically, and to the skipper's surprise. But that surprise lasted a very short time. "Listen to me," the Colonel continued. "This goes farther than you think, and to cure it we must not stop short. Let me speak, and do you, my friends, listen. Courage, and I will give you not only freedom but a good bargain."

The skipper stared. "How so?" he asked.

Then Colonel John unfolded the plan on which he had been meditating while the waves lapped his smarting chin, while the gorse bushes pricked his feet, and the stones giped them. It was a great plan, and before all things a bold one; so bold that Augustin gasped as it unfolded itself, and the seamen, who, with the freedom of foreign sailors in a ship of fortune, crowded the foot of the companion, opened their eyes.

Augustin smacked his lips. "It is what you call *magnifique*!" he said. "But," he shrugged his shoulders, "it is not possible!"

"If the fog holds?"

"But if it—what you call—lifts? What then, eh?"

"Through how many storms have you ridden?" the Colonel answered. "Yet if the mast had gone?"

"We had gone! *Vraiment!*"

"That did not keep you ashore."

Augustin cogitated over this for a while. Then, "But we are eight only," he objected. "Myself, nine."

"And two are eleven," Colonel John replied.

"We do not know the ground."

"I do."

The skipper shrugged his shoulders.

"And they have treated you—but you know how they have treated you," Colonel John went on, appealing to the lower motive.

The group of seamen who stood about the door growled seamen's oaths.

"There are things that seem hard," the Colonel continued, "and being begun, pouf! they are done while you think of them!"

Captain Augustin of Bordeaux swelled out his breast. "That is true," he said. "I have done things like that."

"Then do one more!"

The skipper's eyes surveyed the men's faces. He caught the spark in their eyes. "I will do it," he cried.

"Good!" Colonel John cried. "The arms first!"

CHAPTER XIII

A SLIP

Flavia McMurrough enjoyed one advantage over her partners in conspiracy. She could rise on the morning after the night of the bonfires with a clear head and an appetite undiminished by punch; and probably she was the only one at Morristown of whom this could be said. The morning light did not break for her on aching eyelids and a brain at once too retentive of the boasts of the small hours and too sensitive to the perils of the day to come. Colonel John had scarcely passed away under guard, old Darby had scarcely made his first round—with many an ominous shake of the head—the slatternly serving-boys had scarcely risen from their beds in the passages, before she was afoot, gay as a lark, and trilling like one; with spirits prepared for the best or the worst which the day might bring forth—though she foresaw only the best—and undepressed even by the blanket of mist that shrouded lake and hills and all the world from view.

If the past night, with its wassail and its mirth, its toasts and its loud-voiced bragging, might be called "the great night of Morristown," this, the girl promised herself, should more truly and more fitly be styled "the great day of Ireland." On this day would they begin a work the end of which no man could see, but which, to the close of time, should shed a lustre on the name of McMurrough. No more should their native land be swept along, a chained slave, a handmaid, in the train of a more brutal, a more violent, and a more stupid people! From this day Ireland's valour, that had never known fit leading, should be recognised for what it was, her wit be turned to good uses, her old traditions be revived in the light of new glories. The tears rose to the girl's eyes, her bosom heaved, her heart seemed too large for her, as she pictured the fruition of the work to be begun this day, and with clasped hands and prayerful eyes sang her morning hymn.

No more should an Irish gentleman walk swordless and shamed among his equals. No more should the gallant beast he had bred be seized with contumely in the market-place. No more should all the nobler services of his native land be closed to him, his faith be banned, his priests proscribed! No more should he be driven to sell his valour to the highest bidder, and pour forth his blood in foreign causes, under the walls of old Vienna, and on every stricken field from Almanza to the Don. For on this day Ireland should rouse herself from the long nightmare, the oppression of centuries. She should remember her greatness of old time and the blessing of Patrick; and those who had enslaved her, those who had scorned her and flouted her, should learn the strength of hands nerved by the love of God and the love of country! This day at Morristown the day should break.

The tears gushed from her eyes as she thought of this, and with an overflowing heart thanked Heaven for the grace and favour that assigned her a part in the work. And the halo formed of those tears ennobled all she saw about her. The men, still sprawling up and down the courtyard in the abandonment of drink, her brother calling with a pale face and querulous oaths for a cooling draught, Sir Donny and old Tim Burke, yawning off, like the old toppers they were, the effects of the carouse—the cause and her hopes ennobled all. It was much—may she be forgiven!—if, in the first enthusiasm of the morning, she gave a single thought to the misguided kinsman whose opposition had hurried him into trouble, and exposed him to dangers at which she vaguely guessed.

Fool that he was, she reflected, to pit himself against such men as the Bishop and the

Spanish Admiral! From her window she saw the two walking in the garden with bent heads, aloof from the yawning crowd, and now appearing beyond the line of Florence yews, now vanishing behind them. On which she came near to worshipping them. Had they not brought to Ireland, to Kerry, to Morrinstown, the craft and skill in counsel, the sagacity and courage, which had won for them the favour of foreign kings, and raised them high in exile? Lacking their guidance, the movement might have come to nothing, the most enthusiastic must have wasted their strength. But they were here to inspire, to lead, to control. Against such men the parlour-captains of Tralee, the encroaching Pettys, and their like, must fail indeed. And before more worthy opponents arrived to encounter the patriots, who could say what battles might not be won, what allies gained?

It was a dream, but a golden dream, and when she descended to the living-room she still lived in it. The girl's lips quivered as she kissed the Bishop's hand and received with bent knees his episcopal blessing. "And on this house, my daughter," he added, "and on this day!"

"Amen!" she murmured in her heart.

True, breakfast, and the hour after breakfast, gave some pause to her happiness. The men's nerves were on edge with potheen and excitement, and they had not been at table five minutes before quarrelling broke out at the lower end of the board. The Spanish officer who was in attendance on Cammock came to words, and almost to blows, with one of the O'Beirnes, who resented the notion that the Admiral's safety was not sufficiently secured by the Irish about him. The peace was kept with difficulty, and so much ill-feeling survived the outbreak that Cammock thought it prudent to remit two-thirds of the sailors to the ship, and keep the remainder as far as possible in the background.

This was not a promising beginning, where the numbers were already so scanty that the Bishop wondered in his heart whether his dupes would dare to pass from words to action. But it was not all. Some one spoke of Asgill, and of another Justice in the neighbourhood, asserting that their hearts were with the rising, and that at a later point their aid might be expected. At once,

"The Evil One's spawn!" cried Sir Donny, rising in his place, and speaking under the influence of great excitement. "If you're for dealing with them, I'm riding! No Protestants! No black brood of Cromwell for me! I'd as soon never wear sword again as wear it in their company!"

"You're not meaning it, Sir Donny!" Uncle Ulick said.

"Faith, but if he's not, I am!" cried old Tim Burke, rising and banging the table with his fist. "'Tis what I'm meaning, and devil a bit of a mistake! Just that!"

Another backed him, with so much violence that the most moderate and sensible looked serious, and it needed the Bishop's interference to calm the storm. "We need not decide one way or the other," he said, "until they come in." Probably he thought that an unlikely contingency. "There are arguments on both sides," he continued blandly. "It is true that half-measures are seldom wise. On the other hand, it was by a Protestant king that France was led back to the true faith. But of this at another time. I think we must be moving, gentlemen. It grows late."

While the gentry talked thus at table, the courtyard and the space between the house and the lake began to present, where the mist allowed them to be seen, the lively and animated appearance which the Irish, ever lovers of a crowd, admire. Food and drink were there served to the barefoot, shock-headed boys drawn up in bodies under their priests, or under the great men's agents; and when these matters had been consumed one band after another moved off in the direction of the rendezvous. This was at the Carraghalin, a name long given to the ruins of an abbey situate in an upland valley above the waterfall, and a long Irish mile from the house. But as each troop moved off towards the head of the lake its place was filled in a measure by late-comers, as well as by companies of women and girls, close-hooded and shawled, who halted before the house to raise shrill cries of welcome, or, as they passed, stirred the air with their wild Erse melodies. The orders for all were to take their seats in an orderly fashion and in a mighty semicircle about a well-known rock situate a hundred yards from the abbey. Tradition reported that in old days this rock had been a pulpit, and that thence the Irish Apostle had preached to the heathen. More certainly it had formed a rostrum and the valley a gathering-place in troubled and more recent times. The turf about it was dry, sweet, and sheep-bitten; on either side it sloped gently to the rock, while a sentry posted on each of the two low hills which flanked the vale was a sufficient surety against surprise.

It was not until the last of the peasants had filed off, and the space before the house had resumed its normal aspect—but for once without its beggars—that the gentry began to make their way in the same direction. The buckeens were the first to go. Uncle Ulick, with the Spanish officer and his men, formed the next party. The O'Beirnes, with Sir Donny and

Timothy Burke and a priest or two of a superior order, were not long behind them. The last to leave—and they left the house with no other guardians than a cook-maid or two—were the Admiral and the Bishop, honourably escorted, as became their rank, by their host and hostess.

Freed from the wrangling and confusion which the presence of the others bred, Flavia regained her serenity as she walked. There was nothing, indeed, in the face of nature, in the mist and the dark day, and the moisture that hung in beads on thorn and furze, to cheer her. But she drew her spirits from a higher source, and, sanguine and self-reliant, foreseeing naught but success, stepped proudly along beside the Bishop, who found, perhaps, in her presence and her courage a make-weight for the gloom of the day.

"You are sure," he said, smiling, "that we shall not lose our way?"

"Ah! and I am sure," she answered, "I could take you blindfold."

"The mist——"

"It stands, my lord, for the mist overhanging this poor land, which our sun shall disperse."

"God grant it!" he said—"God grant it, indeed, my daughter!" But, do what he would, he spoke without fervour.

They passed along the lake-edge, catching now and then the shimmer of water on their right. Thence they ascended the steep path that led up the glen of the waterfall to the level of the platform on which the old tower stood. Leaving this on the right—and only to an informed eye was it visible—they climbed yet a little higher, and entered a deep driftway that, at the summit of the gorge, clove its way between the mound behind the tower and the hill on their left, and so penetrated presently to the valley of the Carraghalin. The mist was thinner here, the nature of the ground was more perceptible, and they had not proceeded fifty yards along the sunken way before Cammock, who was leading, in the company of The McMurrrough, halted.

"A fine place for a stand," he said, looking about him with a soldierly eye. "And better for an ambush. Especially on such a morning as this, when you cannot see a man five paces away."

"I trust," the Bishop answered, smiling, "that we shall have no need to make the one, or to fear the other."

"You could hold this," Flavia asked eagerly, "with such men as we have?"

"Against an army," Cammock answered.

"Against an army!" she murmured, as, her heart beating high with pride, they resumed their way, Flavia and the Bishop in the van. "Against an army!" she repeated fondly.

The words had not fully left her lips when she recoiled. At the same moment the Bishop uttered an exclamation, Cammock swore and seized his hilt, The McMurrrough turned as if to flee. For on the path close to them, facing them with a pistol in his hand, stood Colonel Sullivan.

He levelled the pistol at the head of the nearest man, and though Flavia, with instant presence of mind, struck it up, the act helped little. Before Cammock could clear his blade, or his companions back up his resistance, four or five men, of Colonel John's following, flung themselves on them from behind. They were seized, strong arms pinioned them, knives were at their throats. In a twinkling, and while they still expected death, sacks were dragged over their heads and down to their waists, and they were helpless.

It was well, it was neatly done; and completely done, with a single drawback. The men had not seized Flavia, and, white as paper, but with rage not fear, she screamed shrilly for help—screamed twice.

She would have screamed a third time, but Colonel Sullivan, who knew that they were scarcely two furlongs from the meeting-place, and from some hundreds of merciless foes, did the only thing possible. He flung his arms round her, pressed her face roughly against his shoulder, smothered her cries remorselessly. Then raising her, aided by the man with the musket, he bore her, vainly struggling—and, it must be owned, scratching—after the others out of the driftway.

The thing done, the Colonel's little band of Frenchmen knew that they had cast the die, and must now succeed or perish. The girl's screams, quickly suppressed, might not have given the alarm; but they had set nerves on edge. The prick of a knife was used—and often—to apprise the blinded prisoners that if they did not move they would be piked. They were dragged, a seaman on either side of each captive, over some hundred paces of rough ground, through the stream, and so into a path little better than a sheep-track

which ran round the farther side of the hill of the tower, and descended that way to the more remote bank of the lake. It was a rugged path, steep and slippery, dropping precipitously a couple of feet in places, and more than once following the bed of the stream. But it was traceable even in the mist, and the party from the sloop, once put on it, could follow it.

If no late-comer to the meeting encountered them, Colonel John, to whom every foot of the ground was familiar, saw no reason, apart from the chances of pursuit, why they should not get the prisoners, whom they had so audaciously surprised, as far as the lower end of the lake. There he and his party must fall again into the Skull road and risk the more serious uncertainties of the open way. All, however, depended on time. If Flavia's screams had not given the alarm, it would soon be given by the absence of those whom the people had come to meet. The missing leaders would be sought, pursuit would be organised. Yet, if before that pursuit reached the foot of the lake, the fugitives had passed into the road, the raiders would stand a fair chance. They would at least have a start, the sloop in front of them, and their enemies behind them.

But, with peril on every side of them, Flavia was still the main, the real difficulty. Colonel Sullivan could not hope to carry her far, even with the help of the man who fettered her feet, and bore part of her weight. Twice she freed her mouth and uttered a stifled cry. The Colonel only pressed her face more ruthlessly to him—his men's lives depended on her silence. But the sweat stood on his brow; and, after carrying her no more than three hundred yards, he staggered under the unwilling burden. He was on the path now and descending, and he held out a little farther. But presently, when he hoped that she had swooned, she fell to struggling more desperately. He thought, on this, that he might be smothering her; and he relaxed his hold to allow her to breathe. For reward she struck him madly, furiously in the face, and he had to stifle her again.

But his heart was sick. It was a horrible, a brutal business, a thing he had not foreseen on board the *Cormorant*. He had supposed that she would faint at the first alarm; and his courage, which would have faced almost any event with coolness, quailed. He could not murder the girl, and she would not be silent. No, she would not be silent! Short of setting her down and binding her hand and foot, which would take time, and was horrible to imagine, he could not see what to do. And the man with him, who saw the rest of the party outstripping them, and as good as disappearing in the fog, who fancied, with every step, that he heard the feet of merciless pursuers overtaking them, was frantic with impatience.

Then Colonel John, with the sweat standing on his brow, did a thing to which he afterwards looked back with great astonishment.

"Give me your knife," he said, with a groan, "and hold her hands! We must silence her, and there is only one way!"

The man, terrified as he was, and selfish as terrified men are, recoiled from the deed. "My God!" he said. "No!"

"Yes!" Colonel John retorted fiercely. "The knife!—the knife, man! And do you hold her hands!"

With a jerk he lifted her face from his breast—and this time she neither struck him nor screamed. The man had half-heartedly drawn his knife. The Colonel snatched it from him. "Now her hands!" he said. "Hold her, fool! I know where to strike!"

She opened her mouth to shriek, but no sound came. She had heard, she understood; and for a moment she could neither struggle nor cry. That terror which rage and an almost indomitable spirit had kept at bay seized her; the sight of the gleaming death poised above her paralysed her throat. Her mouth gaped, her eyes glared at the steel; then, with a queer sobbing sound, she fainted.

"Thank God!" the Colonel cried. And there was indeed thankfulness in his voice. He thrust the knife back into the man's hands, and, raising the girl again in his arms, "There is a house a little below," he said. "We can leave her there! Hurry, man!—hurry!"

He had not traversed that road for twenty years, but his memory had not tricked him. Less than fifty paces below they came on a cabin, close to the foot of the waterfall. The door was not fastened—for what, in such a place, was there to steal?—and Colonel John thrust it open with his foot. The interior was dark, the place was almost windowless; but he made out the form of an old crone who, nursing her knees, crouched with a pipe in her mouth beside a handful of peat. Seeing him, the woman tottered to her feet with a cry of alarm, and shaded her bleared eyes from the inrush of daylight. She gabbled shrilly, but she knew only Erse, and Colonel John attempted no explanation.

"The lady of the house," he said, in that tongue. And he laid Flavia, not ungently, but very quickly, on the floor. He turned about without another word, shut the door on the two, and hurried along the path at the full stretch of his legs. In half a minute he had overtaken

his companion, and the two pressed on together on the heels of the main party.

The old beldame, left alone with the girl, viewed her with an astonishment which would have been greater if she had not reached that age at which all sensations become dulled. How the Lady of the House, who was to her both Power and Providence, came to be there, and there in that state, passed her conception. But she had the sense to loosen the girl's frock at the neck, to throw water on her face, and to beat her hands. In a very few minutes Flavia, who had never swooned before—fashionable as the exercise was at this period in feminine society—sighed once or twice, and came to herself.

"Where am I?" she muttered. Still for some moments she continued to look about her in a dazed way; at length she recognised the old woman, and the cottage. Then she remembered, with a moan, what had happened—the ambushade, the flight, the knife.

She could not turn whiter, but she shuddered and closed her eyes. At last, with shrinking, she looked at her dress. "Am I—hurt?" she whispered.

The old woman did not understand, but she patted Flavia's hand. Meanwhile the girl saw that there was no blood on her dress, and she found courage to raise her hand to her throat. She found no wound. At that she smiled faintly. Then she began to cry—for she was a woman.

But, broken as she was by that moment of terror, Flavia's indulgence in the feminine weakness was short, for it was measured by the time she devoted to thoughts of her own fortunes. Quickly, very quickly, she overcame her weakness; she stood up, she understood, and she extended her arms in rage and grief and unavailing passion. That rage which treachery arouses in the generous breast, that passion which an outrage upon hospitality kindles in the meanest, that grief which ruined plans and friends betrayed have bred a thousand times in Irish bosoms—she felt them all, and intensely. She would that the villains had killed her! She would that they had finished her life! Why should she survive, except for vengeance? For not only were her hopes for Ireland fallen; not only were those who had trusted themselves to The McMurrough perishing even now in the hands of ruthless foes; but her brother, her dear, her only brother, whom her prayers, her influence had brought into this path, he too was snared, of his fate also there could be no doubt!

She felt all that was most keen, most poignant, of grief, of anger, of indignation. But the sharpest pang of all—had she analysed her feelings—was inflicted by the consciousness of failure, and of failure verging on the ignominious. The mature take good and evil fortune as they come; but to fail at first setting out in life, to be outwitted in the opening venture, to have to acknowledge that experience is, after all, a formidable foe—these are mishaps which sour the magnanimous and poison young blood.

She had not known before what it was to hate. Now she only lived to hate: to hate the man who had shown himself so much cleverer than her friends, who, in a twinkling, and by a single blow, had wrecked her plans, duped her allies, betrayed her brother, made her name a laughing-stock, robbed Ireland of a last chance of freedom! who had held her in his arms, terrified her, mastered her! Oh, why had she swooned? Why had she not rather, disregarding her womanish weakness, her womanish fears, snatched the knife from him and plunged it into his treacherous breast? Why? Why?

CHAPTER XIV

THE COLONEL'S TERMS

Passive courage—courage in circumstances in which a man cannot help himself, but must abide with bound hands whatever a frowning fortune and his enemy's spite threaten—is so much higher a virtue than that which carries him through hot emprises, and is so much more common among women, that the palm for bravery may fairly be given to the weaker sex. True, it is not in the first face of danger that a woman shines; time must be given her to string her nerves. But grant time and there is no calamity so dreadful, no fate so abhorrent to trembling humanity, that a woman has not met it smiling: in the sack of cities, or in the slow agony of towns perishing of hunger, in the dungeon, or in the grip of disease.

The bravest men share this gift, and some whom the shock of conflict appals. Cammock and the Bishop belonged to the former class. Seized in a moment of activity, certain only

that they were in hostile hands, and hurried, blind and helpless, to an unknown doom, they might have been pardoned had they succumbed to despair. But they did not succumb. The habit of danger, and a hundred adventures and escapes, had hardened them; they felt more rage than fear. Stunned for a moment by the audacity of the attack, and humiliated by its success, they had not been dragged a hundred yards before they began to reason and to calculate the chances. If the purpose of those into whose hands they had fallen were to murder them they would have been piked on the spot. On the other hand, if their captors' object was to deliver them to English justice, it was a long way to the Four Courts, and farther to Westminster. Weeks, if not months, must elapse before they stood at the bar on a capital charge; much water must flow under the bridges, and many a thing might happen, by force or fraud, in the interval.

So, half-stifled and bitterly chagrined as they were, they did not waste their strength in a vain resistance. They allowed themselves to be pushed this way and pulled that, took what care they could of their limbs, and for their thoughts gave as many to vengeance as to safety. They had known many reverses in many lands. They did not believe that this was the end. And presently it would be their turn.

With the third of the prisoners it was otherwise. The courage of the Irish is more conspicuous in the advance than in the retreat; and even of that recklessness in fight, that joy in the conflict, which is their birthright and their fame, Flavia had taken more than her woman's share. In James McMurrrough's mean and narrow nature there was small room for the generous passions. Unlike his sister, he would have struck the face of no man in whose power he lay; nor was he one to keep a stout heart when his hands were bound. Conscience does not always make cowards. But he knew into whose hands he had fallen, he knew the fate to which he had himself consigned Colonel John—or would have consigned him but for self-interest—and his heart was water, his knees were aspens, his hair rose, as, helpless, he pictured in livid hues the fate that now awaited himself.

As he had meant to do to the other, it would be done to him! He felt the cruel pike rend the gasping throat; he had heard that it was the most painful death that a man could die, and that the shrieks of men dying on the pike-point could be heard a mile! Or would they throw him, bound and blind as he was, into the sullen lake—yes, that was it! They were carrying him that way, they were taking him to the lake.

And once and twice, in the insanity of fear, he fought with his bonds until the blood came, even throwing himself down, until the men, out of patience, pricked him savagely, and drove him, venting choked cries of pain, to his feet again. After the second attempt, if attempt that could be called which had no reasoning behind it, but only sheer animal fear, he staggered on, beaten, hopeless. He was aware that Colonel John was not with them; and then, again, that he was with them; and then—they were on the wide track now between the end of the lake and the sea—that they were proceeding with increased caution. That might have given a braver man hope, the hope of rescue. But rescue had itself terrors for The McMurrrough. His captors, if pressed, might hasten the end, or his friends might strike him in the *mêlée*. And so, with every furlong of the forced journey, he died a fresh death.

And the furlongs seemed interminable, quickly and roughly as he was hurried along. In his terror the pains of his position, the heat, the friction of the rough sacking, the want of air, went for little. But at last he heard the fall of the waves on the shore, gorse pricked his legs or tripped him up, the men about him spoke louder, he caught a distant hail. Laughter, and exclamations of triumph reached him, and the voices of men who had won in spite of odds.

Then a boat grated on the pebbles, he was lifted into it, and thrust down in the bottom. He felt it float off, and heard the measured sound of the oars in the thole-pins. A few moments elapsed, the sound of the oars ceased, the boat bumped something. He was raised to his feet, his hands were unbound, he was set on a rope-ladder, and bidden to climb. Obeying with shaking knees, he was led across what he guessed to be a deck, and down steep stairs. Then his head was freed from the sack, and, sweating, dishevelled, pale with exhaustion and fear, he looked about him.

The fog was still thick outside, turning day into twilight, and the cabin lamp had been lit and swung above the narrow table, filling the lowbrowed, Dutch-like interior with a strong but shifting light. Behind the table Colonel John and the skipper leant against a bulkhead; before them, on the nearer side of the table, were ranged the three captives. Behind these, again, the dark, grinning faces of the sailors, with their tarred pigtails and flashing eyes, filled the doorway; and, beyond doubt, viewed under the uncertain light of the lamp, they showed a wild and savage crew. As James McMurrrough looked, his hopes, which had risen during the last few minutes, sank. Escape, or chance of escape, there was none. He was helpless, and what those into whose hands he had fallen determined, he must suffer. For a moment his heart stood still, his mouth gaped, he swayed on his feet. Then he clutched the table and steadied himself.

"I am—giddy," he muttered.

"I am sorry that you have been put to so much inconvenience," Colonel John answered civilly.

The words, the tone, might have reassured him, if he had not suspected a devilish irony. Even when Colonel John proceeded to direct one of the men to open a porthole and admit more air, he derived no comfort from the attention. But steady! Colonel John was speaking again.

"You, too, gentlemen," he said, addressing Cammock and the Bishop, "I am sorry that I have been forced to put you to so much discomfort. But I saw no other way of effecting my purpose. And," he went on with a smile, "if you ask my warranty for acting as I have acted —"

"I do!" the Bishop said between his teeth. The Admiral said nothing, but breathed hard.

"Then I can only vouch," the Colonel answered, "the authority by virtue of which you seized me yesterday. I give you credit, reverend father, and you, Admiral, for a belief that in acting as you did you were doing your duty; that in creating a rising here you were serving a cause which you think worthy of sacrifice—the sacrifice of others as well as of yourselves. But I tell, you, as frankly, I feel it my duty to thwart that purpose and prevent that rising; and for the moment fortune is with me. The game, gentlemen, is for the present in my hand; the move is mine. Now I need hardly say," Colonel John continued, with an appearance almost of *bonhomie*, "that I do not wish to proceed to extremities, or to go farther than is necessary to secure my purpose. We might set sail for the nearest garrison port, and I might hand you over to the English authorities, assured that they would pay such a reward as would compensate the shipmaster. But far be it from me to do that! I would have no man's blood on my hands. And though I say at once I would not shrink, were there no other way of saving innocent lives, from sending you to the scaffold —"

"A thousand thanks to you!" the Bishop said. But, brave man as he was, the irony in his voice masked relief; and not then, but a moment later, he passed his handkerchief across his brow. Cammock said nothing, but the angry, bloodshot eyes which he fixed on the Colonel lost a little of their ferocity.

"I say, I would not shrink from doing that," Colonel John continued mildly, "were it necessary. Fortunately for us all, it is not necessary. Still I must provide against your immediate return, against immediate action on your part. I must see that the movement which will die in your absence is not revived by any word from you, or by tidings of you! To that end, gentlemen, I must put you to the inconvenience of a prolonged sea-voyage."

"If I could speak with you in private?" the Bishop said.

"You will have every opportunity," Colonel John answered, smiling, "of speaking to Captain Augustin in private."

"Still, sir, if I could see you alone I think I could convince you——"

"You shall have every opportunity of convincing Captain Augustin," Colonel John returned, smiling more broadly, "and of convincing him by the same means which I venture to think, reverend sir, you would employ with me. To be plain, he will take you to sea for a certain period, and at the end of that time, if your arguments are sufficiently weighty, he will land you at a convenient harbour on the French shore. He will be at the loss of his cargo, and that loss I fear you will have to make good. Something, too, he may charge by way of interest, and for your passage." By this time the sailors were on the broad grin. "A trifle, perhaps, for landing dues. But I have spoken with him to be moderate, and I doubt not that within a few weeks you, Admiral Cammock, will be with your command, and the reverend father will be pursuing his calling in another place."

For a moment there was silence, save for a titter from the group of seamen. Then Cammock laughed—a curt, barking laugh. "A bite!" he said. "A d——d bite! If I can ever repay it, sir, I will! Be sure of that!"

Colonel John bowed courteously.

The Bishop took it otherwise. The veins on his forehead swelled, and he had much ado to control himself. The truth was, he feared ridicule more than he feared danger, perhaps more than he feared death; and such an end to such an enterprise was hard to bear. To have set forth to raise the south of Ireland, to have undertaken a diversion that would never be forgotten, that, on the contrary, would be marked by historians as a main factor in the restoration of the house of Stuart—to have embarked on such an enterprise and to be deported like any troublesome villager delivered to the pressgang for his hamlet's good! To end thus! It was too much.

"Is there no alternative?" he asked, barely able to speak for the chagrin that took him by the throat.

"One, if you prefer it," Colonel Sullivan answered suavely. "You can take your chance with the English authorities. For myself, I lean to the course I have suggested."

"If money were paid down—now? Now, sir?"

"It would not avail."

"Much money?"

"No."

The Bishop glared at him for a few seconds. Then his face relaxed, his eyes grew mild, his chin sank on his breast. His fingers drummed on the table. "His will be done!" he said—"His will be done! I was not worthy."

His surrender seemed to sting Cammock. Perhaps in the course of their joint adventures he had come to know and to respect his companion, and felt more for him than for himself.

"If I had you on my quarter-deck for only half an hour," he growled, "I would learn who was the better man! Ah, my man, I would!"

"The doubt flatters me," Colonel John answered, viewing them both with great respect; for he saw that, bad or good, they were men. Then, "That being settled," he continued, "I shall ask you, gentlemen, to go on deck for a few moments, that I may say a word to my kinsman."

"He is not to go with us?"

"That remains to be seen," Colonel John replied, a note of sternness in his voice. Still they hesitated, and he stood; but at last, in obedience to his courteous gesture, they bowed, turned—with a deep sigh on the Bishop's part—and clambered up the companion. The seamen had already vanished at a word from Augustin, who himself proceeded to follow his prisoners on deck.

"Sit down!" Colonel Sullivan said, the same sternness in his voice. And he sat down on his side of the table, while James McMurrough, with a sullen look but a beating heart, took his seat on the other. The fear of immediate death had left the young man; he tried to put on an air of bravado, but with so little success that if his sister had seen him thus she had been blind indeed if she had not discerned, between these two men seated opposite to one another, the difference that exists between the great and the small, the strong and the infirm of purpose.

It was significant of that difference that the one was silent at will, while the other spoke because he had not the force to be silent.

"What are you wanting with me?" the young man asked.

"Is it not you," Colonel John answered, with a piercing look, "will be wanting to know where O'Sullivan Og is—O'Sullivan Og, whom you sent to do your bidding this morning?"

The young man turned a shade paler, and his bravado fell from him. His breath seemed to stop. Then, "Where?" he whispered—"where is he?"

"Where, I pray, Heaven," Colonel John answered, with the same solemnity, "may have mercy upon him."

"He is not dead?" The McMurrough cried, his voice rising on the last word.

"I have little doubt he is," the Colonel replied. "Dead, sir! And the men who were with him—dead also, or the most part of them. Dead, James McMurrough, on the errand they went for you."

The shock of the news struck the young man dumb, and for some moments he stared at the Colonel, his face colourless. At length, "All dead?" he whispered. "Not all?"

"For what I know," Colonel John replied. "Heaven forgive them!" And, in half a dozen sentences, he told him what had happened. Then, "They are the first fruits," he continued sternly, "God grant that they be the last fruits of this reckless plot! Not that I blame them, who did but as they were bid. Nor do I blame any man, nor any woman who embarked on this—reckless as it was, foolish as it was—with a single heart, either in ignorance of the things that I know, or knowing them, for the sake of an end which they set above their own lives. But—but"—and Colonel John's voice grew more grave—"there was one who had neither of these two excuses. There was one who was willing to do murder, not in blind obedience, nor for a great cause, but to serve his own private interest and his own

advantage!"

"No! no!" the young man cried, cowering before him. "It is not true!"

"One who was ready to do murder," Colonel John continued pitilessly, "because it suited him to remove a man!"

"No! no!" the wretched youth cried, almost grovelling before him. "It was all of them!—it was all!"

"It was not all!" Colonel John retorted; but there was a keenness in his face which showed that he had still something to learn.

"It was—those two on deck!" The McMurrough cried eagerly. "I swear it was! They said—it was necessary."

"They were one with you in condemning! Be it so! I believe you! But who spared?"

"I!" The McMurrough cried, breathlessly eager to exculpate himself. "It was I alone. I! I swear it. I sent the boy!"

"You spared? Yes, and you alone!" the Colonel made answer. "So I thought, and out of your own mouth you are condemned. You spared because you learned that I had made a will, and you feared lest that which had passed to me in trust might pass to a stranger for good and all! You spared because it was—because you thought it was to your interest, your advantage to spare! I say, out of your own mouth you are condemned."

James McMurrough had scarcely force to follow the pitiless reasoning by which the elder man convicted him. But his conscience, his knowledge of his own motives, filled the hiatus, and what his tongue did not own his colourless face, his terrified eyes, confessed.

"You have fallen into our hands," Colonel John continued, grave as fate. "Why should we not deal with you as you would have dealt with us? No!"—the young man by a gesture had appealed to those on deck, to their escape, to their impunity—"no! They may have consented to my death; but as the judge condemns, or the soldier kills; you—you, for your private profit and advantage. Nevertheless, I shall not deal so with you. You can go as they are going—abroad, to return at a convenient season, and I hope a wiser man. Or——"

"Or—what?" the young man cried hurriedly.

"Or you can stay here," Colonel John continued, "and we will treat the past as if it had not been. But on a condition."

James's colour came back. "What'll you be wanting?" he muttered, averting his gaze.

"You must swear that you will not pursue this foolish plan further. That first."

"What can I be doing without *them*?" was the sullen answer.

"Very true," Colonel John rejoined. "But you must swear also, my friend, that you will not attempt anything against me, nor be party to anything."

"What'd I be doing?"

"Don't lie!" the Colonel replied, losing his temper for a single instant. "You know what you have done, and therefore what you'd be likely to do. I've no time to bandy words, and you know how you stand. Swear on your hope of salvation to those two things, and you may stay. Refuse, and I make myself safe by your absence. That is all I have to say."

The young man had the sense to know that he was escaping lightly. The times were rough, the district was lawless, he had embarked—how foolishly he saw—on an enterprise too high for him. He was willing enough to swear that he would not pursue that enterprise further. But the second undertaking stuck in his gizzard. He hated Colonel John. For the past wrong, for the past defeat, above all for the present humiliation, ay, and for the very magnanimity which spared him, he, the weak spirit, hated the strong with a furious, if timid malignity.

"I'm having no choice," he said, shrugging his shoulders.

"Very good," Colonel John answered curtly. And, going to the door, he called Bale from his station by the hatchway, and despatched him to the Bishop and to Admiral Cammock, requesting them to do him the honour to descend.

They came readily enough, in the hope of some favourable turn. But the Colonel's words quickly set them right.

"Gentlemen," he said politely, "I know you to be men of honour in private life. For this reason I have asked you to be present as witnesses to the bargain between my cousin and

myself. Blood is thicker than water: he has no mind to go abroad, and I have no mind to send him against his will. But his presence, after what has passed, is a standing peril to myself. To meet this difficulty, and to free me from the necessity of banishing him, he is ready to swear by all he holds sacred, and upon his honour, that he will attempt nothing against me, nor be a party to it. Is that so, sir?" the speaker continued. "Do you willingly, in the presence of these gentlemen, give that undertaking?"

The young man, with averted eyes and a downcast face, nodded.

"I am afraid I must trouble you to speak," Colonel John said.

"I do," he muttered, looking at no one.

"Further, that you will not within six months attempt anything against the Government?" Colonel John continued.

"I will not."

"Very good. I accept that undertaking, and I thank these gentlemen for their courtesy in condescending to act as witnesses. Admiral Cammock and you, reverend father," Colonel John continued, "it remains but to bid you farewell, and to ask you to believe"—the Colonel paused—"that I have not pushed further than was necessary the advantage I gained."

"By a neat stroke, Colonel Sullivan," the Bishop replied, with a rather sour smile, "not to say a bold one. I'm not denying it. But one, I'd have you notice, that cannot be repeated."

"Maybe not," the Colonel answered. "I am content to think that for some time to come I have transferred your operations, gentlemen, to a sphere where I am not concerned for the lives of the people."

"There are things more precious than lives," the Bishop said.

"I admit it. More by token I'm blaming you little—only you see, sir, I differ. That is all."

With that Colonel Sullivan bowed and left the cabin, and The McMurrough, who had listened to the colloquy with the air of a whipped hound, slunk after him. On deck the Colonel and Augustin talked apart for a moment, then the former signed to the young man to go down into the boat, which lay alongside with a couple of men at the oars, and Bale seated in the sternsheets. The fog still hung upon the water, and the land was hidden. The young man could not see where they lay.

After the lapse of a minute or two Colonel John joined him, and the rowers pushed off, while Augustin and the crew leant over the rail to see them go, and to send after them a torrent of voluble good wishes. A very few, strokes of the oars brought the passengers within misty view of the land; in less than two minutes after leaving the *Cormorant* the boat grated on the rocks, and the Colonel, James McMurrough, and Bale landed. The young man made out that they were some half-mile eastward of Skull Harbour.

Bale stayed to exchange a few words with the seamen, while Colonel John and The McMurrough set off along the beach. They had not walked fifty yards before the fog isolated them; they were alone. And astonishment filled the young man, and grew as they walked. Did Colonel John, after all that had happened, mean to return to Morristown? to establish himself calmly—he, alone—in the midst of the conspirators whose leaders he had removed?

It seemed incredible! For though he, James McMurrough, thirst for revenge as he might, was muzzled by his oath, what of the others? What of Sir Donny and old Timothy Burke? What of the two O'Beirnes? Nay, what of his sister, whom he could fancy more incensed, more vindictive, more dangerous than them all? What, finally, of the barbarous rout of peasants, ready to commit any violence at a word from him?

And still the Colonel walked on by his side. And now they were in sight of Skull—of the old tower and the house by the jetty, looming large through the dripping mist. And at last Colonel John spoke.

"It was fortunate that I made my will as I came through Paris," he said.

CHAPTER XV

FEMINA FURENS

The Irish of that day, with all their wit and all their courage, had the bad habit of looking abroad for leaders. Colonel John had run little risk of being wrong in taking for granted that the meeting at the Carraghalin, mysteriously robbed of the chiefs from over-seas, whose presence had brought the movement to a head, would disperse; either amid the peals of Homeric laughter that in Ireland greet a monster jest, or, in sadder mood, cursing the detested Saxon for one more added to the many wrongs of a downtrodden land.

Had Flavia indeed escaped, had the raid which Colonel Sullivan had so audaciously conceived failed to embrace her, the issue might have been different. Had she appeared upon the scene at the critical moment, her courage and enthusiasm might have supported the spirits of the assemblage and kept it together. But Uncle Ulick had not the force to do this: much less had old Timothy Burke or Sir Donny. Uncle Ulick, we know, expected little good from the rising; he was prepared for any, the worst mishap; while the faith of the older men in any change for the better was not robust enough to stand alone or to resist the first blast of doubt.

Their views indeed were more singular than cheerful.

"Very like," Sir Donny said, with a fallen under-lip, "the ould earth's opened her mouth and swallowed them. She's tired, small blame to her, with all the heretics burdening her and tormenting her—the cream of hell's fire to them!"

"Whisht, man!" the other answered. "Be easy; you're forgetting one's a bishop. Small chance of the devil's tackling him, and, like enough the holy water and all ready to his hand!"

"Then I'm not knowing what it is," the first pronounced hopelessly.

"There you speak truth, Sir Donny," Tim Burke answered. "Is it they can be losing their way in the least taste of fog there is, do you think?"

"And the young lady knowing the path, so that she'd be walking it blindfold in the dark!"

"I'm fearing, then, it will be the garr'son from Tralee," was Uncle Ulick's contribution. And he shook his head. "The saints be between us and them, and grant we'll not be seeing more of them than we like, and sooner!"

"Amen to that same!" replied old Timothy Burke, with an uneasy look behind him.

There was nothing comforting in this. And the messengers sent to learn what was amiss and why the expected party did not arrive had as little cheer to give. They could learn nothing. On which Uncle Ulick and his fellows rubbed their heads: the small men wondered. A few panic-stricken, began to slip away, but the mass were faithful. An hour went by in this trying uncertainty, and a second and part of a third; and messengers departed and came, and there were rumours and alarms, and presently something like the truth got abroad; and there was talk of pursuit, and a band of young stalwarts was detailed and sent off. Still the greater part of the assemblage, with Irish patience, remained seated in ranks on the slopes of the hills, the women with their druggat shawls drawn over their heads, the men with their frieze coats hanging loose about them. The chill mist which clung to the hillsides, and the atmosphere of doubt which overhung all, were a poor exchange for the roaring bonfires, the good cheer, the enthusiasm, the merriment of the previous evening. But the Irish peasant, if he be less staunch at the waiting—even as he is more forward in the hand-to-hand than his Scottish cousins—has the peasant's gift of endurance; and in the most trying hours—in ignorance, in doubt, in danger—has often held his ground in dependence on his betters, with a result pitiful in the reading. For too often the great have abandoned the little, the horse has borne off the rider, and the naked footman, surprised, surrounded, out-matched, and put to the sword, has paid for all.

But on this day a time came, about high noon, when the assemblage—and the fog—began at last to melt. Sir Donny was gone, and old Tim Burke of Maamtrasna. They had slipped homewards, by little-known tracks across the peat hags; and, shamefaced and fearful of the consequences, the spirit all gone out of them, had turned their minds to oaths and alibis. They had been in trouble before, and were taken to know; and their departure sapped the O'Beirnes' resolution, whose uneasy faces as they talked together spread the contagion. Uncle Ulick and several of the buckeens were away on the search; the handful of Spanish seamen had returned to the house or to the ship: there was no one to check the defection when it set in. An hour after Sir Donny had slipped away, the movement which might have meant so much to so many was spent. The slopes about the ruined gables which they called Carraghalin, and which were all that remained of the once proud abbey, had returned to their wonted solitude; where hundreds had sat a short hour before the eagle hovered, the fox turned his head and scented the wind. Even the house at Morristown had so far become itself again that a scarcity, rather than a plenitude of life, betrayed the past night of orgy; and a quietness beyond the ordinary, the things that had

been dreamed. The garrison of Tralee, the Protestant Settlement at Kenmare, facts which had been held distant and negligible in the first flush of hope and action, now seemed to the fearful fancy many an Irish mile nearer and many a shade more real.

Doubtless, in the minds of some, a secret thankfulness that, after all, they were not required to take the leap, relieved the disappointment and lessened the shame. They were well out of an ugly scrape, they reflected; well clear of the ugly shadow of the gallows—always supposing that no informer appeared. It might even be the hand of Providence, they thought, that had removed their leaders, and so held them back. They might think themselves happy to be quit of it for the fright.

But there was one—one who found no such consolation; one to whom the issue was pure loss, a shameful defeat, the end of hopes, the defeat of prayers that had never risen to heaven more purely than that morning.

Flavia sat with her eyes on the dead peat that cumbered the hearth—for in the general excitement the fire had been suffered to go out—and in a stupor of misery refused to be comforted. Of her plans, of her devotion, of her lofty resolves, this was the result. She had aspired, God knew how honestly and earnestly, for her race downtrodden and her faith despised, and this was the bitter fruit. Nor was it only the girl's devotion to her country and to her faith that lay sore wounded: her vanity suffered, and perhaps more keenly. The enterprise that was to have glorified the name of McMurrough, that was to have raised that fallen race, that was to have made that distant province blessed among the provinces of Ireland, had come to an end, derisive and contemptible, before it was born. Her spirit, unbroken by experience and untrained to defeat, fearing before all things ridicule, dashed itself against the dreadful conviction, the dreadful fact. She could hardly believe that all was over. She could hardly realise that the cup was no longer at her lip, that the bird had escaped from the hand. But she looked from the window; and, lo, the courtyard which had hummed and seethed was dead and silent. In one corner a knot of men were carrying out the arms and the powder, and were preparing to bury them. In another, a woman—it was Sullivan Og's widow—sat weeping. It was the *Hic jacet* of the great Rising that was to have been, and that was to have regenerated Ireland!

And "You must kill him!" she cried, with livid cheeks and blazing eyes. "If you do not, I will!"

Uncle Ulick, who had heard the story of the ambush, and beyond doubt was one of those who felt more relief than disappointment, stretched his legs uneasily. He longed to comfort her, but he did not know what to say. Moreover, he was afraid of her in this mood.

"You must kill him!" she repeated.

"We'll talk of that," he said, "when we see him."

"You must kill him!" the girl repeated passionately. "Or I will! If you are a man, if you are an Irishman, if you are a Sullivan, kill him, the shame of your race! Or I will!"

"If he had been on our side," Uncle Ulick answered soberly, "instead of against us, I'm thinking we should have done better."

The girl drew in her breath sharply, pierced to the quick by the thought. Simultaneously the big man started, but for another reason. His eyes were on the window, and they saw a sight which his mind declined to believe. Two men had entered the courtyard—had entered with astonishing, with petrifying nonchalance, as it seemed to him. For the first was Colonel Sullivan. The second—but the second slunk at the heels of the first with a hang-dog air—was James McMurrough.

Fortunately Flavia, whose eyes were glooming on the cold hearth and the extinct ashes, fit image of her dead hopes, had her back to the casement. Uncle Ulick rose. His thoughts came with a shock against the possibility that Colonel John had the garrison of Tralee at his back! But, although The McMurrough had all the appearance of a prisoner, Ulick thrust away the notion as soon as it occurred. To clear his mind, he looked to see how the men engaged in getting out the powder were taking it. They had ceased to work, and were staring with all their eyes. Something in their bearing and their attitudes told Uncle Ulick that the notion which had occurred to him had occurred to them, and that they were prepared to run at the least alarm.

"His blood be on his own head!" he muttered. But he did not say it in the tone of a man who meant it.

"Amen!" she cried, her back still turned to the window, her eyes brooding on the cold hearth. The words fell in with her thoughts.

By this time Colonel Sullivan was within four paces of the door. In a handturn he would be

in the room, he would be actually in the girl's presence—and Uncle Ulick shrank from the scene which must follow. Colonel John was, indeed, and plainly, running on his fate. Already the O'Beirnes, awakening from their trance of astonishment, were closing in behind him with grim faces; and short of the garrison of Tralee the big man saw no help for him; well-nigh—so strongly did even he feel on the matter—he desired none. But Flavia must have no part in it. In God's name, let the girl be clear of it!

The big man took two steps to the door, opened it, slipped through, and closed it behind him. His breast as good as touched that of Colonel Sullivan, who was on the threshold. Behind the Colonel was James McMurrough; behind James were the two O'Beirnes and two others, of whose object, as they cut off the Colonel's retreat, no man who saw their faces could doubt.

For once, in view of the worse things that might happen in the house, Ulick was firm. "You can't come in!" he said, his face pale and frowning. He had no word of greeting for the Colonel. "You can't come in!" he repeated, staring straight at him.

The Colonel turned and saw the four men with arms in their hands spreading out behind him. He understood. "You had better let me in," he said gently. "James will talk to them."

"James——"

"You had better speak to them," Colonel John continued, addressing his companion. "And you, Ulick——"

"You can't come in," Ulick repeated grimly.

James McMurrough interposed in his harshest tone. "An end to this!" he cried. "Who the devil are you to bar the door, Ulick! And you, Phelim and Morty, be easy a minute till you hear me speak."

Ulick still barred the way. "James," he said, in a voice little above a whisper, "you don't know——"

"I know enough!" The McMurrough answered violently. It went sadly against the grain with him to shield his enemy, but so it must be. "Curse you, let him in!" he continued fiercely; they were making his task more hard for him. "And have a care of him," he added anxiously. "Do you hear? Have a care of him!"

Uncle Ulick made a last feeble attempt. "But Flavia," he said. "Flavia is there and——"

"Curse the girl!" James answered. "Get out of the road and let the man in! Is this my house or yours?"

Ulick yielded, as he had yielded so often before. He stood aside. Colonel John opened the door and entered.

The rest happened so quickly that no movement on his part could have saved him. Flavia had heard their voices in altercation—it might be a half minute, it might be a few seconds before. She had risen to her feet, she had recognised the voice of one of the speakers—he had spoken once only, but that was enough—she had snatched up the naked sword that since the previous morning had leant in the chimney corner. As Colonel John crossed the threshold—oh, dastardly audacity, oh, insolence incredible, that in the hour of his triumph he should soil that threshold!—she lunged with all the force of her strong young arm at his heart.

With such violence that the hilt struck his breast and hurled him bodily against the doorpost; while the blade broke off, shivered by contact with the hard wood.

Uncle Ulick uttered a cry of horror. "My G——d!" he exclaimed, "you have killed him!"

"His blood——"

She stopped on the word. For instead of falling Colonel John was regaining his balance. "Flavia!" he cried—the blade had passed through his coat, missing his breast by a bare half-inch. "Flavia, hold! Listen! Listen a moment!"

But in a frenzy of rage, as soon as she saw that her blow had failed, she struck at him with the hilt and the ragged blade that remained—struck at his face, struck at his breast, with cries of fury almost animal. "Wretch! wretch!" she cried—"die! If they are cowards, I am not! Die!"

The scene was atrocious, and Uncle Ulick, staring open-mouthed, gave no help. But Colonel Sullivan mastered her wrists, though not until he had sustained a long bleeding cut on the jaw. Even then, though fettered, and though he had forced her to drop the weapon, she struggled desperately with him—as she had struggled when he carried her through the mist. "Kill him! kill him!" she shrieked. "Help! help!"

The men would have killed him twice and thrice if The McMurrrough, with voice and blade and frantic imprecations and the interposition of his own body, had not kept the O'Beirnes and the others at bay—explaining, deprecating, praying, cursing, all in a breath. Twice a blow was struck at the Colonel through the doorway, but one fell short and the other James McMurrrough parried. For a moment the peril was of the greatest: the girl's cries, the sight of her struggling in Colonel John's grip, wrought the men almost beyond James's holding. Then the strength went out of her suddenly, she ceased to fight, and but for Colonel Sullivan's grasp she would have fallen her length on the floor. He knew that she was harmless then, and he thrust her into the nearest chair. He kicked the broken sword under the table, staunched the blood that trickled fast from his cheek; last of all, he looked at the men who were contending with James in the doorway.

"Gentlemen," he said, breathing a little quickly, but in no other way betraying the strait through which he had passed, "I shall not run away. I shall be here to answer you to-morrow, as fully as to-day. In the meantime I beg to suggest"—again he raised the handkerchief to his cheek and staunched the blood—"that you retire now, and hear what The McMurrrough has to say to you: the more as the cases and the arms I see in the courtyard lie obnoxious to discovery and expose all to risk while they remain so."

His surprising coolness did more to check them than The McMurrrough's efforts. They gaped at him in wonder. Then one uttered an imprecation.

"The McMurrrough will explain if you will go with him," Colonel John answered patiently, "I say again, gentlemen, I shall not run away."

"If you mean her any harm——"

"I mean her no harm."

"Are you alone?"

"I am alone."

So far Morty. But Phelim O'Beirne was not quite satisfied. "If a hair of her head be hurt ——" he growled, pushing himself forward, "I tell you, sir——"

"And I tell you!" James McMurrrough retorted, repelling him. "What are the hairs of her head to you, Phelim O'Beirne? Am I not him that's her brother? A truce to your prating, curse you, and be coming with me. I understand him, and that is enough!"

"But His Reverence——"

"His Reverence is as safe as you or me!" James retorted. "If it were not so, are you thinking I'd be here? Fie on you!" he went on, pushing Phelim through the door; "you are good at the talking now, when it's little good it will be doing! But where were you this morning when a good blow might have saved all?"

"Could I be helping it, when——?"

The voices passed away, still wrangling, across the courtyard. Uncle Ulick stepped to the door and closed it. Then he turned and spoke his mind.

"You were wrong to come back, John Sullivan," he said, the hardness of his tone bearing witness to his horror of what had happened. "Shame on you! It is no thanks to you that your blood is not on the girl's hands, and the floor of your grandfather's house! You're a bold man, I allow. But the fox made too free with the window at last, and, take my word for it, there are a score of men, whose hands are surer than this child's, who will not rest till they have had your life! And after what has happened, can you wonder? Be bid and go then; be bid, and go while the breath is firm in you!"

Colonel John did not speak for a moment, and when he did answer, it was with a severity that overbore Ulick's anger, and in a tone of contempt that was something new to the big man. "If the breath be firm in those whom you, Ulick Sullivan," he said—"ay, you, Ulick Sullivan—and your fellows would have duped, it is enough for me! For myself, whom should I fear? The plotters whose childish plans were not proof against the simplest stratagem? The conspirators"—his tone grew more cutting in its scorn—"who took it in hand to pull down a throne and were routed by a Sergeant's Guard? The poor puppets who played at a game too high for them, and, dreaming they were Sarsfields or Montroses, danced in truth to others' piping? Shall I fear them," he continued, the tail of his eye on the girl, who, sitting low in her chair, writhed involuntarily under his words—"poor tools, poor creatures, only a little less ignorant, only a little more guilty than the clods they would have led to the crows or the hangman? Is it these I am to fear; these I am to flee from? God forbid, Ulick Sullivan! I am not the man to flee from shadows!"

His tone, his manner, the truth of his words—which were intended to open the girl's eyes, but did in fact increase her burning resentment—hurt even Uncle Ulick's pride. "Whisht,

man," he said bitterly. "It's plain you're thinking you're master here!"

"I am," Colonel John replied sternly. "I am, and I intend to be. Nor a day too soon! Where all are children, there is need of a master! Don't look at me like that, man! And for my cousin, let her hear the truth for once! Let her know what men who have seen the world think of the visions, from which she would have awakened in a dungeon, and the poor fools, her fellow-dupes, under the gibbet! A great rising for a great cause, if it be real, man, if it be earnest, if it be based on forethought and some calculation of the chances, God knows I hold it a fine thing, and a high thing! But the rising of a child with a bladder against an armed man, a rising that can ruin but cannot help, I know not whether to call it more silly or more wicked! Man, the devil does his choicest work through fools, not rogues! And, for certain, he never found a choicer morsel or fitter instruments than at Morristown yesterday."

Uncle Ulick swore impatiently. "We may be fools," he growled. "Yet spare the girl! Spare the girl!"

"What? Spare her the truth?"

"All! Everything!" Uncle Ulick cried, with unusual heat. "Cannot you see that she at least meant well!"

"Such do the most ill," Colonel John retorted, with sententious severity. "God forgive them—and her!" He paused for a moment and then, in a lighter tone, he continued, "As I do. As I do gladly. Only there must be an end of this foolishness. The two men who knew in what they worked and had reason in their wrong-doing are beyond seas. We shall see their faces no more. The McMurrugh is not so mad as to wish to act without them. He"—with a faint smile—"is not implacable. You, Ulick, are not of the stuff of whom martyrs are made, nor are Mr. Burke and Sir Donny. But the two young men outside"—he paused as if he reflected—"they and three or four others are—what my cousin now listening to me makes them. They are tow, if the flame be brought near them. And therefore—and therefore," he repeated still more slowly, "I have spoken the truth and plainly. To this purpose, that there may be an end."

Flavia had sat at first with closed eyes, in a state next door to collapse, her head inclined, her arms drooping, as if at any moment she might sink to the floor. But in the course of his speaking a change had come over her. The last heavings of the storm, physical and mental, through which she had passed, still shook her; now a quiver distorted her features, now a violent shudder agitated her from head to foot. But the indomitable youth in her, and the spirit which she had inherited from some dead forefather, were not to be long gainsaid. Slowly, as she listened—and mainly under the influence of indignation—her colour had returned, her face grown more firm, her form more stiff. In truth Colonel John had adopted the wrong course with her. He had been hard—knowing men better than women—when he should have been mild; he had browbeaten where he should have forgiven. And so at his last declaration, "There must be an end," she rose to her feet, and spoke. And speaking, she showed that neither the failure of her attempt on him, nor the bodily struggle with him, horribly as it humiliated her in the remembrance, had quelled her courage.

"An end!" she said, in a voice vibrating with emotion. "Yes, but it will be an end for you! Children, are we? Well, better that, a thousand times better that, than be so old before our time, so cold of heart and cunning of head that there is naught real for us but that we touch and see, nothing high for us but that our words will be measuring, nothing worth risk but that we are safe to gain! Children, are we?" she continued, with deep passion. "But at least we believe! At least we own something higher than ourselves—a God, a Cause, a Country! At least we have not bartered all—all three and honour for a pittance of pay, fighting alike for right or wrong, betraying alike the right and wrong! Children? May be! But, God be thanked, we are warm, the blood runs in us——"

"Flavia!"

"I say the blood runs in us!" she repeated. "And if we are foolish, as you say, we are wiser yet than one"—she looked at him with a strange and almost awful steadfastness—"who in his wisdom thinks that a traitor can walk our Irish soil unharmed, or one go back and forth in safety who has ruined and shamed us! You have escaped my hand! But I know that all your boasted wisdom will not lengthen your life till the moon wanes!"

He had tried to interrupt her once—eagerly, vividly, as one who would defend himself. He answered her now after another fashion: perhaps he had learnt his lesson. "If God wills," he said simply, "it will be so; it will be as you say. And the road will lie open to you. Only while I live, Flavia, whether I love this Irish soil or not, or my country, or my honour, the storm shall not break here, nor the house fall from which we spring!"

"While you live!" she repeated, with a dreadful smile. "I tell you, I tell you," and she

extended her hand towards him, "the winding-sheet is high upon your breast, and the salt dried that shall lie upon your heart."

CHAPTER XVI

THE MARPLOT

If, after that, Colonel Sullivan's life had depended on his courage or the vigilance of his servant, it is certain that, tried as was the one and unwinking as was the other, Flavia's prophecy would have been quickly fulfilled. He would not have seen another moon, perhaps he would not have seen another dawn. The part which he had played in the events at the Carraghalin was known to few; but the hundred tongues of rumour were already abroad, carrying as many versions, and in all he was the marplot. His traffic with the Old Fox had spirited away the Holy Father in God—whom the saints preserve!—and swept off also, probably on a broom-stick, the doughty champion whose sole desire it was to lead the hosts of Ireland to victory. In the eyes of some ten score persons, scattered over half a dozen leagues of country, wild, and beyond the pale of law—persons who valued an informer's life no higher than a wolf's—he wore the ugly shape of one. And the logical consequence was certain. That the man who had done these things should continue to walk the sod, that the man who had these things on his black heretic conscience should continue to haunt the scene of his crimes and lord it over those whom his misdeeds had sullied, was to the common mind unthinkable—nay, incredible: a blot on God's good day. To every potato-setter who, out of the corner of his eye, watched his passage, to every beggar by the road whose whine masked heart-felt curses, to the very children who fell back from the cabin door to escape his evil eye, this was plain and known, and the man already as the dead. For if the cotters by the lakeside were not men enough, the nights being at present moonlit, was there not Roaring Andy's band in the hills, not seven miles away, who would cut any man's throat for a silver doubloon, and a Protestant's for the "trate it would be, and sorra a bit of pay at all, the good men!"

Beyond doubt the Colonel's boldness, and the nerve which enabled him to take his place as if nothing threatened him, went for something; and for something the sinister prestige which the disappearance of O'Sullivan Og and his whole party cast about him. For there was wailing in the house by the jetty: the rising had cost some lives though nipped in the bud. The evening tide had cast the body of one of the men upon the shore, where it had been found among the sea-wrack; and, though the fate of the others remained a mystery, the messenger who had sped after Og with the counter-order told the story as he knew it. The means by which the two prisoners, in face of odds so great, had destroyed their captors, were still a secret; but the worst was feared. The Irish are ever open to superstitious beliefs, and the man who singlehanded could wreak such a vengeance, who poured death as it were from a horn, went his way by road and bog, shrouded in a gloomy fame that might provoke the bold, but kept the timid at bay. Before night it was known in a dozen lonely cabins that the Colonel might be shot from behind with a silver bullet: or stabbed, if a man were bold enough, with a cross-handled knife, blest and sprinkled. But woe to him whose aim proved faulty or his hand uncertain! His chance in the grasp of the Father of ill, or of the mis-shapen Trolls, *revenants* of a heathen race, who yearly profaned the Carraghalin with their orgies, had not been worse!

But this reputation alone, seeing that reckless spirits were not wanting, nor in the recesses of the hills those whose lives were forfeit, would have availed him little if the protection of The McMurrrough had not been cast over him. Why it was cast over him, so that he went to and fro in safety—men scarcely dared to guess; it was a dark thing into which it were ill to peer too closely. But the fact was certain; so certain that the anxiety of the young man that the Colonel might meet with no hurt was plain and notorious, a thing observed stealthily and with wonder. Did Colonel John saunter across the court to the gateway, to look on the lake, The McMurrrough was at his shoulder in a twinkling, and thence, with a haggard eye, searched the furze-bush for the glint of a gun-barrel, and the angle of the wall for a lurking foe. It was the same if the Colonel, who seemed himself unconscious of danger, fared as far as the ruined tower, or stretched his legs on the road by the shore. The McMurrrough could not be too near him, walked with his hand on his arm, cast from time to time vigilant looks to the rear. A score of times between rising and sleeping Colonel John smiled at the care that forewent his steps and covered his retreat; nor perhaps had the contempt in which he held James McMurrrough ever reached a higher pitch than while he thus stood from hour to hour indebted to that young man for his life.

What Uncle Ulick, if he held the key to the matter, thought of it, or how he explained it, if

he had not, did not appear; nor, certain that the big man would favour a course of action that made for peace, was Colonel John overcurious to know. But what Flavia thought of the position was a point which aroused his most lively curiosity. He gave her credit for feelings so deep and for a nature so downright, that time-serving or paltering were the last faults he looked to find in her. He could hardly believe that she would consent to sit at meat with him after what had happened; and possibly—for men are strange, and the motives of the best are mixed—a desire to see how she would behave and how she would bear herself in the circumstances had something to do with the course he was taking.

That she consented to the plan was soon made clear. She even took part in it. James could not be always at his elbow. The young man must sometimes retire, it might be to vent his spleen in curses he dared not utter openly, it might be to take other measures for his safety. When this happened, the girl took her brother's place, stooped to dog the Colonel's footsteps, and for a day or two, while the danger hung most imminent, and every ditch to James's fancy held a lurking foe, cast the mantle of her presence over the man she hated.

But stoop as she might, she never for a moment stooped to mask her hate. In her incomings and her outgoings, in her risings-up and at table with him, every movement of her body, the carriage of her head, the glance of her eye, showed that she despised him; that she who now suffered him was the same woman who had struck at his life, and, failing, repented only the failure. In all she did, in parleying with him, in bearing with his presence, in suffering his gaze, she made it plain that she did it against her will; as the captive endures perforce the company of the brigand in whose power he lies, but whom, when opportunity offers, he will deliver with avidity to the cord or the garotte. Because she must, and for her brother's sake, for the sake of his name and pride and home, she was willing to do this, though she abhorred it; and though every time that she broke bread with the intruder, met his eyes, or breathed the air that he breathed, she told herself that it was intolerable, that it must end.

Once or twice, feeling the humiliation more than she could bear, she declared to her brother that the man must go. "Let him go!" she cried, in uncontrollable excitement. "Let him go!"

"But he will not be going, Flavvy."

"He must go!" she replied.

"And Morristown his?" James would answer. "Ye are forgetting! Over and above that, he's not one to do my bidding, nor yours!"

That was true. He would not go; he persisted in remaining and being master. But it was not there the difficulty lay. If he had not made a will before he came, a will that doubtless set the property of the family for ever beyond James's reach, the thing had been simple and Colonel John's shrift had been short. But now, to rid the earth of him was to place the power in the hands of an unknown person, a stranger, an alien, for whom the ties of family and honour would have no stringency. True, the law was weak in Kerry. A writ was one thing, and possession another. Whatever right a stranger might gain, it could only be with difficulty and after the lapse of years that he would make it good against the old family, or plant those about him who would ensure his safety. But it did not do to depend on this. Within the last generation, the McCarthys, a clan more powerful than the McMurrughs, had been driven from the greater part of their lands; and on every side English settlers were impinging on the old Irish families. A bold man might indeed keep the forces of law at bay for a time; but James McMurrugh, notwithstanding the folly into which he had been led, was no desperado. He had no desire to live with a rope round his neck, to flee to the bog on the least alarm, and, in the issue, to give his name to an Irish Glencoe.

A stranger position it had been hard to conceive; or one more humiliating to a proud and untamed spirit such as Flavia's. What arguments, what prayers, what threats The McMurrugh used to bring her to it, Colonel Sullivan could not guess. But though she consented, her shame, her resentment, her hostility, were so patent that the effect was to pair off Colonel John and herself, to pit them one against the other, to match them one to one. The McMurrugh, supple and insincere, found little difficulty in subduing his temper to his interests, though now and again his churlishness broke out. For Uncle Ulick, his habit was to be easy and to bid others be easy; the dawn and dark of a day reconciled him to most things. The O'Beirnes, sullen and distrustful, were still glad to escape present peril. Looking for a better time to come, they took their orders, helped to shield the common enemy, supposed it policy, and felt no shame. Flavia alone, in presence of the man who had announced that he meant to be master, writhed in helpless revolt, swore that he should never be her master, swore that whoever bowed the head she never would.

And Colonel Sullivan, seated, apparently at his ease, on the steep lap of danger, found that this hostility and the hostile person held his thoughts. A man may be an enthusiast in the cause of duty, he may have plucked from the hideous slough of war the rare blue

flower of loving-kindness, he may in the strength of his convictions seem sufficient to himself; he will still feel a craving for sympathy. Colonel Sullivan was no exception. He found his thoughts dwelling on the one untamable person, on the one enemy who would not stoop, and whose submission seemed valuable. The others took up, in a greater or less degree, the positions he assigned to them, gave him lip-service, pretended that they were as they had been, and he as he had been. She did not; she would not.

Presently he discovered with surprise that her attitude rendered him unhappy. Secure in his sense of right, certain that he was acting for the best, looking from a height of experience on that lowland in which she toiled forward, following will-of-the-wisps, he should have been indifferent. But he was not indifferent.

Meantime, she believed that there was no length to which she would not go against him; she fancied that there was no weapon which she would not stoop to pick up if it would hurt him. And presently she was tried. A week had passed since the great fiasco. Again it was the eve of Sunday, and in the usual course of things a priest would appear to celebrate mass on the following day. This risk James was now unwilling to run. His fears painted that as dangerous which had been done safely Sunday by Sunday for years; and in a hang-dog, hesitating way, he let Flavia know his doubts.

"Devil take me if I think he'll suffer it!" he said, kicking up the turf with his toe. They were standing together by the waterside, Flavia rebelling against the consciousness that it was only outside their own walls that they could talk freely. "May be," he continued, "it will be best to let Father O'Hara know—to let be for a week or two."

The girl turned upon him, in passionate reprehension. "Why?" she cried, "Why?"

"Why, is it you're asking?" James answered sullenly. "Well, isn't he master for the time, bad luck to him! And if he thinks we're beginning to draw the boys together, he'll maybe put his foot down! And I'd rather be stopping it myself, I'm telling you, and it's the truth, too, just for a week or two, Flavvy, than be bidden by him."

"Never!" she cried.

"But——"

"Never! Never! Never!" she repeated firmly. "Let us turn our back on our king by all means! But on our God, no! Let him do his worst!"

He was ashamed to persist, and he took another line. "I'm thinking of O'Hara," he said. "It'll be four walls for him, or worse, if he's taken."

"There's no one will be taking him," she answered steadfastly.

"But if he is?"

"I'm saying there's no one will be taking him."

James felt himself repulsed. He shrugged his shoulders and was silent. Presently, "Flavvy," he said in a low tone, "I've a notion, my girl. And it'll serve, I'm thinking. This can't be lasting."

She looked at him without much hope.

"Well?" she said coldly. She had begun to find him out.

He looked at her cunningly. "We might put the boot on the other leg," he said. "He's for informing. But what if we inform, my girl? It's the first in the field that's believed. He's his tale of the Spanish ship, and you know who. But what if we tell it first, and say that he came with them and stayed behind to get us to move? Who's to say he didn't land from the Spaniard, if we're all in a tale? And faith, he's no friend here nor one that will open his mouth for him. A word at Tralee will do it, and Luke Asgill has friends there, that will be glad to set the ball rolling at his bidding. Once clapped up John Sullivan may *squeal*, he'll not be the one to be believed, but those that put him there. It'll be no more than to swear an information, and Luke Asgill will do the rest."

Flavia shuddered. "They won't take his life?" she asked.

James frowned. "That would not suit us at all," he said. "Not at all! We could do that for ourselves. Faith," with a sudden laugh, "you didn't lack much of doing it, Flavvy! No; but a stone box and a ring round his leg, and four walls to talk to—until such time as we have a use for him, would be mighty convenient for everybody. He'd have leisure to think of his dear relations, and of the neat way he outwitted them, the clever devil! But for taking his life—I'm seeing my way there too," with a grin—"it was naming his dear relations made me think of it. They'd not bear to be informing without surety for his life, to be sure! No!" with a chuckle. "And very creditable to them!"

Flavia stared across the water. She was very pale.

"We'll be wanting one or two to swear to it," he continued, "and the rest to be silent. Sorra a bit of difficulty will there be about it!"

"But if," she said slowly, "he gets the first word? And tells the truth?"

"The truth?" James McMurrough replied scornfully. "The truth is what we'll make it! I'll see to that, my jewel."

She shivered. "Still," she said, "it will not be truth."

"What matter?" James answered. "It will cook his goose. Curse him," he continued with violence, "what right had he to come here and thrust himself into other folks' affairs?"

"I could have killed him," she said. "But——"

"But you can't," he rejoined. "And you know why."

"But this"—she continued with a shudder, "this is different."

"What will you be after?" he cried impatiently. "You are not turning sheep-hearted at this time of day?"

"I am not sheep-hearted."

"What is it then, my girl?"

"I can't do this," she said. She was still very pale. Something had come close to her, had touched her, that had never approached her so nearly before.

He stared at her. "But he'll have his life," he said.

"It's not that," she answered slowly. "It's the way. I can't!" she repeated. "I've tried, and I can't! It sickens me."

"And he's to do what he likes with us?" James cried.

"No, no!"

"And we're not to touch him without our gloves?"

She did not answer, and twice her brother repeated the taunt—twice asked her, with a confidence he did not feel, what was the matter with the plan. At last, "It's too vile!" she cried passionately. "It's too horrible! It's to sink to what he is, and worse!" Her voice trembled with the intensity of her feelings—as a man, who has scaled a giddy height without faltering, sometimes trembles when he reaches the solid ground. "Worse!" she repeated.

To relieve his feelings, perhaps to hide his shame, he cursed his enemy anew. And "I wish I had never told you!" he added bitterly.

"It's too late now," she replied.

"Asgill could have managed it, and no one the wiser!"

"I believe you!" she replied quickly. "But not you! Don't do it, James," she repeated, laying her hand on his arm and speaking with sudden heat. "Don't you do it! Don't!"

"And we're to let the worst happen," he retorted, "and O'Hara perhaps be seized——"

"God forbid!"

"That's rubbish! And this man be seized, and that man, as he pleases! We're to let him rule over us, and we're to be good boys whatever happens, and serve King George and turn Protestants, every man of us!"

"God forbid!" she repeated strenuously.

"As well turn," he retorted, "if we are to live slaves all our days! By Heaven, Cammock was right when he said that he would let no woman knit a halter for his throat!"

She did not ask him who had been the life and soul of the movement, whose enthusiasm had set it going, and whose steadfastness maintained it. She did not say that whatever the folly of the enterprise, and however ludicrous its failure, she had gone into it whole-hearted, and with one end in view. She did not tell him that the issue was a hundred times more grievous and more galling to her than to him. Her eyes were beginning to be opened to his failings, she was beginning to see that all men did not override their womenfolk, or treat them roughly. But the habit of giving way to him was still strong; and when, with another volley of harsh, contemptuous words, he flung away from her, though her last

interjection was a prayer to him to refrain, she blamed herself rather than him.

Now that she was alone, too, the priest's safety weighed on her mind. If Colonel John betrayed him, she would never forgive herself. Certainly it was unlikely he would; for in that part priests moved freely, the authorities winked at their presence, and it was only within sight of the walls of Tralee or of Galway that the law which proscribed them was enforced. But her experience of Colonel Sullivan—of his activity, his determination, his devilish adroitness—made all things seem possible. He had been firm as fate in the removal of the Bishop and Cammock; he had been turned no jot from his purpose by her prayers, her rage, her ineffectual struggles—she sickened at the remembrance of that moment. He was capable of everything, this man who had come suddenly into their lives out of the darkness of far Scandinavia, himself dark and inscrutable. He was capable of everything, and if he thought fit—but at that point her eyes alighted on a man who was approaching along the lake-road. It was Father O'Hara himself. The priest was advancing as calmly and openly as if no law made his presence a felony, or as if no Protestant breathed the soft Irish air for a dozen leagues about.

Her brother's words had shaken Flavia's nerves. She was courageous, but she was a woman. She flew to meet the priest, and with every step his peril loomed larger before her fluttered spirits. The wretch had said that he would be master, and a master who was a Protestant, a fanatic—

She did not follow the thought to its conclusion. She waved a warning even before she reached the Father. When she did, "Father!" she cried eagerly, "you must get away, and come back after dark!"

The good man's jaw fell. He had been looking forward to good cheer and a good bed, to a rare oasis of comfort in his squalid life. He cast a wary look round him. "What has happened, my daughter?" he stammered.

"Colonel Sullivan!" Flavia gasped. "He is here, and he will certainly give you up."

"Colonel Sullivan?"

"Yes. You were at the Carraghalin? You have heard what happened! He will surely give you up!"

"Are the soldiers here?" the priest asked, with a blanched face.

"No, but he is here! He is in the house, and may come out at any moment," Flavia explained. "Don't you understand?"

"Did he tell you—"

"What?"

"That he would inform?"

"No!" Flavia replied, thinking the man very dull. "But you wouldn't trust him?"

The priest looked round to assure himself that the landscape held no overt signs of danger. Then he brought back his eyes to the girl's face, and he stroked his thin, brown cheek reflectively. He recalled the scene in the bog, Colonel John's courage, and his thought for his servant. And at last, "I am not thinking," he said coolly, "that he will betray me. I am sure—I think I am sure," he continued, correcting himself, "that he will not. He is a heretic, but he is a good man."

Flavia's cheek flamed. She started back. "A good man!" she cried in a voice audible half a hundred yards away.

Father O'Hara looked a little ashamed of himself; but he stood by his guns. "A heretic, of course," he said. "But, I'm thinking, a good man. At any rate, I'm not believing that he will inform against me."

As quickly as it had come, the colour fled from Flavia's face, and left it cold and hard. She looked at the priest as she had never looked at a priest of her Church before. "You must take your own course then," she said. And with a gesture which he did not understand she turned from him, and leaving him, puzzled and disconcerted, she went away into the house.

A good man! Heaven and earth and the sea besides! A good man! Father O'Hara was a fool! A fool!

CHAPTER XVII

THE LIMIT

If there was one man more sorry than another that the Morristown rising had been nipped in the bud it was Luke Asgill. It stood to his credit that, though he had never dared to cross Flavia's will, he had tried, and honestly tried, to turn James McMurrough from the attempt. But even while doing this, he had known—as he had once told James with bitter frankness—that his interest lay in the other scale; he had seen that had he attended to it only, he would not have dissuaded The McMurrough, but, on the contrary, would have egged him on, in the assurance that the failure of the plot would provide his one best chance of winning Flavia. A score of times, indeed, he had pictured, and with rapture, the inevitable collapse. In the visions of his head upon his bed he had seen the girl turn to him in the wreck of things—it might be to save her brother's life, it might be to save her tender feet from the stones of foreign streets. And in the same dream he had seen himself standing by her, alone against the world; as, to do him justice, he would have stood, no matter how sharp the stress or great the cost.

He had no doubt that he would be able to save her—in spite of herself and whatever her indiscretion. For he belonged to a class that has ever owned inordinate power in Ireland: the class of the middlemen with roots in either camp—a grandam, who, perchance, still softens her clay on the old cabin hearth, while a son preens it with his betters in Trinity College. Such men carry into the ruling ranks their knowledge of the modes of thought, the tricks and subterfuges of those from whom they spring; and at once astute and overbearing, hard and supple, turn the needs of rich and poor to their own advantage, and rise on the common loss. Asgill, with money to lend in the town, and protections to grant upon the bog, with the secrets of two worlds in his head or in his deed-box, could afford to await with confidence the day when the storm would break upon Morristown, and Flavia, in the ruin of all about her, would turn to him for rescue.

Keen therefore was his chagrin when, through the underground channels which were in his power, he heard two days after the event, and in distant Tralee, what had happened. Some word of a large Spanish ship seen off the point had reached the mess-room; but only he knew how nearly work had been found for the garrison: only he, walking about with a smooth face, listened for the alarm that did not come. For a wonder he had been virtuous, he had given James his warning; yet he had seen cakes and ale in prospect. Now, not only was the treat vanished below the horizon, but stranger news, news still less welcome, was whispered in his ear. The man whom he had distrusted from the first, the man against whom he had warned The McMurrough, had done this. More, in spite of the line he had taken, the man was still at Morristown, if not honoured, protected, and if not openly triumphant, master in fact.

Luke Asgill swore horribly. But Colonel Sullivan had got the better of him once, and he was not to be duped again by this Don Quixote's mildness and love of peace. He knew him to be formidable, and he took time to consider before he acted. He waited a week and examined the matter on many sides before he took horse to see things with his own eyes. Nor did he alight at the gate of Morristown until he had made many a resolution to be wary and on his guard.

He had reason to call these to mind before his foot was well out of the stirrup, for the first person he saw, after he had bidden his groom take the horses to the stable, was Colonel Sullivan. Asgill had time to scan his face before they met in the middle of the courtyard, the one entering, the other leaving; and he judged that Colonel John's triumph did not go very deep. He was looking graver, sadder, older; finally—this he saw as they saluted one another—sterner.

Asgill stepped aside courteously, meaning to go by him. But the Colonel stepped aside also, and so barred his way. "Mr. Asgill," he said—and there was something of the martinet in his tone—"I will trouble you to give me a word apart."

"A word apart?" Asgill answered. He was taken aback, and do what he could the Colonel's grave eyes discomposed him. "With all the pleasure in life, Colonel. But a little later, by your leave."

"I think now were more convenient, sir," the Colonel answered, "by your leave."

"I will lay my cloak in the house, and then——"

"It will be more convenient to keep your cloak, I'm thinking," the Colonel rejoined with dryness. And either because of the meaning in his voice or the command in his eyes, Asgill gave way and turned with him, and the two walked gravely and step for step through the gateway.

Outside the Colonel beckoned to a ragged urchin who was playing ducks and drakes with his naked toes. "Go after Mr. Asgill's horses," he said, and bid the man bring them back."

"Colonel Sullivan!"

The Colonel did not heed his remonstrance. "And follow us!" he continued. "Are you hearing, boy? Go then."

"Colonel Sullivan," Asgill repeated, his face both darker and paler—for there could be no doubt about the other's meaning—"I'm thinking this is a strange liberty you're taking. And I beg to say I don't understand the meaning of it."

"You wish to know the meaning of it?"

"I do."

"It means, sir," Colonel John replied, "that the sooner you start on your return journey the better!"

Asgill stared. "The better you will be pleased, you mean!" he said. And he laughed harshly.

"The better it will be for you, I mean," Colonel John answered.

Asgill flushed darkly, but he commanded himself—having those injunctions to prudence fresh in his mind. "This is an odd tone," he said. "And I must ask you to explain yourself further, or I can tell you that what you have said will go for little. I am here upon the invitation of my friend, The McMurrough——"

"This is not his house."

Asgill stared. "Do you mean——"

"I mean what I say," the Colonel answered. "This is not his house, as you well know."

"But——"

"It is mine, and I do not propose to entertain you, Mr. Asgill," Colonel John continued. "Is that sufficiently plain?"

The glove was down. The two men looked at one another, while the knot of beggars, gathered round the gate and just out of earshot, watched them—in the dark as to all else, but aware with Irish shrewdness that they were at grips. Asgill was not only taken by surprise, but he lay under the disadvantage of ignorance. He did not know precisely how things stood, much less could he explain this sudden attack. Yet if the tall, lean man, serious and growing grey, represented one form of strength, the shorter, stouter man, with the mobile face and the quick brain, stood for another. Offhand he could think of no weak spot on his side; and if he must fight, he would fight.

He forced a laugh. And, truly to think of this man, who had not seen Morristown for a score of years, using the experience of a fortnight to give him notice to quit, was laughable. The laugh he had forced became real.

"More plain than hospitable, Colonel," he said. "Perhaps, after all, it will be best so, and we shall understand one another."

"I am thinking so," Colonel Sullivan answered. It was plain that he did not mean to be drawn from the position he had taken up.

"Only I think that you have overlooked this," Asgill continued smoothly. "It is one thing to own a house and another to kick the logs on the hearth; one thing to have the deeds and another—in the west—to pass the punch-bowl! More, by token, 'tis a hospitable country this, Colonel, none more so; and if there is one thing would annoy The McMurrough and the young lady, his sister, more than another, it would be to turn a guest from the door—that is thought to be theirs!"

"You mean that you will not take my bidding?" the Colonel said.

"Not the least taste in life," Asgill answered gaily, "unless it is backed by the gentleman or the lady."

"Yet I believe, sir, that I have a means to persuade you," Colonel John replied. "It is no more than a week ago, Mr. Asgill, since a number of persons in my presence assumed a badge so notoriously treasonable that a child could not doubt its meaning."

"In the west of Ireland," Asgill said, with a twinkle in his eye, "that is a trifle, my dear sir, not worth naming."

"But if reported in the east?"

Asgill averted his face that its smile might not be seen. "Well," he said, "it might be a serious matter there."

"I think you take me now," Colonel John rejoined. "I wish to use no threats. The least said the soonest mended."

Asgill looked at him with half-shut eyes and a lurking smile—in truth, with the amusement of a man watching the transparent scheming of a child. "As you say, the least said the soonest mended," he rejoined. "So—who is to report it in the east?"

"I will, if necessary."

"If—"

"If you push me to it."

Asgill raised his eyebrows impertinently. "An informer?" he said.

Colonel John did not flinch. "If necessary," he repeated.

"That would be serious," Asgill rejoined, "for many people. In the first place for the young lady, your ward, Colonel. Then for your kinsman—and Mr. Ulick Sullivan. After that for quite a number of honest gentlemen, tolerably harmless and tolerably well-reputed here, whose only fault is a tendency to heroics after dinner. It would be so serious, and for so many, Colonel, that for my part I should be glad to suffer in such good company. Particularly," he continued, with a droll look, the droller for his appreciation of the Colonel's face of discomfiture, "as being a Protestant and a Justice, I should, ten to one, be the only person against whom the story would not pass. Eh, Colonel, what do you think? So that, ten to one, I should go free, and the others go to Geordie's prison!"

Colonel John had not, to be honest, a word to say. He was fairly defeated, his flank turned, his guns captured. He had counted so surely on a panic, on the man whom he knew to be a knave proving also a coward, that even his anger—and he was very angry—could not hide his discomfiture. He looked, indeed, so rueful, and at the same time so wrathful, that Asgill laughed aloud.

"Come, Colonel," he said, "it is no use to scowl at me. We know you never call any one out. Let me just hint that wits in Ireland are not quite so slow as in colder countries, and that, had I been here a week back, you had not found it so easy to——"

"To what, sir?"

"To send two old women to sea in a cockboat," Asgill replied. And he laughed anew and loudly. But this time there was no gaiety in his laugh. If the Colonel had not performed the feat in question, in how different a state things might have been at this moment! Asgill felt murderous towards him as he thought of that; and the weapon of the flesh being out of the question—for he had no mind to face the Colonel's small-sword—he sought about for an arm of another kind, and had no difficulty in finding one. "More, by token," he continued, "if you are going to turn informer, it was a pity you did not send the young woman to sea with the old ones. But I'm thinking you'd not be liking to be without her, Colonel?"

Colonel John turned surprisingly red: perhaps he did not quite know why. "We will leave her out of the question, sir," he said haughtily. "Or—that reminds me! That reminds me," he continued, with increasing sternness. "You question my right to bid you begone——"

"By G—d, I do!" Asgill cried, with zest. He was beginning to enjoy himself.

"But you forget, I think, another little matter in the past that is known to me—and that you would not like disclosed, I believe, sir."

"You seem to have been raking things up, Colonel."

"One must deal with a rogue according to his roguery," Colonel John retorted.

Asgill's face grew dark. This was taking the buttons off with a vengeance. He made a movement, but restrained himself. "You don't mince matters," he said.

"I do not."

"You may be finding it an unfortunate policy before long," Asgill said between his teeth. He was moved at last, angered, perhaps apprehensive of what was coming.

"Maybe, sir," Colonel John returned, "maybe. But in the meantime let me remind you that your tricks as a horsedealer would not go far to recommend you as a guest to my kinswoman."

"Oh?"

"Who shall assuredly hear who seized her mare if you persist in forcing your company upon her."

"Upon her?" Asgill repeated, in a peculiar tone. "I see."

Colonel John reddened. "You know now," he said. "And if you persist——"

"You will tell her," Asgill took him up, "that I—shall I say—abducted her mare?"

"I shall tell her without hesitation."

"Or scruple?"

Colonel Sullivan glowered at him, but did not answer.

Asgill laughed a laugh of honest contempt. "And she," he said, "will not believe you if you swear it a score of times! Try, sir! Try! You will injure yourself, you will not injure me. Why, man," he continued, in a tone of unmeasured scorn, "you are duller than I thought you were! The ice is still in your wits and the fog in your brain. I thought, when I heard what you had done, that you were the man for Kerry! But——"

"What is it? What's this?"

The speaker was James McMurrrough, who had come from the house in search of the kinsman he dared not suffer out of his sight. He had approached unnoticed, and his churlish tone showed that what he had overheard was not to his liking. But Asgill supposed that James's ill-humour was directed against his enemy, and he appealed to him.

"What is it?" he repeated with energy; "I'll tell you!"

"Then you'll be telling me indoors!" James answered curtly.

"No!" said Colonel Sullivan.

But at that the young man exploded. "No?" he cried. "No? And, why no? Confusion, sir, it's too far you are driving us," he continued passionately. "Is it at your bidding I must stand in a mob of beggars at my own gate—I, The McMurrrough? And be telling and taking for all the gossoons in the country to hear? No? But it's yes, I say! There's bounds to it all, and if you must be falling to words with my friends, quarrel like gentlemen within doors, and not in a parcel of loons at the gate."

He turned without waiting for a reply and strode into the courtyard. Colonel John hesitated a moment, then he stood aside, and, with a stern face, he invited Asgill to precede him. The Justice did so, smiling. He had won the first bout; and now, if he was not much mistaken, his opponent had made a false move.

That opponent, following with a sombre face, began to be of the same opinion. In his simplicity he had supposed that it would be easy to bell the cat. He had seen, he fancied, a way to do it in a corner, quietly, with little outcry and no disturbance. But the cat had teeth and claws and the cunning of a cat, and was not, it now appeared, an animal easy to bell.

They passed into the house, The McMurrrough leading. There were two or three buckeens in the hall, and Darby and one of the down-at-heel serving-boys were laying the evening meal. "You'll be getting out," James said curtly.

"We will," replied one of the men. And they trooped out at the back.

"Now, what is it?" the McMurrrough asked, turning on his followers and speaking in a tone hardly more civil.

"It's what you're saying—Get out!" Asgill answered smiling. "Only it's the Colonel here's for saying it, and it seems I'm the one to get out."

"What the saints do you mean?" James growled. "Sorra bit of your fun am I wishing at this present!" He wanted no trouble, and he saw that here was trouble.

"I can tell you in a few words," Colonel Sullivan answered. "You know on what terms we are here. I wish to do nothing uncivil, and I was looking for this gentleman to take a hint and go quietly. He will not, it seems, and so I must say plainly what I mean. I object to his presence here."

James stared. He did not understand. "Why, man, he's no Jacobite," he cried, "whoever the other is!" His surprise was genuine.

"I will say nothing as to that," Colonel John answered precisely.

"Then, faith, what are you saying?" James asked. Asgill stood by smiling, aware that silence would best fight his battle.

"This," Colonel John returned. "That I know those things of him that make him unfit company here."

"The devil you do!"

"And——"

But James's patience was at an end. "Unfit company for whom?" he cried. "Eh! Unfit company for whom? Is it Darby he'll be spoiling? Or Thaddy the lad? Or"—resentment gradually overcoming irony—"is it Phelim or Morty he'll be tainting the souls of, and he a Protestant like yourself? Curse me, Colonel Sullivan, it's clean out of patience you put me! Are we boys at school, to be scolded and flouted and put right by you? Unfit company? For whom? For whom, sir? I'd like to know. More, by token, I'd like to know also where this is to end—and I will, by your leave! For whom, sir?"

"For your sister," Colonel John replied. "Without saying more, Mr. Asgill is not of the class with whom your grandfather——"

"My grandfather—be hanged!" cried the angry young man—angry with some cause, for it must be confessed that Colonel John, with the best intentions, was a little heavy-handed. "You said you'd be master here, and faith," he continued with bitterness, "it's master you mean to be. But there's a limit! By Heaven, there's a limit——"

"Yes, James, there is a limit!" a voice struck in—a voice as angry as The McMurrough's, but vibrating to a purer note of passion; so that the indignation which it expressed seemed to raise the opposition to Colonel John's action to a higher plane. "There is a limit, Colonel Sullivan!" Flavia repeated, stepping from the foot of the stairs, on the upper flight of which—drawn from her room by the first outburst—she had heard the whole. "And it has been reached! It has been reached when the head of The McMurroughs of Morristown is told on his own hearth whom he shall receive and whom he shall put to the door! Limit is it? Let me tell you, sir, I would rather be the poorest exile than live thus. I would rather beg my bread barefoot among strangers, never to see the sod again, never to hear the friendly Irish tongue, never to smell, the peat reek, than live on this tenure, at the mercy of a hand I loathe, on the sufferance of a man I despise, of an informer, a traitor, ay, an apostate——"

"Flavia! Flavia!" Colonel John's remonstrance was full of pain.

"Ah, don't call me that!" she rejoined passionately. "Don't make me hate my own name! Better a hundred times an open foe——"

"Have I ever been anything but an open foe?" he returned. "On this point at any rate?"

She swept the remonstrance by. "Better," she cried vehemently, "far better a fate we know, a lot we understand; far better freedom and poverty, than to live thus—yesterday a laughing-stock, to-day slaves; yesterday false to our vows, to-day false to our friends! Oh, there must be an end! There——"

She choked on the word, and her distress moved Asgill to do a strange thing. He had listened to her with an admiration that for the time purified the man, lifted him above selfishness, put the desire to triumph far from him. Now he stepped forward. "I would rather never cross this threshold again," he cried; "never, ay, believe me, I would rather never see you again, than give you this pain! I go, dear lady, I go! And do not let one thought of me trouble or distress you! Let this gentleman have his way. I do not understand. I do not ask to understand, how he holds you, or constrains you. But I shall be silent."

He seemed to the onlookers as much raised above himself as Colonel John seemed depressed below himself. There could be no doubt with whom the victory lay: with whom the magnanimity. Asgill stood erect, almost beatified, a Saint George, a knight of chivalry. Colonel Sullivan showed smaller to the eye, stood bowed and grey-faced, a man beaten and visibly beaten.

But as Asgill turned on his heel Flavia found her voice. "Do not go!" she cried impulsively. "There must be an end! There must be an end of this!"

But Asgill insisted. He saw that to go, to submit himself to the sway against which she revolted was to impress himself upon her mind, was to commend himself to her a hundred times more seriously than if he stayed. And he persisted. "No," he said; "permit me to go." He stepped forward and, with a grace borrowed for the occasion, and with lips that trembled at his daring, he raised and kissed her hand. "Permit me to go, dear lady. I would rather banish myself a hundred times than bring ill into this house or differences into this family."

"Flavia!" Colonel Sullivan said, finding his voice at last, "hear first, I am begging you, what I have to say! Hear it, since against my will the matter has been brought to your knowledge."

"That last I can believe!" she cried spitefully. "But for hearing, I choose the part this gentleman has chosen—to go from your presence. What?" looking at the Colonel with white cheeks and flaming eyes—Asgill had turned to go from the room—"has it come to this? That we must seek your leave to live, to breathe, to have a guest, to eat and sleep, and perhaps to die? Then I say—then I say, if this be so, we have no choice but to go. This is no place for us!"

"Flavia!"

"Ah, do not call me that!" she retorted. "My hope, joy, honour, are in this house, and you have disgraced it! My brother is a McMurrough, and what have you made of him? He cowers before your eye! He has no will but yours! He is as good as dumb—before his master! You flog us like children, but you forget that we are grown, and that it is more than the body that smarts. It is shame we feel—shame so bitter that if a look could lay you dead at my feet, though it cost us all, though it left us beggared, I would look it joyfully—were I alone! But you, cowardly interloper, a schemer living on our impotence, walk on and trample upon us——"

"Enough," Colonel Sullivan cried, intolerable pain in his voice. "You win! You have a heart harder than the millstone, more set than ice! I call you to witness I have struggled hard, I have struggled hard, girl——"

"For the mastery," she cried venomously. "And for your master, the devil!"

"No," he replied, more quietly. "I think for God. If I was wrong, may He forgive me!"

"I never will!" she protested.

"I shall not ask for your forgiveness," he retorted. He looked at her silently, and then, in an altered tone, "The more," he said, "as my mind is changed again. Ay, thank God, changed again. A minute ago I was weak; now I am strong, and I will do my duty as I have set myself to do it. When I came here I came to be a peacemaker, I came to save the great from his folly and the poor from his ignorance, to shield the house of my fathers from ruin and my kin from the gaol and the gibbet. And I stand here still, and I shall persist—I shall persist."

"You will?" she exclaimed.

"I shall! I shall remain and persist."

Passion choked her. She could not find words. After all she had said he would persist. He was not to be moved—he would persist. He would still trample upon them, still be master. The house was no longer theirs, nor was anything theirs. They were to have no life, no will, no freedom—while he lived. Ah, while he lived. She made an odd gesture with her hands, and turned and went up the stairs, leaving him master of the field. The worse for him! The worse, the worse, the worse for him!

CHAPTER XVIII

A COUNTERPLOT

Luke Asgill rode slowly from the gates, not without a backward glance that raked the house. The McMurrough walked by his stirrup, talking rapidly—he, too, with furtive backward glances. In five minutes he had explained the situation and the Colonel's vantage ground. At the end of those minutes, and when they were at some distance from the house, "I see," Asgill said thoughtfully. "Easy to put him under the sod! But you're thinking him worse dead than alive."

"Sorra a doubt of it!"

"Yet the bogs are deep," Asgill returned, his tone smacking faintly of raillery. "You might deal with him first, and his heir when the time came. Why not?"

"God knows!" James answered. "And I've no taste to make the trial." He did not name the oath he had taken to attempt nothing against Colonel John, nor to be a party to any

attempt. He had slurred over that episode. He had dwelt in preference on the fact of the will and the dilemma in which it placed him.

Asgill looked for some moments between his horse's ears, flicking his foot the while with his switch. When he spoke he proved in three or four sentences that if his will was the stronger, his cunning was also the more subtle. "A will is revocable," he said. "Eh?"

"It is."

"And the man that's made one may make another?"

"Who's doubting it?"

"But you're doubting," Asgill rejoined—and he laughed as he spoke—"that it would not be in your favour, my lad."

"Devil a bit do I doubt it!" James said.

"No, but in a minute you will," Asgill answered. And stooping from his saddle—after he had assured himself that his groom was out of earshot—he talked for some minutes in a low tone. When he raised his head again he clapped The McMurrough on the shoulder. "There!" he said, "now won't that be doing the trick for you?"

"It's clever," James answered, with a cruel gleam in his eyes. "It is d—d clever! The old devil himself couldn't be beating it by the length of his hoof! But——"

"What's amiss with it?"

"A will's revocable," James said, with a cunning look. "And what he can do once he can do twice."

"Sorrow a doubt of that, too, if you're innocent enough to let him make one! But you're not, my lad. No; the will first, and then——" Luke Asgill did not finish the sentence, but he grinned. "Anything else amiss with it?" he asked.

"No. But the devil a bit do I see why you bring Flavvy into it?"

"Don't you?"

"I do not."

Asgill drew rein, and by a gesture bade his groom ride on. "No?" he said. "Well, I'll be telling you. He's an obstinate dog; faith, and I'll be saying it, as obstinate a dog as ever walked on two legs! And left to himself, he'd, maybe, take more time and trouble to come to where we want him than we can spare. But, I'm thinking, James McMurrough, that he's sweet on your sister!"

The McMurrough stared. The notion had never crossed his mind. "It's jesting you are?" he said.

"It's the last thing I'd jest about," Asgill answered sombrely. "It is so; whether she knows it or not, I know it! And so d'you see, my lad, if she's in this, 'twill do more—take my word for it that know—to break him down and draw the heart out of him, so that he'll care little one way or the other, than anything you can do yourself!"

James McMurrough's face, turned upwards to the rider, reflected his admiration. "If you're in the right," he said, "I'll say it for you, Asgill, you're the match of the old one for cleverness. But do you think she'll come to it, the jewel?"

"She will."

James shook his head. "I'm not thinking it," he said.

"Are you not?" Asgill answered, and his face fell and his voice was anxious. "And why?"

"Sure and why? I'll tell you. It was but a day or two ago I'd a plan of my own. It was just to swear the plot upon him; swear he'd come off the Spanish ship, and the rest, d' you see, and get him clapped in Tralee gaol in my place. More by token, I was coming to you to help in it. But I thought I'd need the girl to swear to it, and when I up and told her she was like a hen you'd take the chickens from!"

Asgill was silent for a moment. Then, "You asked her to do that?" he said, in an odd tone.

"Just so."

"And you're wondering she didn't do it?"

"I am."

"And I'm thanking God she'd not be doing it!" Asgill retorted.

"Oh!" James exclaimed. "You're mighty particular all in a minute, Mr. Asgill. But if not that, why this. Eh? Why this?"

"For a reason you'd not be understanding," Asgill answered coolly. "But I know it myself in my bones. She'll do this if she's handled. But there's a man that'll not be doing it at all, at all, and that's Ulick Sullivan. You'll have to be rid of him for a time, and how I'm not saying."

"I'll be planning that."

"Well, make no mistake about it. He must not get wind of this."

"Ain't I knowing it?" James returned restively. He had been snubbed, and he was sore.

"Well, there was a thing you were not knowing," Asgill retorted, with a look which it was fortunate that the other did not see. "And still there's a thing you've not thought of, my lad. It's only to a Protestant he can leave it, and you must have one ready. Now if I——"

"No!" James cried, with sudden energy. And he drew back a step, and looked the other in the face. "No, Mr. Asgill," he continued; "if it is to that you've been working, I'd as soon him as you! Ay, by G——d, I would! I'd sooner turn myself!"

"I can believe that."

"A hundred times sooner!" James repeated. "And what for not? What's to prevent me? Eh? What's to prevent me?"

"Your sister," Asgill answered.

James's face, which had flamed with passion, lost its colour.

"Your sister," Asgill repeated with gusto. "I'd like fine to see you asking her to help you turn Protestant! Faith, and, for a mere word of that same, I'll warrant she'd treat you as the old gentleman treated you!"

"Anyway, I'll not trust you," James replied, with venom. "Sooner than that I'll have—ay, that will do finely—I'll have Constantine Hussey of Duppa. He's holder for three or four already, and the whole country calls him honest! I'll have him and be safe."

"You'll do as you please about that," Asgill answered equably. If he felt any chagrin, he hid it well. "And that being settled, I wish you luck. Only, mind you, I don't use my wits for nothing. If the estate's to be yours, Flavia's to be mine—if she's willing."

"Willing or unwilling for what I care!" James answered brutally.

Asgill did not hide his scorn. "An excellent brother!" he said. "And so, good-day to you. But have a care of old Ulick."

"Do you think I'm a fool?" James shouted after him.

It was well, perhaps, that the wind carried Asgill's answer across the water and wasted it on the dusk, which presently swallowed his retreating form. The McMurrough stood awhile where the other had left him. He watched the rider go, and twice he shook his fist after him.

"Marry my sister, you dog," he muttered. "Ay, if it will give me my place again! But for helping you to the land first and to her afterwards, as you'd have me, you schemer, you bog-trotter, it would make Tophet's dog sick! You d——d dirty son of an upstart! You'd marry my sister, would you? It will be odd"—he paused—"if I don't jink you yet, when I've made my use of you! I'm a schemer too, Mister Asgill, only—one at a time, one at a time! The Colonel first, and you afterwards! Ay, you afterwards, brother-in-law!"

With a last gesture of defiance—Asgill had long passed out of sight—he returned to the house.

It was two or three days after this interview that Colonel Sullivan, descending at the breakfast hour, found Flavia in the room. He saw her with surprise; with greater surprise he saw that she remained, for during those three days the girl had not sat at meals with him. Once or twice his entrance had surprised her, but it had been the signal for her departure; and he had seen no more of her than the back of her head or the tail of her gown. More often he had found the men alone and had sat down with them. Far from resenting this avoidance, he had found it natural and even proper; and suffering it patiently, he had hoped, though almost against hope, that steering a steady course he would gradually force her to change her opinion of him. He, on his part, must not give way. He had saved the house from a great peril; he had cleared it of—vermin. As he had begun he must continue, and hug, for comfort, the old proverb, *Femme souvent varie*.

That she was already beginning to change he could scarcely hope; yet, when he saw on this morning that she meant to abide his coming, he was elated—secretly and absurdly elated.

She was at the window, but she turned on hearing his step. "I am wishing to speak to you," she said. But her unforgiving eyes looked out of a hard-cut face, and her figure was stiff as a sergeant's cane.

After that he did not try to compass a commonplace greeting. He bowed gravely. "I am ready to listen," he answered.

"I am wanting to give you a warning," she said. "Your man Bale—I have no reason to wish him ill. But he does not share the immunity which you have secured, and if you'll be taking my advice you will send him away. My uncle is riding as far as Mallow; he will be absent ten days. If you think fit, you will allow your man to go with him. The interval may"—she halted as if in search of a word, but her eyes did not leave his—"I do not say it will, but it may mend matters."

"I am obliged to you," he answered. Then he was silent, reflecting.

"You are not wishing," she said, with a touch of contempt, "to expose the man to a risk you do not run yourself?"

"Heaven forbid!" he answered. "But——"

"If you think he is a protection to you," she continued in the same tone, "do not send him."

"He is not that," he replied, unmoved by her taunt. "But I am alone, and he is a comfort to me."

"As you please," she answered.

"Nevertheless he shall go," he continued. "It may be for the best." He was thinking that if he rejected this overture, she might make no other: and, hard as it would prove to persuade Bale to leave him, he must undertake it. "In any case," he added, "I thank you."

She did not deign to answer, but she turned on her heel and went out. On the threshold she met a serving-boy and she paused an instant, and the Colonel caught a momentary glimpse of her face. It wore a strange look, of disgust or of horror—he was not sure which—that appalled him; so that when the door closed upon her, he remained gazing at it. Had he misread the look? Or—what was its meaning? Could it be that she hated him to that degree! At once the elation which the interview and her thoughtfulness for Bale had roused in him sank; and he was in a brown study when Uncle Ulick, the only person, Bale excepted, to whom he could look for support or sympathy, came in and confirmed the story of his journey.

"You had better come with me," he said, with a meaning look at James and the O'Beirnes, who talked with averted faces, turned their shoulders on their elders and flouted the Colonel as far as they dared. "I shall lie at Tralee one night, and at Ross Castle one night, and at Mallow the third."

But Colonel John had set his course, and was resolved to abide by it. After breakfast he saw Bale, and he had the trouble with him which he had foreseen. But in the end military obedience prevailed and the man consented to go—with forebodings at which his master affected to smile.

"None the less I misdoubt them," the man said, sticking to his point with the east-country doggedness, which is the antipodes of the Irish character. "I misdoubt them, your honour. They were never so careful for me," he added grimly, "when they were for piking me in the bog!"

"The young lady had naught to do with that," Colonel John replied.

"D——n me if I know!"

"Nonsense, man!" the Colonel said sharply. "I'll not hear such words."

"But why separate us, your honour?" Bale pleaded. "Not for good, I swear. No, not for good!"

"For your greater safety, I hope."

"Oh, ay, I understand that! But what of your honour's?"

"I have explained to you," the Colonel said patiently, "why I am safe here."

"For my part, and that's flat, I hate their soft sawder!" the man burst out. "It's everything to please you while they sharpen the pike to stick in your back. If old Oliver, that was a

countryman of my own, and bred not so far off, had dealt with a few more of the rogues
——"

"Hush!" Colonel John cried sternly. "And, for my sake, keep your tongue between your teeth. Have done with such talk, or you'll not be safe, go or stay; Be more prudent, man!"

"It's my belief I'll never see your honour again!" the man cried, with passion. "That's my belief! That's my belief and you'll not stir it."

"We've parted before in worse hap," Colonel John answered, "and come together again. And, please God, we'll do the same this time."

The man did not answer, but he shook his head obstinately. For the rest of the day he clung to his master like a burr, and it was with an unusual sinking of the heart that Colonel John saw him ride away on the morrow. With him went Uncle Ulick, the Colonel's other friend in the house; and certainly the departure of these two seemed unlucky, if it was nothing worse. But the man who was left behind was not one to give way to vain fears. He thrust down the rising doubt, and chid himself for a presentiment that belittled Providence. Perhaps in the depths of his heart, he welcomed a change, finding cheer in the thought that the smaller the household at Morristown, the more prominently, and therefore the more fairly, he must stand in Flavia's view.

Be that as it might, he saw nothing of her on that day or the following day. But though she shunned him, others did not. He began to remark that he was seldom alone, even in the house. James and the O'Beirnes were always at his elbow—watching, watching, watching, it seemed to him. They said little, and what they said they whispered to one another in corners; but if he came out of his chamber, he found one in the passage, and if he mounted to it, one forewent him! This dogging, these whisperings, this endless watching, would have got on the nerves of a more timid man; it began to disturb him. He began to fancy that even Darby and the serving-boys looked askance at him and kept him in view. Once he took a notion that the butler, who had been friendly within limits—for the sake of that father who had met his man in Tralee churchyard—wished to say something to him. But at the critical moment Morty O'Beirne popped up from somewhere, and Darby sneaked off in silence.

The Colonel disdained to ask what was afoot, but he thought that he would give Morty a chance of speaking. "Are you looking for your brother?" he asked suavely.

"I am not," Morty answered, with a gloomy look.

"Nor for The McMurrugh?"

"I am not. I am thinking," he added, with a grin, "that he has his hands full with the young lady."

Colonel John was somewhat startled. "What's the matter?" he asked.

"Oh, two minds in a house. Sorrow a bit more than that. It's no very new thing in a family," Morty added. And he went out whistling "'Twas a' for our rightful King." But he went, as the Colonel noted, no farther than the courtyard, whence he could command the room through the window. He lounged there, whistling, and now and again peeping.

Suddenly, on the upper floor, Colonel John heard a door open, and the clamour of a voice raised in anger. It was James's voice. "Tell him? Curse me if you shall!" Colonel John heard him say. The next moment the door was sharply closed and he caught no more.

But he had heard enough to quicken his pulses. What was it she wished to tell him? *Souvent femme varie?* Was she already seeking to follow up the hint which she had given him on Bale's behalf? And was the special surveillance to which he had been subjected for the last two days aimed at keeping them apart, that she might have no opportunity of telling him—something?

Colonel John suspected that this might be so. And his heart beat, as has been hinted, more quickly. At the evening meal he was early in the room, on the chance that she might appear before the others. But she did not descend, and the meal proved unpleasant beyond the ordinary, James drinking more than was good for him, and taking a tone, brutal and churlish, if not positively hostile. For some reason, the Colonel reflected, the young man was beginning to lose his fears. Why? What was he planning? How was he, even if he had no respect for his oath, thinking to evade that dilemma which ensured his guest's safety?

"Secure as I seem, I must look to myself," Colonel John thought. And he slept that night with his door bolted and a loaded pistol under his pillow. Next morning he took care to descend early, on the chance of seeing Flavia before the others appeared. She was not down: he waited, and she did not come. But neither did his watchers; and when he had been in the room five minutes a serving-girl slipped in at the back, showed him a scared

face, held out a scrap of paper and, when he had taken it, fled in a panic and without a spoken word.

He hid the paper about him and read it later. The message was in Flavia's hand; he had seen her write more than once. But if he had not, he knew that neither James nor the O'Beirnes were capable of penning a grammatical sentence. Colonel John's spirits rose as he read the note.

"Be at the old Tower an hour after sunset. You must not be followed."

"That is more easily said than done," he commented.

Nor, if he were followed through the day as closely as on previous days, did he see how it was to be done. He stood, cudgelling his brains to evolve a plan that would enable him to give the slip to the three men and to the servants who replaced them when they were called away. But he found none that might not, by awakening James's suspicions, make matters worse; indeed, it seemed to him that James was already suspicious. He had at last to let things take their course, in the hope that when the time came they would shape themselves favourably.

They did. For before noon he gathered that James wanted to go fishing. The O'Beirnes also wanted to go fishing, and for the general convenience it became him to go with them. He said neither No nor Yes; but he dallied with the idea until it was time to start and they had made up their minds that he was coming. Then he declined.

James swore, the O'Beirnes scowled at him and grumbled. Presently the three went outside and held a conference. His hopes rose as he sat smiling to himself, for their next step was to call Darby. Evidently they gave him orders and left him in charge, for a few minutes later they went off, spending their anger on one another, and on the barefoot gossoons who carried the tackle.

Late in the afternoon Colonel John took up his position on the horse-block by the entrance-gates, where the June sun fell on him; there he affected to be busy plaiting horse-hair lines. Every two or three minutes Darby showed himself at the door: once in a quarter of an hour the old man found occasion to cross the court to count the ducks or rout a trespassing beggar. Towards sunset, however, he came less often, having to busy himself with the evening meal. The Colonel smiled and waited, and presently the butler came again, found him still seated there, and withdrew—this time with an air of finality. "He's satisfied," the Colonel muttered, and the next moment—for the sun had already set a full hour—he was gone also. The light was waning fast, night was falling in the valley. Before he had travelled a hundred yards he was lost to view.

The fishing-party had started the contrary way, so that he had nothing to fear from them. But that he might omit no precaution, when he had gone a quarter of a mile he halted and listened, with his ear near the ground, for the beat of pursuing footsteps. He heard none, nor any sounds but the low of a cow whose calf was being weaned, the "Whoo! hoo! hoo!" of owls beginning to mouse beside the lake, and the creak of oars in a boat which darkness already hid. He straightened himself with a sigh of relief, and hastened at speed in the direction of the waterfall.

He gave Flavia credit for all the virtues, if for some of the faults of a proud, untamed nature. Therefore he believed her to be fearless. Nevertheless, before he stood on the platform and made out the shape of the Tower looming dark and huge above him, he had come to the conclusion that the need which forced her to such a place at such an hour must be great. The moon would not rise before eleven o'clock, the last shimmer of the water had faded into unfathomable blackness beneath him; he had to tread softly and with care to avoid the brink.

He peered about him, hoping to see her figure emerge beside him. He did not, and, disappointed, he coughed. Finally, in a subdued voice, he called her by name, once and twice. Alas! only the wind, softly stirring the grass and whispering in the ivy, answered him. He was beginning to think—with a chill of disappointment, excessive at his age and in the circumstances—that she had failed to come, when, at no great distance before him, he fancied some one moved. He groped his way forward half a dozen paces, found a light break on his view, and stood in astonishment.

The movement had carried him beyond the face of the Tower, and so revealed the light, which issued from a doorway situate in the flank of the building. He paused; but second thoughts, treading on the heels of surprise, reassured him. He saw that in that position the light was not visible from the lake or the house; and he moved quickly to the open door, expecting to see Flavia. Three steps led down to the basement room of the Tower; great was his surprise when he saw below him in this remote, abandoned building—in this room three feet below the level of the soil—a table set handsomely with four lighted

candles in tall sticks, and furnished besides with a silver inkhorn, pens, and paper. Beside the table stood a couple of chairs and a stool. Doubtless there was other furniture in the room, but in his astonishment he saw only these.

He uttered an exclamation, and descended the steps. "Flavia!" he cried. "Flavia!" He did not see her, and he moved a pace towards that part of the room which the door hid from him.

Crash! The door fell to, dragged by an unseen hand. Colonel John sprang towards it; but too late. He heard the grating of a rusty key turned in the lock; he heard through one of the loopholes the sound of an inhuman laugh; and he knew that he was a prisoner. In that moment the cold air of the vault struck a chill to his bones; but it struck not so cold nor so death-like as the knowledge struck to his heart that Flavia had duped him. Yes, on the instant, before the crash of the closing door had ceased to echo in the stone vaulting above him, he knew that, he felt that! She had tricked him. She had deceived him. He let his chin sink on his breast. Oh, the pity of it!

CHAPTER XIX

PEINE FORTE ET DURE

For many minutes, fifteen, twenty perhaps, Colonel John sat motionless in the chair into which he had sunk, his eyes fixed on the flames of the candles that, so still was the night, burned steadily upwards. His unwinking gaze created about each tongue of flame strange effects of vapour, halo-like circles that widened and again contracted, colours that came and went. But he saw these things with his eyes without seeing them with his mind. It was not of them, it was not of the death-cold room about him, in which the table and chairs formed a lighted oasis out of character with the earthen floor, the rough walls, and the vaulted roof—it was not of anything within sight he was thinking; but of Flavia!

Of Flavia, who had deceived him, duped him, cajoled him. Who, for all he knew—and he thought it likely—had got rid of Uncle Ulick. Who had certainly got rid of Bale by playing on his feeling for the man. Who, by affecting a quarrel with her brother, had thrown him off his guard, and won his confidence, only to betray it. Who, having lured him thither, had laughed—had laughed! Deep sighs broke at long intervals from Colonel John's breast as he thought of her treachery. It cut him to the heart. He looked years older as he sat and pondered.

At length, with a sigh drawn from his very soul, he roused himself, and, taking a candle, he made the round of the chamber. The door by which he had entered was the only outlet, and it was of stout oak, clamped with iron, and locked. For windows, a pair of loopholes, slits so narrow that on the brightest day the room must be twilit, pierced the wall towards the lake. If the room had not been used of old as a prison, it made an admirable one; for the ancient walls were two feet thick, and the groined roof was out of reach, and of stone, hard as the weathering of centuries had left it. But not so hard, not so cruel as her heart! Flavia! The word almost came from his lips in a cry of pain.

Yet what was her purpose? He had been lured hither; but why? He tried to shake off the depression which weighed on him, and to think. His eyes fell on the table; he reflected that the answer would doubtless be found among the papers that lay on it. He sat down in the chair which was set before it, and he took up the first sheet that came to hand, a note of a dozen lines in her handwriting—alas! in her handwriting.

"SIR," so it ran,—

"You have betrayed us; and, were that all, I'd still be finding it in my heart to forgive you. But you have betrayed also our Country, our King, and our Faith; and for this it's not with me it lies to pardon. Over and above, you have thought to hold us in a web that would make you safe at once in your life and your person; but you are meshed in your turn, and will fare as you can, without water, food, or fire, until you have signed and sealed the grant which lies beside this paper. We're not unmerciful; and one will visit you once in twenty-four hours until he has it under your hand, when he will witness it. That done, you will go where you please; and Heaven forgive you. I, who write this, am, though unjustly, the owner of that you grant, and you do no wrong.

"FLAVIA McMURROUGH."

He read the letter with a mixture of emotions. Beside it lay a deed, engrossed on parchment, which purported to grant all that he held under the will of the late Sir Michael McMurrrough to and for the sole use of Constantine Hussey, Esquire, of Duppa. But annexed to the deed was a separate scroll, illegal but not unusual in Ireland at that day, stating that the true meaning was that the lands should be held by Constantine Hussey for the use of The McMurrrough, who, as a Roman Catholic, was not capable of taking in his own name.

Fully, only too fully, enlightened by Flavia's letter, Colonel John barely glanced at the parchments; for, largely as these, with their waxen discs, prepared to receive the impress of the signet on his finger, bulked on the table, the gist of all lay in the letter. He had fallen into a trap—a trap as cold, cruel, heartless as the bosom of her who had decoyed him hither. Without food or water! And already the chill of the earthen floor was eating into his bones, already the damp of a hundred years was creeping over him.

For the moment he lacked the spirit to rise and contend by movement against the one or the other. He sat gazing at the paper with dull eyes. For, after all, whose interests had he upheld? Whose cause had he supported against James McMurrrough and his friends? For whose sake had he declared himself master at Morristown, with no intention, no thought, as Heaven was his witness, of deriving one jot or one tittle of advantage for himself? Flavia's! Always Flavia's! And she had penned this! she had planned this! She had consigned him to this, playing to its crafty end the farce that had blinded him!

His mind, as he sat brooding, travelled back to the beginning of it all; to the day on which Sir Michael's letter, with a copy of his will, had reached his hands, at Stralsund on the Baltic, in his quarters beside the East Gate, in one of those Hanse houses with the tall narrow fronts which look like nothing so much as the gable-ends of churches. The cast of his thoughts at the reading rose up before him; the vivid recollections of his home, his boyhood, his father, which the old man's writing had evoked, and the firmness with which, touched by the dead man's confidence, a confidence based wholly on report, he had resolved to protect the girl's interests. Sir Michael had spoken so plainly of James as to leave the reader under no delusion about him. Nevertheless, Colonel John had conceived some pity for him; in a vague way he had hoped that he might soften things for him when the time came. But that the old man's confidence should be justified, the young girl's inheritance secured to her—this had been the purpose in his mind from first to last.

And this was his reward!

True, that purpose would not have embroiled him with her, strong as was her love for her brother, if it had not become entwined under the stress of events with another—with the resolve to pluck her and hers from the abyss into which they were bent on flinging themselves. It was that resolution which had done the mischief, and made her his enemy to this point. But he could not regret that. He could not repent of that—he who had seen war in all its cruel phases, and fierce rebellions, and more cruel repressions. Perish—though he perished himself in this cold prison—perish the thought! For even now some warmth awoke at his heart, some heat was kindled in him by the reflection that, whatever befell him, he had saved scores and hundreds from misery, a countryside from devastation, women and children from the worst of fates. Many and many a one who cursed his name to-day had cause, did he know it, to remember him in his prayers. And though he never saw the sun again, though the grim walls about him proved indeed his grave, though he never lived to return to the cold lands where he had made a name and a place for himself, he would at least pass beyond with full hands, and with the knowledge that for every life he, the soldier of fortune, had taken, he had saved ten.

He sat an hour, two hours, thinking of this, and of her; and towards the end less bitterly. For he was just, and could picture the wild, untutored heart of the girl, bred in solitude, dwelling on the present wrongs and the past greatness of her race, taking dreams for realities, and that which lay in cloudland for the possible. Her rough awakening from those dreams, her disappointment, the fall from the heaven of fancy to the world as it was, might—he owned it—have driven even a generous spirit to cruel and heartless lengths. And still he sighed—he sighed.

At the end of two hours he roused himself perforce. For he was very cold, and that could only be mended by such exercise as the size of his prison permitted. He set himself to walk briskly up and down. When he had taken a few turns, however, he paused with his eyes on the table. The candles? They would serve him the longer if he burned but one at a time. He extinguished three. The deed? He might burn it, and so put the temptation, which he was too wise to despise, out of reach. But he had noticed in one corner a few half-charred fragments of wood, damp indeed, but such as might be kindled by coaxing. He would preserve the deed for the purpose of kindling the wood; and the fire, as his only luxury, he would postpone until he needed it more sorely. In the end the table and the chairs—or all but one—should eke out his fuel, and he would sleep. But not yet.

For he had no desire to die; and with warmth he knew that he could put up for a long time with the lack of food. Every hour during which he had the strength and courage to bear up against privation increased his chances; it was impossible to say what might not happen with time. Uncle Ulick was due to return in a week—and Bale. Or his gaolers might relent. Nay, they must relent for their own sakes, if he bore a stout heart and held out; for until the deed was signed they dared not let him perish.

That was a good thought. He wondered if it had occurred to them. If it had, it was plain that they relied on his faint-heartedness, and his inability to bear the pangs of hunger, even within limits. For they could put him on the rack, but they dared not push the torment so far as to endanger his life. With that knowledge, surely with that in his mind, he could outstay their patience. He must tighten his belt, he must eke out his fuel, he must bear equably the pangs of appetite; after all, in comparison with the perils and privations through which he had passed on the cruel plains of Eastern Europe, and among a barbarous people, this was a small thing.

Or it would have been a small thing if that profound depression, that sadness at the heart which had held him motionless so long had not still sapped his will, undermined his courage, and bowed his head upon his breast. A small thing! a few hours, a few days even of hunger and cold and physical privation—no more! But when it was overpast, and he had suffered and was free, to what could he look forward? What prospect stretched beyond, save one grey, dull, and sunless, a homeless middle age, an old age without solace? He was wounded in the house of his friend, and felt not the pain only, but the sorrow. In a little while he would remember that, if he had not to take, he had still to give: if he had not to enjoy, he had still to do. The wounds would heal. Already shadowy plans rose before him.

Yet for the time—for he was human—he drew small comfort from such plans. He would walk up and down for a few minutes, then he would sink into his chair with a stern face, and he would brood. Again, when the cold struck to his bones, he would sigh, and rise of necessity and pace again from wall to wall.

His had been a mad fancy, a foolish fancy, a fancy of which—for how many years rolled between him and the girl, and how many things done, suffered, seen—he should have known the outcome. But, taking its rise in the instinct to protect, which their relations justified, it had mastered him slowly, not so much against his will as without his knowledge; until he had awakened one day to find himself possessed by a fancy—a madness, if the term were fitter—the more powerful because he was no longer young, and in his youth had known passion but once, and then to his sorrow. By-and-by, for a certainty, the man's sense of duty, the principles that had ruled him so long—and ruled more men then than now, for faith was stronger—would assert themselves. And he would go back to the Baltic lands, the barren, snow-bitten lands of his prime, a greyer, older, more sombre man—but not an unhappy man.

Something of this he told himself as he paced up and down the gloomy chamber, while the flame of the candle crept steadily downward, and his shadow in the vault above grew taller and more grotesque. It must be midnight; it must be two; it must be three in the morning. The loopholes, when he stood between them and the candle, were growing grey; the birds were beginning to chirp. Presently the sun would rise, and through the narrow windows he would see its beams flashing on the distant water. But the windows looked north-west, and many hours must pass before a ray would strike into his dungeon. The candle was beginning to burn low, and it seemed a pity to light another, with the daylight peering in. But if he did not, he would lack the means to light his fire. And he was eager to do without the fire as long as possible, though already he shivered in the keen morning air. He was cold now, but he would be colder, he knew, much colder by-and-by, and his need of the fire would be greater.

From that the time wore wearily on—he was feeling the reaction—to the breakfast hour. The sun was high now; the birds were singing sweetly in the rough brakes and brambles about the Tower; far away on the shining lake, of which only the farther end lay within his sight, three men were fishing from a boat. He watched them; now and again he caught the tiny splash as they flung the bait far out. And, so watching, with no thought or expectation of it, he fell asleep, and slept, for five or six hours, the sleep of which excitement had cheated him through the night. In warmth, morning and evening, night and day differed little in that sunken room. Still the air in it profited a little by the high sun; and he awoke, not only less weary, but warmer. But, alas! he awoke also hungry.

He stood up and stretched himself: and, seeing that two-thirds of the second candle had burned away while he slept, he was thankful that he had lit it. He tried to put away the visions of hot bacon, cold round, and sweet brown bread that rose before him; he smiled, indeed, considering how much more hungry he would be by-and-by, this evening—and tomorrow. He wondered ruefully how far they would carry it: and, on that, mind got the better of body, and he forgot his appetite in a thought more engrossing.

Would she come? Every twenty-four hours, her letter said, a person would visit him, to learn if his will had yielded to theirs. Would she be the person? Would she who had so wronged him have the courage to confront him? And, if she did, how would she carry it off? It was wonderful with what interest, nay, with what agitation, he dwelt on this. How would she look? how would she bear herself? how would she meet his eye? Would the shame she ought to feel make itself seen in her carriage, or would her looks and her mien match the arrogance of her letter? Would she shun his gaze, or would she face it without flinching, with a steady colour and a smiling lip? And, if the latter were the case, would it be the same when hours and days of fasting had hollowed his cheeks, and given to his eyes the glare which he had seen in many a wretched peasant's eyes in those distant lands? Would she still be able to face that sight without flinching, to view his sufferings without a quail, and turn, firm in her cruel purpose, from the dumb pleading of his hunger?

"God forbid!" he cried. "Ah! God forbid!"

And he prayed that, rather than that, rather than have that last proof of the hardness of the heart that dwelt in that fair shape, he might not see her at all. He prayed that, rather than that, she might not come; though—so weak are men—that she might come, and he might see how she bore herself, and how she carried off his knowledge of her treason—was now the one interest he had, the one thought, prospect, hope that had power to lighten the time, and keep at bay—though noon was long past, and he had fasted twenty-four hours—the attacks of hunger!

The thought possessed him to an extraordinary extent. Would she come? And would he see her? Or, having lured him by that Judas letter into his enemies' power, would she leave him to be treated as they chose, while she lay warm and safe in the house which his interference had saved for her?

Oh! cruel!

Then—for no man was more just than this man, though many surpassed him in tact—the very barbarity of an action so false and so unwomanly suggested that, viewed from her side, it must wear another shape. For even Delilah was a Philistine, and by her perfidy served her country. What was this girl gaining? Revenge, yes; yet, if they kept faith with him, and, the deed signed, let him go free, she had not even revenge. For the rest, she lost by the deed. All that her grandfather had meant for her passed by it to her brother. To lend herself to stripping herself was not the part of a selfish woman. Even in her falseness there was something magnanimous.

He sat drumming on the table with his fingers, and thinking of it. She had been false to him, treacherous, cruel! But not for her own sake, not for her private advantage; rather to her hurt. Viewed on that side, there was something to be said for her.

He was still staring dreamily at the table when a shadow falling on the table roused him. He lifted his eyes to the nearest loophole, through which the setting sun had been darting its rays a moment before. Morty O'Beirne bending almost double—for outside, the arrow-slit was not more than two feet from the ground—was peering in.

"Ye'll not have changed your quarters, Colonel," he said, in a tone of raillery which was assumed perhaps to hide a real feeling of shame. "Sure, you're there, Colonel, safe enough?"

"Yes, I am here," Colonel John answered austerely. He did not leave his seat at the table.

"And as much at home as a mole in a hill," Morty continued. "And, like that same blessed little fellow in black velvet that I take my hat off to, with lashings of time for thinking."

"So much," Colonel John answered, with the same severe look, "that I am loth to think ill of any. Are you alone, Mr. O'Beirne?"

"Faith, and who'd there be with me?" Morty answered in true Irish fashion.

"I cannot say. I ask only, Are you alone?"

"Then I am, and that's God's truth," Morty replied, peering inquisitively into the corners of the gloomy chamber. "More by token I wish you no worse than just to be doing as you're bid—and faith, it's but what's right!—and go your way. 'Tis a cold, damp, unchancy place you've chosen, Colonel," he continued, with a grin; "like nothing in all the wide world so much as that same molehill. Well, glory be to God, it can't be said I'm one for talking; but, if you're asking my advice, you'll be wiser acting first than last, and full than empty!"

"I'm not of that opinion, sir," Colonel John replied, looking at him with the same stern eyes.

"Then I'm thinking you're not as hungry as I'd be! And not the least taste in life to stay my

stomach for twenty-four hours!"

"It has happened to me before," Colonel John answered.

"You're not for signing, then?"

"I am not."

"Don't be saying that, Colonel!" Morty rejoined. "It's not yet awhile, you're meaning?"

"Neither now nor ever, God willing," Colonel John answered. "I quote from yourself, sir. As well say it first as last, and full as empty!"

"Sure, and ye'll be thinking better of it by-and-by, Colonel."

"No."

"Ah, you will," Morty retorted, in that tone which to a mind made up is worse than a blister. "Sure, ye'll not be so hard-hearted, Colonel, as to refuse a lady! It's not Kerry-born you are, and say the word 'No' that easy!"

"Do not deceive yourself, sir," Colonel John answered severely, and with a darker look. "I shall not give way either to-day or to-morrow."

"Nor the next day?"

"Nor the next day, God willing."

"Not if the lady asks you herself? Come, Colonel."

Colonel John rose sharply from his seat; such patience, as a famished man has, come to an end.

"Sir," he said, "if this is all you have to say to me, I have your message, and I prefer to be alone."

Morty grinned at him a moment, then, with an Irish shrug, he gave way. "As you will," he said.

He withdrew himself suddenly, and the sunset light darted into the room through the narrow window, dimming the candle's rays. The Colonel heard him laugh as he strode away across the platform, and down the hill. A moment and the sounds ceased. He was gone. The Colonel was alone.

Until this time to-morrow! Twenty-four hours. Yes, he must tighten his belt.

Morty, poking his head this way and that, peering into the chamber as he had peered yesterday, wished he could see Colonel John's face. But Colonel John, bending resolutely over the handful of embers that glowed in an inner angle of the room, showed only his back. Even that Morty could not see plainly; for the last of the candles had burned out, and in the chamber, dark in comparison with the open air, the crouching figure was no more than a shapeless mass obscuring the glow of the fuel.

Morty shaded his eyes and peered more closely. He was not a sensitive person, and he was obeying orders. But he was not quite comfortable.

"And that's your last word?" he said slowly. "Come, Colonel dear, ye'll say something more to that."

"That's my last word to-day," Colonel John answered as slowly, and without turning his head.

"Honour bright? Won't ye think better of it before I go?"

"I will not."

Morty paused, to tell the truth, in extreme exasperation. He had no great liking for the part he was playing; but why couldn't the man be reasonable? "You're sure of it, Colonel," he said.

Colonel John did not answer.

"And I'm to tell her so?" Morty concluded.

Colonel John rose sharply, as if at last the other tried him too far. "Yes," he said, "tell her that! Or," lowering his voice and his hand, "do not tell her, as you please. That is my last

word, sir! Let me be."

But it was not his last word. For as Morty turned to go, and suffered the light to fall again through the aperture, the Colonel heard him speak—in a lower and a different tone. At the same moment, or his eyes deceived him, a shadow—that was not Morty O'Beirne's fell for one second on the splayed wall inside the window. It was gone as soon as seen; but Colonel John had seen it, and he sprang to the window.

"Flavia!" he cried. "Flavia!"

He paused to listen, his hand on the wall on either side of the opening. His face, which had been pinched and haggard a moment before, was now flushed by the sunset. Then "Flavia!" he repeated, keen appeal in his voice. "Flavia!"

She did not answer. She was gone. And perhaps it was as well. He listened for a long time, but in vain; and he told himself again that it was as well. Why, after all, appeal to her? How, could it avail him? What good could it do? Slowly he went back to his chair and sat down in the old attitude over the embers. But his lip quivered.

CHAPTER XX

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR

A little before sunset on that same day—almost precisely indeed at the moment at which Flavia's shadow darkened the splayed flank of the window in the Tower—two men stood beside the entrance at Morristown, whence the one's whip had just chased the beggars. They were staring at a third, who, seated nonchalantly upon the horse-block, slapped his boot with his riding switch, and made as poor a show of hiding his amusement as they of masking their disgust. The man who slapped his leg and shaped his lips to a silent whistle, was Major Payton of the —th. The men who looked at him, and cursed the unlucky star which had brought him thither, were Luke Asgill and The McMurrrough.

"Faith, and I should have thought," Asgill said, with a clouded face, "that my presence here, Major, and I, a Justice——"

"True for you!" Payton said, with a grin.

"Should have been enough by itself, and the least taste more than enough, to prove the absurdity of the Castle's story."

"True for you again," Payton replied. "And ain't I saying that but for your presence here, and a friend at court that I'll not name, it's not your humble servant this gentleman would be entertaining"—he turned to The McMurrrough—"but half a company and a sergeant's guard!"

"I'm allowing it."

"You've no cause to do other."

"Devil a bit I'm denying it," Asgill replied more amicably; and, as far as he could, he cleared his face. "It's not that you're not welcome. Not at all, Major! Sure, and I'll answer for it, my friend, The McMurrrough is glad to welcome any English gentleman, much more one of your reputation."

"Truth, and I am," The McMurrrough assented. But he had not Asgill's self-control, and his sulky tone belied his words.

"Still—I come at an awkward time, perhaps?" Payton answered, looking with a grin from one to the other.

For the first time it struck him that the suspicions at headquarters might be well-founded; in that case he had been rash to put his head in the lion's mouth. For it had been wholly his own notion. Partly to tease Asgill, whom he did not love the more because he owed him money, and partly to see the rustic beauty whom, rumour had it, Asgill was courting in the wilds—a little, too, because life at Tralee was dull, he had volunteered to do with three or four troopers what otherwise a half-company would have been sent to do. That he could at the same time put his creditor under an obligation, and annoy him, had not been the least part of the temptation; while no one at Tralee believed the story sent down from Dublin.

He did not credit it even now for more than two seconds. Then common sense, and his knowledge of Luke Asgill reassured him. "Eh! An awkward time, perhaps?" he repeated, looking at The McMurrrough. "Sorry, I'm sure, but——"

"I'd have entertained you better, I'm thinking," James McMurrrough said, "if I'd known you were coming before you came."

"Devil a doubt of it!" said Asgill, whose subtle brain had been at work. "Not that it matters, bedad, for an Irish gentleman will do his best. And to-morrow Colonel Sullivan, that's more knowledge of the mode and foreign ways, will be back, and he'll be helping his cousin. More by token," he added, in a different tone, "you know him of old?"

Payton, who had frowned at the name, reddened at the question. "Is that," he asked, "the Colonel Sullivan who——"

"Who tried the foils with Lemoine at Tralee?" Asgill cried heartily. "The same and no other! He is away to-day, but he'll be returning tomorrow, and he'll be delighted to see you! And by good luck, there are foils in the house, and he'll pass the time pleasantly with you! It's he's the hospitable creature!"

Payton was far from pleased. He was anything but anxious to see the man whose skill had turned the joke against him; and his face betokened his feelings. Had he foreseen the meeting he would certainly have remained in Tralee, and left the job to a subaltern. "Hang it!" he exclaimed, vexed by the recollection, "a fine mess you led me into there, Asgill!"

"I did not know him then," Asgill replied lightly. "And, pho! Take my word for it, he's no man to bear malice!"

"Malice, begad!" Payton answered, ill-humouredly; "I think it's I——"

"Ah, you are right again, to be sure!" Asgill agreed, laughing silently. For already he had formed a hope that the guest might be manœuvred out of the house on the morrow. Not that he thought Payton was likely either to discover the Colonel's plight, or to interfere if he did. But Asgill had another, and a stronger motive for wishing the intruder away. He knew Payton. He knew the man's arrogance and insolence, the contempt in which he held the Irish, his view of them as an inferior race. And he was sure that, if he saw Flavia and fancied her—and who that saw her would not fancy her?—he was capable of any rudeness, any outrage; or, if he learned her position in regard to the estate, he might prove a formidable, if an honourable, competitor. In either case, to hasten the man's departure, and to induce Flavia to remain in the background in the meantime, became Asgill's chief aim.

James McMurrrough, on the other hand, saw in the unwelcome intruder an English officer; and, troubled by his guilty conscience, he dreaded above all things what he might discover. True, the past was past, the plot spent, the Spanish ship gone. But the Colonel remained, and in durance. And if by any chance the Englishman stumbled on him, released him and heard his story, and lived to carry it back to Tralee—the consequences might be such that a cold sweat broke out on the young man's brow at the thought of them. To add to his alarm, Payton, whose mind was secretly occupied with the Colonel, sought to evince his indifference by changing the subject, and in doing so, hit on one singularly unfortunate.

"A pretty fair piece of water," he said, rising with an affected yawn, and pointing over the lake with his riding-switch. "The tower at the head of it—it's grown too dark to see it—is it inhabited?"

The McMurrrough started guiltily. "The tower?" he stammered. Could it be that the man knew all, and was here to expose him? His heart stood still, then raced.

"The Major'll be meaning the tower on the rock," Asgill said smoothly, but with a warning look. "Ah, sure, it'll be used at times, Major, for a prison, you understand."

"Oh!"

"But we'll be better to be moving inside, I'm thinking," he continued.

Payton assented. He was still brooding on his enemy, the Colonel, and his probable arrival on the morrow. Curse the man, he was thinking. Why couldn't he keep out of his way?

"Take the Major in, McMurrrough," Asgill said, who on his side was on tenter-hooks lest Flavia and Morty O'Beirne should arrive from the Tower. "You'll like to get rid of your boots before supper, Major?" he went on. "Bid Darby send the Major's man to him, McMurrrough; or, better, I'll be going to the stables myself and I'll be telling him!"

As the others went in, Asgill strolled on this pretext towards the stables. But when they had passed out of sight he turned and walked along the lake to meet the girl and her

companion. As he walked he had time to think, and to decide how he might best deal with Flavia, and how much and what he should tell her. When he met them, therefore—by this time the night was falling—his first question related to their errand, and to that which an hour before had been the one pre-occupation of all their minds.

"Well," he said, "he'll not have yielded yet, I am thinking?"

Dark as it was, the girl averted her face to hide the trouble in her eyes. She shook her head. "No," she said, "he has not."

"I did not count on it," Asgill replied cheerfully. "But time—time and hunger and patience—devil a doubt he'll give in presently."

She did not answer, but he fancied—she kept her face averted—that she shivered.

"While you have been away, something has happened," he continued. After all, it was perhaps as well, he reflected, that Payton had come. His coming, even if Flavia did not encounter him, would divert her thoughts, would suggest an external peril, would prevent her dwelling too long or too fancifully on that room in the Tower, and on the man who famished there. She hated the Colonel, Asgill believed. She had hated him, he was sure. But how long would she continue to hate him in these circumstances? How long if she learned what were the Colonel's feelings towards her? "An unwelcome guest has come," he continued glibly, "and one that'll be giving trouble, I'm fearing."

"A guest?" Flavia repeated in astonishment. She halted. What time for guests was this? "And unwelcome?" she added. "Who is it?"

"An English officer," Asgill explained, "from Tralee. He is saying that the Castle has heard something, and has sent him here to look about him."

Naturally the danger seemed greater to the two than to Asgill, who knew his man. Words of dismay broke from Flavia and O'Beirne. "From Tralee?" she cried. "And an English officer? Good heavens! Do you know him?"

"I do," Asgill answered confidently. "And, believe me or no, I can manage him." He began to appreciate this opportunity of showing himself the master of the position. "I hold him, like that, not the least doubt of it; but the less we'll be doing for him the sooner he'll be going, and the safer we'll be! I would not be so bold as to advise," he continued diffidently, "but I'm thinking it would be no worse if you left him to be entertained by the men."

"I will!" she cried, embracing the idea. "Why should I be wanting to see him?"

"Then I think he'll be ordering his horse to-morrow!"

"I wish he were gone now!" she cried.

"Ah, so do I!" he replied, from his heart.

"I will go in through the garden," she said.

He assented; it was to that point he had been moving. She turned aside, and for a moment he bent to the temptation to go with her. Since the day on which he had voluntarily left the house at the Colonel's dictation he had made progress in her favour. He was sure that he had come closer to her—that she had begun not only to suffer his company, but to suffer it willingly. And here, as she passed through the darkling garden under the solid blackness of the yews, was an opportunity of making a further advance. She would have to grope her way, a reason for taking her hand might offer, and—his head grew hot at the thought.

But he thrust the temptation from him. He knew that it was not only the stranger's presence that weighed her down, but her recollection of the man in the Tower and his miserable plight. This was not the time, nor was she in the mood for such advances; and, putting pressure on himself, Asgill turned from her, satisfied with what he had done.

As he went on with Morty, he gave him a hint to say as little in Payton's presence as possible, and to leave the management to him. "I know the man," he explained, "and where he's weak. I'm for seeing the back of him as soon as we can, but without noise."

"There's always the bog," grumbled Morty. He did not love Asgill overmuch, and the interview with the Colonel had left him in a restive mood.

"And the garrison at Tralee," Asgill rejoined drily, "to ask where he is! And his troopers to answer the question."

Morty fell back on sullenness, and bade him manage it his own way. "Only I'll trouble you not to blame me," he added, "if the English soger finds the Colonel, and ruins us entirely!"

"I'll not," Asgill answered pithily, "if so be you'll hold your tongue."

So at supper that night Payton looked in vain for the Kerry beauty whose charms the warmer wits of the mess had more than once painted in hues rather florid than fit. Lacking her, he found that the conversation lay wholly between Asgill and himself. Nor did this surprise him, when he had surmounted his annoyance at the young lady's absence; for the contempt in which he held the natives disposed him to expect nothing from them. On the contrary, he found it natural that these savages should sit silent before a man of the world, and, like the clowns they were, find nothing to say fit for a gentleman to hear. Under such circumstances he was not unwilling to pose before them in an indolent, insolent fashion, to show them what a great person he was, and to speak of things beyond their ken. Playing this part, he would have enjoyed himself tolerably—nor the less because now and again he let his contempt for the company peep from under his complaisance—but for the obtuseness, or the malice of his friend; who, as if he had only one man and one idea in his head, let fall with every moment some mention of Colonel John. Now, it was the happy certainty of the Colonel's return next day that inspired his eloquence; now, the pleasure with which the Colonel would meet Payton again; now, the lucky chance that found a pair of new foils on the window ledge among the fishing-tackle, the old fowling-pieces, and the ragged copies of *Armida* and *The Don*.

"For he's ruined entirely and no one to play with him!" Asgill continued, a twinkle, which he made no attempt to hide, in his eye. "No one, I'm meaning, Major, of his sort of force at all! Begad, boys, you'll see some fine fencing for once! Ye'll think ye've never seen any before I'm doubting!"

"I'm not sure that I can remain to-morrow," Payton said in a surly tone. For he began to suspect that Asgill was quizzing him. He noticed that every time the Justice named Colonel Sullivan, whether he referred to his return, or exalted his prowess, a sensation, a something that was almost a physical stir passed round the table. Men looked furtively at one another, or looked straight before them, as if they were in a design. If that were so, the design could only be to pit Colonel Sullivan against him, or in some way to provoke a quarrel between them. He felt a qualm of distrust and apprehension, for he remembered the words the Colonel had used in reference to their next meeting; and he was confirmed in the plan he had already formed—to be gone next day. But in the meantime his temper moved him to carry the war into the enemy's country.

"I didn't know," he snarled, taking Asgill up in the middle of a eulogy of Colonel John's skill, "that he was so great a favourite of yours."

"He was not," Asgill replied drily.

"He is now, it seems!" in the same sneering tone.

"We know him better. Don't we, boys?"

They murmured assent.

"And the lady whose horse I sheltered for you," the Major continued, spitefully watching for an opening—"confound you, little you thanked me for it!—she must be still more in his interest than you. And how does that suit your book?"

Asgill had great self-control, and the Major was not, except where his malice was roused, a close observer. But the thrust was so unexpected that on the instant Payton read the other's secret in his eyes—knew that he loved, and knew that he was jealous. Jealous of Sullivan! Jealous of the man whom he was for some reason praising. Then why not jealous of a younger, a more proper, a more fashionable rival? Asgill's cunningly reared plans began to sink, and even while he answered he knew it.

"She likes him," he said, "as we all do."

"Some more, some less," Payton answered with a grin.

"Just so," the Irishman returned, controlling himself. "Some more, some less. And why not, I'm asking."

"I think I must stay over to-morrow," Payton remarked, smiling at the ceiling. "There must be a good deal to be seen here."

"Ah, there is," Asgill answered in apparent good humour.

"Worth seeing, too, I'll be sworn!" the Englishman replied, smiling more broadly.

"And that's true, too!" the other rejoined.

He had himself in hand; and it was not from him that the proposal to break up the party came. The Major it was who at last pleaded fatigue. Englishmen's heads, he said, were stronger than their stomachs; they were a match for port but not for claret. "Too much

Bordeaux," he continued, with careless contempt, "gives me the vapours next day. It's a d—d sour drink, I call it! Here's a health to Methuen and sound Oporto!"

"You should correct it, Major, with a little cognac," The McMurrrough suggested politely.

"Not to-night; and, by your leave, I'll have my man called and go to bed."

"It's early," James McMurrrough said, playing the host.

"It is, but I'll have my man and go to bed," Payton answered, with true British obstinacy. "No offence to any gentleman."

"There's none will take it here," Asgill answered. "An Irishman's house is his guest's castle." But, knowing that Payton liked his glass, he wondered; until it occurred to him that the other wished to have his hand steady for the sword-play next day. He meant to stay, then! "Hang him! Hang him!" he repeated in his mind.

The McMurrrough, who had risen, took a light and attended his guest to his room. Asgill and the O'Beirnes—the smaller folk had withdrawn earlier—remained seated at the table, the young men scoffing at the Englishman's weak head, and his stiffness and conceit of himself, Asgill silent and downcast. His scheme for ridding himself of Payton had failed; it remained to face the situation. He did not distrust Flavia; no Englishman, he was sure, would find favour with her. But he distrusted Payton, his insolence, his violence, and the privileged position which his duellist's skill gave him. And then there was Colonel John. If Payton learned what was afoot at the Tower, and saw his way to make use of it, the worst might happen to all concerned.

He looked up at a touch from Morty, and to his astonishment he saw Flavia standing at the end of the table. There was a hasty scrambling to the feet, for the men had not drunk deep, and by all in the house, except her brother, the girl was treated with respect. After a fashion, they were to a man in love with her.

"I was thinking," Asgill said, foreseeing trouble, "that you were in bed and asleep." Her hair was tied back negligently and her dress half-fastened at the throat.

"I cannot sleep," she answered. And then she stood a moment drumming with her slender fingers on the table, and the men noticed that she was unusually pale. "I cannot sleep," she repeated, a tremor in her voice. "I keep thinking of him. I want some one—to go to him."

"Now?"

"Now!"

"But," Asgill said slowly, "I'm thinking that to do that were to give him hopes. It were to spoil all. Once in twenty-four hours—that was agreed, and he was told. And it is not four hours since you were there. If there is one thing needful, not the least doubt of it!—it is to leave him thinking that we're meaning it."

He spoke gently and reasonably. But the girl laboured, it was plain, under a weight of agitation that did not suffer her to reason, much less to answer him reasonably. She was as one who wakes in the dark night, with the terror of an evil dream upon him, and cannot for a time shake it off. "But if he dies?" she cried in a woeful tone. "If he dies of hunger? Oh, my God, of hunger! What have we done then? I tell you," she continued, struggling with overwhelming emotion, "I cannot bear it! I cannot bear it!" She looked from one to the other as appealing to each in turn to share her horror, and to act. "It is wicked, it is wicked!" she continued, in a shriller tone and with a note of defiance in her voice, "and who will answer for it? Who will answer for it, if he dies? I, not you! I, who tricked him, who lied to him, who lured him there!"

For a moment there was a stricken silence in the room. Then, "And what had he done to you?" Asgill retorted with spirit—for he saw that if he did not meet her on her own plane she was capable of any act, however ruinous. "Or, if not to you, to Ireland, to your King, to your Country, to your hopes?" He flung into his voice all the indignation of which he was master. "A trick, you say? Was it not by a trick he ruined all? The fairest prospect, the brightest day that ever dawned for Ireland! The day of freedom, of liberty, of——"

She twisted her fingers feverishly together. "Yes," she said, "yes! Yes, but—I can't bear it! I can't! I can't! It is no use talking," she continued with a violent shudder. "You are here—look!" she pointed to the table strewn with the remains of the meal, with flasks and glasses and tall silver-edged horns. "But he is—starving! Starving!" she repeated, as if the physical pain touched herself.

"You shall go to him to-morrow! Go, yourself!" he replied in a soothing tone.

"I!" she cried. "Never!"

"Oh, but——" Asgill began, perplexed but not surprised by her attitude—"But here's your brother," he continued, relieved. "He will tell you—he'll tell you, I'm sure, that nothing can be so harmful as to change now. Your sister," he went on, addressing The McMurrrough, who had just descended the stairs, "she's wishing some one will go to the Colonel, and see if he's down a peg. But I'm telling her——"

"It's folly entirely, you should be telling her!" James McMurrrough replied, curtly and roughly. Intercourse with Payton had not left him in the best of tempers. "To-morrow at sunset, and not an hour earlier, he'll be visited. And then it'll be you, Flavvy, that'll speak to him! What more is it you're wanting?"

"I speak to him?" she cried. "I couldn't!"

"But it'll be you'll have to!" he replied roughly. "Wasn't it so arranged?"

"I couldn't," she replied, in the same tone of trouble. "Some one else—if you like!"

"But it's not some one else will do," James retorted.

"But why should I be the one—to go?" she wailed. She had Colonel John's face before her, haggard, sunken, famished, as, peering into the gloomy, firelit room, she had seen it that afternoon, ay, and as she had seen it later against the darkness of her bedroom. "Why should I," she repeated, "be the one to go?"

"For a very good reason," her brother retorted with a sneer. And he looked at Asgill and laughed.

That look, which she saw, and the laugh which went with it, startled her as a flash of light startles a traveller groping through darkness. "Why?" she repeated in a different tone. "Why?"

But neither her tone nor Asgill's warning glance put James McMurrrough on his guard; he was in one of his brutal humours. "Why?" he replied. "Because he's a silly fool, as I'm thinking some others are, and has a fancy for you, Flavvy! Faith, you're not blind!"—he continued, forgetting that he had only learned the fact from Asgill a few days before, and that it was news to the younger men—"and know it, I'll be sworn, as well as I do! Any way, I've a notion that if you let him see that there is no one in the house wishes him worse than you, or would see him starve, the stupid fool, with a lighter heart—I'm thinking it will be for bringing him down, if anything will!"

She did not answer. And outwardly she was not much moved. But inwardly, the horror of herself and her part in the matter, which she had felt as she lay upstairs in the darkness, thinking of the starving man, whelmed up and choked her. They were using her for this! They were using her because the man—loved her! Because hard words, cruel treatment, brutality from her would be ten times more hard, more cruel, more brutal than from others! Because such treatment at her hands would be more likely to break his spirit and crush his heart! To what viler use, to what lower end could a woman be used, or human feeling be prostituted?

Nor was this all. On the tide of this loathing of herself rose another, a newer and a stranger feeling. The man loved her. She did not doubt the statement. Its truth came home to her at once, although, occupied with other views of him, she had never suspected the fact. And because it placed him in a different light, because it placed him in a light in which she had never viewed him before, because it recalled a hundred things, acts, words on his part which she had barely noted at the time, but which now took on another aspect, it showed him, too, as one whom she had never seen. Had he been free at this moment, prosperous, triumphant, the knowledge that he loved her, that he, her enemy, loved her, might have revolted her—she might have hated him the more for it. But now that he lay a prisoner, famished, starving, the fact that he loved her touched her heart, transfixed her with an almost poignant feeling, choked her with a rising flood of pity and self-reproach.

"So there you have it, Flavvy!" James cried complacently. "And sure, you'll not be making a fool of yourself at this time of day!"

She stood as one stunned; looking at him with strange eyes, thinking, not answering. Asgill, and Asgill only, saw a burning blush dye for an instant the whiteness of her face. He, and he only, discovered, with the subtle insight of one who loved, a part of what she was thinking. He wished James McMurrrough in the depth of hell. But it was too late, or he feared so.

Great was his relief, therefore, when she spoke. "Then you'll not—be going now?" she said.

"Now?" James retorted contemptuously. "Haven't I told you, you'll go to-morrow?"

"If I must," she said slowly, "I will—if I must."

"Then what's the good of talking, I'm thinking?" The McMurrough answered. And he was going on—being in a bullying mood—to say more in the same strain, when the opportunity was taken from him. One of the O'Beirnes, who happened to avert his eyes from the girl, discovered Payton standing at the foot of the stairs. Phelim's exclamation apprised the others that something was amiss, and they turned.

"I left my snuff-box on the table," Payton said, with a sly grin. How much he had heard they could not tell. "Ha! there it is! Thank you. Sorry! Sorry, I am sure! Hope I don't trespass. Will you present me to your sister, Mr. McMurrough?"

James McMurrough had no option but to do so—looking foolish; while Luke Asgill stood by with rage in his heart, cursing the evil chance which had brought Flavia downstairs.

"I assure you," Payton said, bowing low before her, but not so low that the insolence of his smile was hidden from all, "I think myself happy. My friend Asgill's picture of you, warmly as he painted it, fell infinitely—infinitely below the reality!"

CHAPTER XXI

THE KEY

Colonel John rose and walked unsteadily to the window. He rested a hand on either jamb and looked through it, peering to right and left with wistful eyes. He detected no one, nothing, no change, no movement, and, with a groan, he straightened himself. But he still continued to look out, gazing at the bare sward below the window, at the sparkling sheet of water beyond and beneath it, at the pitiless blue sky above, in which the sun was still high, though it had begun to decline.

Presently he grew weary, and went back to his chair. He sat down with his elbows on his knees and his head between his hands. Again his ears had deceived him! Again hope had told her flattering tale! How many more times would he start to his feet, fancying he heard the footstep that did not fall, calling aloud to those who were not there, anticipating those who, more hard of heart than the stone walls about him, more heedless than the pitiless face of nature without, would not come before the appointed time! And that was hours away, hours of thirst and hunger, almost intolerable; of patience and waiting, weary waiting, broken only by such a fancy, born of his weakened senses, as had just drawn him to the window.

The suffering which is inevitable is more easy to bear than that which is caused by man. In the latter case the sense that the misery felt may be ended by so small a thing as another's will; that another may, by lifting a finger, cut it short, and will not; that to persuade him is all that is needful—this becomes at the last maddening, intolerable, a thing to upset the reason, if that other will not be persuaded.

Colonel John was a man sane and well-balanced, and assuredly not one to despair lightly. But even he had succumbed more than once during the last twelve hours to gusts of rage, provoked as much by the futility of his suffering as by the cruelty of his persecutors. After each of these storms he had laughed, in wonder at himself, had scolded himself and grown calm. But they had made their mark upon him, they had left his eyes wilder, his cheeks more hollow; his hand less firm.

He had burned, in fighting the cold of the past night, all that would burn, except the chair on which he sat; and with the dawn the last spark of his fire had died out. Notwithstanding those fits of rage he was not light-headed. He could command his faculties at will, he could still reflect and plan, marshal the arguments and perfect the reasons that must convince his foes, that, if they inflicted a lingering death on him, they did but work their own undoing. But at times he found himself confounding the present with the past, fancying, for a while, that he was in a Turkish prison, and turning, under that impression, to address Bale; or starting from a waking dream of some cold camp in Russian snows—alas! starting from it only to shiver with that penetrating, heart-piercing, frightful cold, which was worse to bear than the gnawing of hunger or the longing of thirst.

He had not eaten for more than seventy hours. But the long privation which had weakened his limbs and blanched his cheeks, which had even gone some way towards disordering his senses, had not availed to shake his will. The possibility of surrender did not occur to him, partly because he felt sure that James McMurrough would not be so

foolish as to let him die; but partly, also, by reason of a noble stubbornness in the man, a fixedness that for no pain of death would leave a woman or a child to perish. More than once Colonel Sullivan had had to make that choice, amid the horrors of a retreat across famished lands, with wolves and Cossacks on his skirts; and perhaps the choice then made had become a habit of the mind. At any rate, whether that were the cause or no, in this new phase he gave no thought to yielding.

He had sat for some minutes in the attitude of depression, or bodily weakness, which has, been described, when once more a sound startled him. He raised his head and turned his eyes, sharpened by hunger, on the window. But this time, distrusting his senses, he did not rise until the sound was repeated. Then he faltered to his feet, and once again went unsteadily to the window, and, leaning a hand on each jamb, looked out.

At the same moment Flavia looked in. Their eyes met. Their faces were less than a yard apart.

The girl started back with a low cry, caused either by alarm on finding him so near her or by horror at the change in his aspect. If the latter, there was abundant cause. For she had left him hungry, she found him starving; she had left him haggard, she found him with eyes unnaturally large, his temples hollow, his lips dry, his chin unshaven. It was indeed a mask rather than a face, a staring mask of famine, that looked out of the dusky room at her, and looked not the less pitifully, not the less wofully, because, as soon as its owner took in her identity, the mask tried to smile.

"Mother of God!" she whispered. Her face had grown nearly as white as his. "O Mother of God!" She had imagined nothing like this.

And Colonel John, believing—his throat was so dry that he could not speak at once—that he read pity as well as horror in her face, felt a sob rise in his breast. He tried to smile the more bravely for that, and presently he found his voice, a queer, husky voice.

"You must not leave me—too long," he said. His smile was becoming ghastly.

She drew in her breath, and averted her face, to hide, he hoped, the effect of the sight upon her. Or perhaps—for he saw her shudder—she was mutely calling the sunlit lake on which her eyes rested, the blue sky, the smiling summer scene, to witness against this foul cruelty, this dark wickedness.

But it seemed that he deceived himself. For when she turned her face to him again, though it was still colourless, it was hard and set.

"You must sign," she said. "You must sign the paper."

His parched lips opened, but he did not answer. He was as one struck dumb.

"You must sign!" she repeated insistently. "Do you hear? You must sign!"

Still he did not answer; he only looked at her with eyes of infinite reproach. The pity of it! The pity of it! She, a woman, a girl, whom compassion should have constrained, whose tender heart should have bled for him, could see him tortured, could aid in the work, and cry "Sign!"

She could indeed, for she repeated the word—fiercely, feverishly. "Sign!" she cried. And then, "If you will," she said, "I will give you—see! See! You shall have this. You shall eat and drink; only sign! For God's sake, sign what they want, and eat and drink!"

And, with fingers that trembled with haste, she drew from a hiding-place in her cloak, bread and milk and wine. "See what I have brought," she continued, holding them before his starting eyes, his cracking lips, "if you will sign."

He gazed at them, at her, with anguish of the mind as well as of the body. How he had mistaken her! How he had misread her! Then, with a groan, "God forgive you!" he cried, "I cannot! I cannot!"

"You will not sign?" she retorted.

"Cannot, and will not!" he said.

"And why? Why will you not?"

On that his patience, sorely tried, gave way; and, swept along by one of those gusts of rage, he spoke. "Why?" he cried in hoarse accents. "You ask me why? Because, ungrateful, unwomanly, miserable as you are—I will not rob you or the dead! Because I will not be false to an old man's trust! I will not give to the forsworn what was meant for the innocent—nor sell my honour for a drink of water! Because,"—he laughed a half-delirious laugh—"there is nothing to sign, nothing! I have burned your parchments these two days, and if you tempt me two more days, if you make me suffer twice as much as I have suffered, you

can do nothing! If your heart be as hard as—it is, you can do nothing!" He held out hands which trembled with passion. "You can do nothing!" he repeated. "Neither you, who—God forgive you, are no woman, have no woman's heart, no woman's pity!—nor he who would have killed me in the bog to gain that which he now starves me to get! But I foiled him then, as I will foil him to-day, ingrate, perjured, accursed, as he is, accursed——"

He faltered and was silent, steadying himself by resting one hand against the wall. For a moment he covered his eyes with the other hand. Then "God forgive me!" he resumed in a lower tone, "I know not what I say! God forgive me! And you—Go! for you too—God forgive you—know not what you do. You do not know what it is to hunger and thirst, or you would not try me thus! Nor do you know what you were to me, or you would not try me thus! Yet I ought to remember that—that it is not for yourself you do it!"

He turned his back on her then, and on the window. He had taken three steps towards the middle of the room, when she cried, "Wait!"

"Go!" he repeated with a backward gesture of the hand. "Go! and God forgive you, as I do!"

"Wait!" she cried. "And take them! Oh, take them! Quick!" He turned about slowly, almost with suspicion. She was holding the food and the drink through the window, holding them out for him to take. But it might be another deception. He was not sure, and for a moment a cunning look gleamed in his eyes, and he took a step in a stealthy fashion towards the window, as if, were she off her guard, he would snatch them from her. But she cried again, "Take them! Take them!" with tears in her voice. "I brought them for you. May God indeed forgive me!"

The craving was so strong upon him that he took them then without a word, without answering her or thanking her. He turned his back on her, as soon as he had possessed himself of them, as if he dared not let her see the desire in his face; and standing thus, he drew the stopper from the bottle of milk, and drank. He would fain have held the bottle to his lips until he had drained the last drop: but he controlled himself, and when he had swallowed a few mouthfuls, he removed it. Then, with the solemnity of a sacrament, perhaps with the feeling that should attend one, he broke off three or four small fragments of the bread, and ate them one by one and slowly—the first with difficulty, the second more easily, the third with an avidity which he checked only by a firm effort of the will. "Presently!" he told himself. "Presently! There is plenty, there is plenty." Yet he allowed himself two more mouthfuls of bread and another sip of milk—milk that was nectar, rather than any earthly drink his lips had ever encountered.

At length, with new life running in his veins, and not new life only, but a pure thankfulness that she had proved herself very woman at the last, he laid his treasures on the chair, and turned to her. She was gone.

His face fell. For while he had eaten and drunk he had felt her presence at his back, and once he was sure that he had heard her sob. But she was gone. A chill fell upon his spirits. Yet she might not be gone far. He staggered—for he was not yet steady on his feet—to the window, and looked to right and left.

She had not gone far. She was lying prone on the sward, her face hidden on her arms; and it was true that he had heard her sob, for she was weeping without restraint. The change in him, the evidence of suffering which she had read in his face, to say nothing of his reproaches, had done something more than shock her. They had opened her eyes to the true nature—already dimly seen—of the plan to which she had lent herself. They had torn the last veil from the selfishness of those with whom she had acted, their cupidity and their ruthlessness. And they had shown the man himself in a light so new and startling, that even the last twenty-four hours had not prepared her for it. The scales of prejudice which had dimmed her sight fell at length, and wholly, from her eyes; and, for the first time, she saw him as he was. For the first time she perceived that, in pursuing the path he had followed, he might have thought himself right; he might have been moved by a higher motive than self-interest, he might have been standing for others rather than for himself. Parts of the passionate rebuke which suffering and indignation had forced from him remained branded upon her memory; and she wept in shame, feeling her helplessness, her ignorance, her inexperience, feeling that she had no longer any sure support or prop. For how could she trust those who had drawn her into this hideous, this cruel business? Who, taking advantage at once of her wounded vanity, and her affection for her brother, had led her to this act, from which she now shrank in abhorrence?

There was only, of all about her, Uncle Ulick to whom she could turn, or on whom she could depend. And he, though he would not have stooped to this, was little better, she knew, than a broken reed. The sense of her loneliness, the knowledge that those about her used her for their own ends—and those the most unworthy—overwhelmed her; and in proportion as she had been proud and self-reliant, was her present abasement.

When the first passion of self-reproach had spent itself, she heard him calling her by name, and in a voice that stirred her heart-strings. She rose, first to her knees and then to her feet, and, averting her face, "I will open the door," she said, humbly and in a broken voice. "I have brought the key."

He did not answer, and she did not unlock. For as, still keeping her face averted that he might not see her tears, she turned the corner of the Tower to gain the door, her brother's head and shoulders rose above the level of the platform. As The McMurrrough stepped on to the latter from the path, he was in time to see her skirt vanishing. He saw no more. But his suspicions were aroused. He strode across the face of the Tower, turned the corner, and came on her in the act of putting the key in the lock.

"What are you doing?" he cried, in a terrible voice. "Are you mad?"

She did not answer, but neither did he pause for her answer. The imminence of the peril, the thought that the man whom he had so deeply wronged, and who knew him for the perjured thing he was, might in another minute be free—free to take what steps he pleased, free to avenge himself and punish his foes, rose up before him, and he thrust her roughly from the door. The key, not yet turned, came away in her hand, and he tried to snatch it from her.

"Give it me!" he cried. "Do you hear? Give it me!"

"I will not!" she cried. "No!"

"Give it up, I say!" he retorted. And this time he made good his hold on her wrist. He tried to force the key from her. "Let it go!" he panted, "or I shall hurt you!"

But he made a great mistake if he thought that he could coerce Flavia in that way. Her fingers only closed more tightly on the key. "Never!" she cried, struggling with him. "Never! I am going to let him out!"

"You coward!" a voice cried through the door. "Coward! Coward!" There was a sound of drumming on the door.

But Colonel John's voice and his blows were powerless to help, as James, in a frenzy of rage and alarm, gripped the girl's wrist, and twisted it. "Let it go! Let it go, you fool!" he cried brutally, "or I will break your arm!"

Her face turned white with pain, but for a moment she endured in silence. Then a shriek escaped her.

It was answered instantly. Neither he nor she had had eyes for aught but one another; and the hand that fell, and fell heavily, on James's shoulder was as unexpected as a thunderbolt.

"By Heaven, man," a voice cried in his ear. "Are you mad? Or is this the way you treat women in Kerry? Let the lady go! Let her go, I say!"

The command was needless, for at the first sound of the voice James had fallen back with a curse, and Flavia, grasping her bruised wrist with her other hand, reeled for support against the Tower wall. For a moment no one spoke. Then James, with scarcely a look at Payton—for he it was—bade her come away with him. "If you are not mad," he growled, "you'll have a care! You'll have a care, and come away, girl!"

"When I have let him out, I will," she answered, her eyes glowing sombrely as she nursed her wrist. In her, too, the old Adam had been raised.

"Give me the key!" he said for the last time.

"I will not," she said. "And if I did—" she continued, with a glance at Payton that reminded the unhappy McMurrrough that, with the secret known, the key was no longer of use—"if I did, how would it serve you?"

The McMurrrough turned his rage upon the intruder. "Devil take you, what business will it be of yours?" he cried. "Who are you to come between us, eh?"

Payton bowed. "If I offend," he said airily, "I am entirely at your service." He tapped the hilt of his sword. "You do not wear one, but I have no doubt you can use one. I shall be happy to give you satisfaction where and when you please. A time and place——"

But James did not stop to hear him out. He turned with an oath and a snarl, and went off—went off in such a manner that Flavia could not but see that the challenge was not to his taste. At another time she would have blushed for him. But his brutal violence had done more during the last ten minutes to depose his image from her heart than years of neglect and rudeness.

Payton saw him go, and, blessing the good fortune which had put him in a position to command the beauty's thanks, he turned to receive them. But Flavia was not looking at him, was not thinking of him. She had put the key in the lock and was trying to turn it. Her left wrist, however, was too weak, and the right was so strained as to be useless. She signed to him to turn the key, and he did so, and threw open the door, wondering much who was there and what it was all about.

He did not at once recognise the man who, pale and haggard, a mere ghost of himself, dragged himself up the three steps, and, exhausted by the effort, leant against the doorpost. But when Colonel John spoke and tried to thank the girl, he knew him.

He whistled. "You are Colonel Sullivan!" he said.

"The same, sir!" Colonel John murmured mechanically.

"Are you ill?"

"I am not well," the other replied with a sickly smile. The indignation which he had felt during the contest between the girl and her brother had been too much for his strength. "I shall be better presently," he added. He closed his eyes.

"We should be getting him below," Flavia said in an undertone.

Payton looked from one to the other. He was in a fog. "Has he been here long?" he asked.

"Nearly four days," she replied, with a shiver.

"And nothing to eat?"

"Nothing."

"The devil! And why?"

She did not stay to think how much it was wise to tell him. In her repentant mood she was anxious to pour herself out in self-reproach. "We wanted him to convey some property," she said, "as we wished."

"To your brother?"

"Ah, to him!" Then, seeing his astonishment, "It was mine," she added.

Payton knew that estates were much held in trust in that part, and he began to understand. He looked at her; but no, he did not understand now. For if the idea had been to constrain Colonel Sullivan to transfer her property to her brother, how did her interest match with that? He could only suppose that her brother had coerced her, and that she had given him the slip and tried to release the man—with the result he had witnessed.

One thing was clear. The property, large or small, was still hers. The Major looked with a thoughtful face at the smiling valley, with its cabins scattered over the slopes, at the lake and the fishing-boats, and the rambling slate-roofed house with its sheds and peat-stacks. He wondered.

No more was said at that moment, however, for Flavia saw that Colonel Sullivan's strength was not to be revived in an hour. He must be assisted to the house and cared for there. But in the meantime, and to lend some strength, she was anxious to give him such wine and food as he could safely take. To procure these she entered the room in which he had been confined.

As she cast her eyes round its dismal interior, marked the poor handful of embers that told of his long struggle with the cold, marked the one chair which he had saved—for to lie on the floor had been death—marked the beaten path that led from the chair to the window, and spoke of many an hour of painful waiting and of hope deferred, she saw the man in another, a more gentle, a more domestic aspect. She had seen the heroism, she now saw the pathos of his conduct, and tears came afresh to her eyes. "For me!" she murmured. "For me! And how had I treated him!"

Her old grievance against him was forgotten, wiped out of remembrance by his sufferings. She dwelt only on the treatment she had meted out to him.

When they had given him to eat and drink he assured them, smiling, that he could walk. But when he attempted to do so he staggered. "He will need a stronger arm than yours," Payton said, with a grin. "May I offer mine?"

For the first time she looked at him gratefully "Thank you," she said.

"I can walk," the Colonel repeated obstinately. "A little giddy, that is all." But in the end he needed all the help that both could give him. And so it happened that a few minutes later Luke Asgill, standing at the entrance to the courtyard, a little anxious indeed, but

aware of no immediate danger, looked along the road, and saw the three approaching, linked in apparent amity.

The shock was great, for James McMurrough had fled, cursing, into solitude and the hills, taking no steps to warn his ally. The sight, thus unforeseen, struck Asgill with the force of a bullet. Colonel John released, and in the company of Flavia and Payton! All his craft, all his coolness forsook him. He slunk out of sight by a back way, but not before Payton had marked his retreat.

CHAPTER XXII

THE SCENE IN THE PASSAGE

Asgill saw himself in the position of a commander whose force has been outflanked, and who has to decide on the instant how he may best re-form it on a new front. Flavia and Colonel Sullivan, Flavia and Payton, Payton and Colonel Sullivan—each of these conjunctions had for him a separate menace; each threatened either his suit for Flavia, or his standing in the house through which, and through which alone, he could hope to win her. In addition, the absence of James McMurrough at this critical moment left Asgill in the most painful perplexity. If James knew what had happened, why was he wanting at this moment, when it behoved them to decide, and to decide quickly, what line they would take?

Under the shadow of the great peat-stack at the back of the house, whither he had retired that he might make up his mind before he faced the three, Asgill bit his nails and cursed The McMurrough with all his heart, calling him a score of names, each worse than the other. It was, it must be, through his folly and mismanagement that the thing had befallen, that the prisoner had been released, that Payton had been let into the secret. The volley of oaths that flew from Asgill expressed no more than a tithe of his rage and his bewilderment.

How was he to get rid of Payton? How prevent Colonel John from resuming that sway in the house which he had exercised before? How nip in the bud that nascent sympathy, that feeling for him which Flavia's outbreak the night before had suggested? Or how, short of all this, was he to face either Payton or the Colonel?

Again a volley of oaths flew from him.

In council with James McMurrough he might have arranged a plan of action; at least, he would have learned from him what Payton knew. But James's absence ruined all. In the end, after waiting some time in the vain hope that he would appear, Asgill went in to supper.

Colonel Sullivan was not there; he was in no condition to descend. Nor was Flavia; whereon Asgill reflected, with chagrin, that probably she was attending upon the invalid. Payton was at table, with the two O'Beirnes, and three other buckeens. The Englishman, amused and uplifted by the discovery he had made, was openly disdainful of his companions; while the Irishmen, sullen and suspicious, were not aware how much he knew, nor all of them how much there was to know. If The McMurrough chose to imprison his strange and unpopular kinsman, it was nothing to them; nor a matter into which gentlemen eating at his table and drinking his potheen and claret were called upon to peer too closely.

The position was singular; for the English officer, partly by virtue of his mission and partly by reason of the knowledge he had gained, carried himself as if he held that ascendancy in the house which Colonel Sullivan had enjoyed—an ascendancy, like his, grudging and precarious, as the men's savage and furtive glances proved. But for his repute as a duellist they would have picked a quarrel with the visitor there and then. And but for the presence of his four troopers in the background they might have fallen upon him in some less regular fashion. As it was, they sat, eating slowly and eyeing him askance; and, without shame, were relieved when Asgill entered. They looked to him to clear up the situation and put the interloper in his right place. At any rate, the burden was now lifted from their shoulders.

"I'm fearing I'm late," Asgill said, as he took his seat. "Where'll The McMurrough be, I wonder?"

"Gone to meet your friend, I should think," Payton replied with a sneer.

Asgill maintained a steady face. "My friend?" he repeated. "Oh, Colonel Sullivan?"

"Yes, your friend who was to return to-day," the other retorted. "Have you seen anything of him?" he continued, with a grin.

Asgill fixed his eyes steadily on Payton's face. "I'm fancying you have the advantage of me," he said. "More by token, I'm thinking, Major, you have seen that same friend already."

"Maybe I have."

"And had a bout with him?"

"Eh?"

"And, faith, had the best of the bout, too!" Asgill continued coolly, and with his eyes fixed on the other's features, as if his one aim was to see if he had hit the mark. "So much the best that I'll be chancing a guess he's upstairs at this moment, and wounded! Leastwise, I hear you and the young lady brought him to the house between you, and him scarcely able to use his ten toes."

Payton, with his mouth open, glared at the speaker in a manner that at another time must have provoked him to laughter.

"Isn't that the fact?" Asgill asked coldly.

"The fact!" the other burst forth. "No, I'm cursed if it is! And you know it is not! You know as well as I do——" And with that he poured forth a version of the events of the afternoon, and of those leading up to them, which included not only the Colonel's release, but the treatment to which he had been subjected and the motive for it.

When he had done, "That's a strange story," Asgill said quietly, "if it's true."

"True?" Payton rejoined, laying his hand on a glass and speaking in a towering rage. "Damn you, you know it's true!"

"I know nothing about it," Asgill replied, with the utmost coolness.

"Nothing?"

"And for a good reason. Sure, and I'm the last person they would be likely to tell it to!"

"And you were not a party to it?" Payton cried.

"Why should I be?" Asgill rejoined, calmly cutting a slice of bread. "What have I to gain by robbing the young lady of her inheritance? I'd be more likely to lose by it than gain."

"Lose by it? Why?"

"That is my affair," Asgill answered. And he hummed:

They tried put the comether on Judy McBain:
One, two, three, one, two, three!
Cotter and crowder and Paddy O'Hea;
For who but she's owner of Ballymacshane?

He made his meaning so clear, and pointed it so audaciously before them all, that Payton, after scowling at him for some seconds with his hand on a glass as if he meant to throw it, dropped his eyes and his hand and fell into a gloomy study. He could not but own the weight of the other's argument. If Asgill was a pretender to the heiress's hand—and Payton did not doubt this—the last thought in his mind would be to divest her of her property.

Asgill read his thoughts, and presently, "I hope the wound is not serious?" he said.

"He is not wounded," the Major answered curtly. A few minutes before he would have flown out at the other; now he took the thrust quietly. He was thinking. Meanwhile the O'Beirnes and their fellows grinned their open-mouthed admiration of the bear-tamer; and by-and-by, concluding the fun was at an end, they went out one by one, until the two men were left together.

They sat some way apart, Payton brooding savagely, with his eyes on the table, Asgill toying with the things before him and from time to time glancing at the other. Each saw the prize clear before him; each saw the other in the way and wondered how he could best brush him from it. Payton cared for the girl herself, only as a toy that had caught his fancy; but he was sunk in debt, and his mouth watered for her possessions. Asgill cared, as has been said, little or nothing for the inheritance, but he swore that the other man should never live to possess the woman. "It is a pity," Payton meditated, "for, with his aid,

I could take the girl, willing or unwilling. She'd not be the first Irish girl who has gone to her marriage across the pommel!" While Asgill reflected that if he could find Payton alone on a dark night it would not be his small-sword would help him or his four troopers would find him! But it must not be at Morrinstown.

Each owned, with reluctance, that the other had advantages. Asgill was Irish, and known to Flavia, and had come to be favoured by her. But Payton, though English, was the younger, the handsomer, the better born, and, in his braggart fashion, the better bred. Both were Protestants; but if Asgill was the cleverer, Payton was an officer and a gentleman. The latter flattered himself that, given a little time, he would win, if not by favour, still by force or fraud. But, could he have looked into Asgill's heart, he would have trembled, perhaps he would have drawn back. For he would have known that, while Irish bogs were deep and Irish pikes were sharp, his life would not be worth one week's purchase if he wronged this girl. Bad man as Asgill was, his love was of no common kind, even as the man was no common man.

And he suspected the other; and he shook—ay, so that the table against which he leant trembled—with rage at the thought that Payton might offer the girl some rudeness. The suspicion weighed so heavily on him that he was fixed to see the other to his room that night. When Payton rose to go, he rose also; and when, by chance, Payton sat down again, he sat down also, with a look that betrayed his thoughts. At once the Englishman understood; and thenceforth they sat with frowning faces, each thinking more intently than before how he might thrust the other from his path; each more certain, with every moment, that, the other removed, his path to the goal was clear and open. Neither gave a thought to Colonel Sullivan, sleeping the sleep of exhaustion upstairs: Payton, because the Colonel seemed to him a middle-aged man, plain and grey; and Asgill, because a more immediate and pressing jealousy had thrust his mistrust of the Colonel from his mind.

There was claret on the table, and the Major, dull and bored, and resenting the other's vigilance, did not spare it. When he rose to his feet to retire he was heated and flushed, but not drunk. "Where's that young cub?" he asked, breaking the silence.

Asgill shrugged his shoulders. "I can't hope to fill his place," he said with a smooth smile. "But I will be doing the honours as well as I can."

"You are d—d officious, it seems to me," Payton growled. And then, more loudly, "I am going to bed," he said.

"In his absence," Asgill answered, with mock politeness, "I will have the honour of lighting you."

"You needn't trouble."

"Faith, and it's no trouble at all," Asgill replied in the same tone. And, taking two of the candles from the table, he preceded the Englishman up the stairs.

The gradual ascent of the lights and the men's mounting footsteps should have given Flavia warning of their coming. But either she disdained concealment or she was thinking of other things, for when they entered the passage beyond the landing they espied the girl standing, in what had been darkness, outside the Colonel's door. A pang shot through Asgill's heart, and he drew in his breath.

She raised her hand. "Ah," she said, "he has been crying out! But I think it was in his sleep. Will you be making as little noise as you can?"

Asgill did not answer, but Payton did. "Happy man!" he said. And, being in his cups, he said it in such a tone and with such a look that a deep blush crimsoned the girl's face.

Her eyes snapped. "Good-night," she said coldly.

Asgill continued to keep silence. Unfortunately Payton did not. "Wish I'd such a guardian!" he said with a chuckle. "I'd be a happy man then!" And, without thinking what he did, having Asgill's air in his head, he hummed, with his head on one side and a grin on his face:

"They tried put the comether on Judy McBain:
One, two, three, one, two, three!
Cotter and crowder and Paddy O'Hea;
For who but she's owner of Ballymacshane?"

Asgill's face was dark with passion, but "Goodnight" Flavia repeated coldly. And this time the displeasure in her tone silenced the Major. The two men went on to their rooms, though Asgill's hands itched to be at the other's throat. A moment later two doors closed sharply.

Flavia remained in the darkness of the passage, but she no longer listened—she thought.

Presently she went back to her room.

There, when the door had closed upon her, she continued to stand and to think. And the blush which the Major's insinuation had brought to her cheek still burned there. It was natural that Payton's words should direct her thoughts more closely and more intimately to the man outside whose door he had found her; nor less natural that she should institute a comparison between the two, should picture the manner of the one and the manner of the other, should consider how the one had treated her in an abnormal crisis, when he had held her struggling in his arms, when in her despair she had beaten his face with her hands, when, after her attempt on his life, he had subdued her by sheer force; and how the other had treated her in the few hours he had known her! And so comparing, she could not but find in the one a nobility, in the other a—a dreadfulness. For, looking back, and having Payton's words and manner fresh in her mind, she had to own that, in all his treatment of her, Colonel Sullivan, while opposing and thwarting her, had still, and always, respected her.

Strange to say, she could not now understand, much less could she sustain, that rage against him which had before carried her to such lengths. What had he done? How had he wronged her? She could find no sufficing answer. A curtain had fallen between the past and the present. Long years, it seemed to her, had elapsed, so that she could now see things in their due proportions and with a clear sight. The rising? It stood on a sudden very distant, very dim, a thing of the past, an enterprise lofty and romantic, but hopeless. She supposed that he had seen it in that light all through, and that for acting on what he saw she had hated him. The contemptuous words in which he had denounced it rang again in her ears, but they no longer kindled her resentment; they convinced. As one recovering from sickness looks back on the delusions of fever, Flavia reviewed the hopes and aspirations of the past month. She saw now that it was not in that remote corner, it was not with such forces as they could command, it was not with a handful of cotters and peasants, that Ireland could be saved, or the true faith restored!

She was still standing a pace within her door, and thinking such thoughts when a foot stumbled heavily on the stairs. She recognised it for James's footstep—she had heard him stumble on those stairs before—and she laid her hand on the latch. She had never had a real quarrel with him until now, and, bitterly as he had disappointed her, ruthlessly as he had destroyed her illusions about him, outrageously as he had treated her, she could not bear to sleep without making an attempt to heal the breach. She opened the door, and stepped out.

James's light was travelling up the stairs, but he had not himself reached the landing. She had just noted this when a door between her and the stairs opened, and Payton looked out. He saw her, and, still flushed with claret, he misunderstood her presence and her purpose. He stepped towards her.

"Thought so!" he chuckled. "Still listening, eh? Why not listen at my door? Then it would be a pretty man and a pretty maid. But I've caught you." He shot out his arm and tried to draw her towards him. "There's no one to see, and the least you can do is to give me a kiss for a forfeit!"

The girl recoiled, outraged and angry. But, knowing her brother was at hand, and seeing in a flash what might happen in the event of a collision, she did so in silence, hoping to escape before he came upon them. Unfortunately Payton misread her silence and took her movement for a show of feigned modesty. With a movement as quick as hers, he grasped her roughly, dragged her towards him and kissed her.

She screamed then in sheer rage—screamed with such passion and such unmistakable earnestness that Payton let her go and stepped back with an oath. As he did so he turned, and the turn brought him face to face with James McMurrrough.

The young man, tipsy and smarting with his wrongs, saw what was before his eyes—his sister in Payton's arms—but he saw something more. He saw the man who had thwarted him that day, and whom he had not at the time dared to beard. What he might have done had he been sober, matters not. Drink and vindictiveness gave him more than the courage he needed, and, with a roar of anger, he dashed the glass he was carrying—and its contents—into Payton's face.

The Englishman dropped where he was, and James stood over him, swearing, while the grease guttered from the tilted candle in his right hand. Flavia gasped, and, horror-struck, clutched James's arm as he lifted the candlestick, and made as if he would beat in the man's brains.

Fortunately a stronger hand than hers interfered. Asgill dragged the young man back. "Haven't you done enough?" he cried. "Would you murder the man, and his troopers in the house?"

"Ah, didn't you see, curse you, he——"

"I know, I know!" Asgill answered hoarsely. "But not now! Not now! Let him rise if he can! Let him rise, I say! Payton! Major!"

The moment James stood back the fallen man staggered to his feet, and though the blood was running down his face from a cut on the cheek-bone, he showed that he was less hurt than startled. "You'll give me satisfaction for this!" he muttered. "You'll give me satisfaction for this," he repeated, between his teeth.

"Ah, by G—d, I will!" James McMurrough answered furiously. "And kill you, too!"

"At eight to-morrow! Do you hear? At eight to-morrow! Not an hour later!"

"I'll not keep you waiting," James retorted.

Flavia leant almost fainting against her door. She tried to speak, tried to say something. But her voice failed her.

And Payton's livid, scowling, bleeding face was hate itself. "Behind the yews in the garden?" he said, disregarding her presence.

"Ah, I'll meet you there!" The McMurrough answered, pot-valiant. "And, more by token, order your coffin, for you'll need it!" Drink and rage left no place in his brain for fear.

"That will be seen—to-morrow," the Englishman answered, in a tone that chilled the girl's marrow. Then, with his kerchief pressed to his cheek to staunch the blood, he retreated into his room, and slammed the door. They heard him turn the key in it.

Flavia found her voice. She looked at her brother. "Ah, God!" she cried. "Why did I open my door?"

James, still pot-valiant, returned her look. "Because you were a fool, you slut!" he said. "But I'll spit him, never fear! Faith, and I'll spit him like a fowl!" In his turn he went on unsteadily to his room, disappeared within it, and closed the door. He took the candle with him, but from Asgill's open door, and from Flavia's, which stood ajar, enough light issued to illumine the passage faintly.

Flavia and Asgill remained together. Her eyes met his. "Ah, why did I open my door?" she cried. "Why did I open my door? Why did I?"

He had no comfort for her. He shook his head, but did not speak.

"He will kill him!" she said.

Asgill reflected in a heavy silence. "I will think what can be done," he muttered at last. "I will think! Do you go to bed!"

"To bed?" she cried.

"There is naught to be done to-night," he answered, in a low tone. "If the troopers were not with him—then indeed; but that is useless. And—his door is locked. Do you go to bed, and I will think what we can do!"

"To save James?" She laid her hand on Asgill's arm, and he quivered. "Ah, you will save him!" She had forgotten her brother's treatment of her earlier in the day.

"If I can," he said slowly. His face was damp and very pale. "If I can," he repeated. "But it will not be easy to save him honourably."

"What do you mean?" she whispered.

"He'll save himself, I fancy. But his honour——"

"Ah!" The word came from her in a cry of pain.

CHAPTER XXIII

BEHIND THE YEWS

Under the sky the pale softness of dawn had yielded place to the sun in his strength—in more poetical words, Aurora had given way to Phœbus—but within, the passages were

still grey and chill, and silent as though night's ghostly sentinels still walked them, when one of the bedchamber doors opened and a face peeped out. The face was Flavia's. The girl was too young, too full of life and vigour, to be altered by a single sleepless night, but the cold reflection of the whitewashed walls did that which watching had failed to do. It robbed her eyes of their brightness, her face of its colour, her hair of its lustre. She stood an instant, and gazed, frowning, at the doors that, in a row and all alike, hid nevertheless one a hope, and another a fear, and a third perhaps a tragedy. But drab, silent, closed, each within a shadow of its own, they told nothing. Presently the girl stepped forward—paused, scared by a board that creaked under her naked foot—then went on again. She stood now at one of the doors, and scratched on it with her nail.

No one answered the summons, and she pushed the door open and went in. And, as she had feared, enlightened by Asgill's hint and by what she had seen of her brother's conduct earlier in the day, she found. James was awake—wide awake—and sitting up in his bed, his arms clasped about his knees. His eyes met hers as she entered, and in his eyes, and in his form, huddled together as in sheer physical pain, she read beyond all doubt, beyond all mistake—fear. Why she had felt certain, courageous herself, that this was what she would find, she did not know. But there it was, as Asgill had foretold it, and as she had foreseen it, through the long, restless, torturing hours; as she had seen it, and now denied it, now, with a sick heart, owned its reality.

James tried to utter the oath that, deceiving her, might rid him of her presence. But his nerves, shaken by his overnight drink, could not command his voice even for that. His eyes dropped in shame, the muttered "What the plague will you be wanting at this hour?" was no more than a querulous whisper.

"I couldn't sleep," she said, avoiding his eyes.

"I, no more," he muttered. "Curse him! Curse him! Curse you, too! Why were you getting in his way? You've as good as murdered me with your tricks and your poses!"

"God forbid!" she exclaimed.

"Ah, you have!" he answered, rocking himself to and fro in his excitement. "If it were any one else, I'm as ready to fight as another! And why not? But he's killed four men, and he'll kill me! Oh, the differ, if I'd not come up at that minute! If I'd not come up at that minute!"

The picture of what he would have escaped had he mounted the stairs a minute later, of what he had brought on himself by mounting a moment earlier, was too much for him. Not a thought did he give to what might have happened to her had he come on the scene later; but, with all his cowardly soul laid bare, he rocked himself to and fro in a paroxysm of self-pity.

Yet he did not suffer more sorely, he did not wince more tenderly under the lash of his own terrors, than Flavia suffered; than she winced, seeing him thus, seeing at last her idol as he was—the braggadocio stripped from him, and the poor, cringing creature displayed. If her pride of race—and the fabled Wicklow kings, of whom she came, were often in her mind—if that pride needed correction, she had it here. If she had thought too much of her descent—and the more in proportion as fortune had straitened the line, and only in this corner of a downtrodden land was its greatness even a memory—she was chastened for it now! She suffered for it now! She could have wept tears of shame. And yet, so plain was the collapse of the man before her, and so futile words, that she did not think of reproach; even had she found heart to chide him, knowing that her words might send him to his death.

All her thought was, could she hide the blot? Could she mask the shame? Could she, at any rate, so veil it that this insolent Englishman, this bully of the conquering race, might not perceive it? That were worth so much that her own life, on this summer morning, seemed a small price to pay for it.

But, alas! she could not purchase it with her life. Only in fairy tales can the woman pass for the man, and Doris receive in her tender bosom the thrust intended for the sterner breast. Then how? How could they shun at least open disgrace, open dishonour? For it needed but a glance at her brother's pallid face and wandering eye to assure her that, brought to the test, he would flinch; that, brought to the field, he would prove unequal even to the task of cloaking his fears.

She sickened at the thought, and her eyes grew hard. Was this the man in whom she had believed? And when, presently, he turned on his side and hid his face in the pillow and groaned, she had small pity to spare for him. "Are you not well?" she asked.

"Can't you be seeing?" he answered fractiously; but for very shame he could not face her eyes. "Cannot you be seeing I am not fit to get up, let alone be meeting that devil? See how my hand shakes!"

"What is to be done, then?"

He cursed Payton thrice in a frenzy of rage. He beat the pillow with his fist.

"That does no good," she said.

"I believe you want to kill me!" he retorted, with childish passion. "I believe you want to see me dead! Why can't you be managing your own affairs, without—without—Oh, my God!" And then, in a dreadful voice, "My God, I shall be dead to-night! I shall be dead to-night! And you care nothing!"

He hid unmanly tears on his pillow, while she looked at the wall, pale to the lips and cut to the heart. Her worst misgivings, even those nightmare fears which haunt the dawn, had not pictured a thing so mean as this, a heart so low, a spirit so poor. And this was her brother, her idol, the last of the McMurrroughs of Morristown, he to whom she had fondly looked to revive the glories of the race! Truly she had not understood him, or others. She had been blind indeed, blind, blind!

She had spoken to Luke Asgill the night before. He guessed, if he did not know the worst, and he would help her, she believed. But for that she would have turned, as her thoughts did turn, to Colonel John. But he lay prostrate, and, if she could have brought herself to go to him, he was in no state to give aid. The O'Beirnes were out of the question; she could not tell them. Youth has no pity, makes no allowance, expects the utmost, and a hundred times they had heard James brag and brawl. They would not understand, they would not believe. And Uncle Ulick was away.

There remained only Luke Asgill, who had offered his help.

"If you are not well," she said, in the same hard voice, "shall I be telling Mr. Asgill? He may contrive something."

The man cringing in the bed leapt at the hope, as he would have leapt at any hope. Nor was he so bemused by fear as not to reflect that, whatever Flavia asked, Asgill would do. "Ah, tell him," he cried, raising himself on his elbow. "Do you be telling him! He can make him—wait, may be."

At that moment she came near to hating her brother. "I will send him to you," she said.

"No!" he cried anxiously. "No! Do you be telling him! You tell him! Do you hear? I'm not so well to see him."

She shivered, seeing plainly the cowardice, the unmixed selfishness of the course he urged. But she had not the heart to answer him. She went from the room without another word, and, going back to her own chamber, she dressed. By this time it wanted not much of seven. The house was astir, the June sunshine was pouring with the songs of birds through the windows, she heard one of the O'Beirnes stumble downstairs. Next Asgill opened his door and passed down. In a twinkling she slipped out and followed him. At the bottom of the staircase he turned, hearing her footstep behind him, but she made a sign to him to go on, and led him into the open air. Nor when they were outside did she speak until she had put the courtyard between herself and the house.

For she would have hidden their shame from all if she could! Even to say what she had to say to one, and though he already guessed the truth, cost her in pain and humiliation more than her brother had paid for aught in his selfish life. But it had to be said, and, after a pause, and with eyes averted, "My brother is ill," she faltered. "He cannot meet—that man, this morning. It is—as you feared. And—what can we do?"

In another case Luke Asgill would have blessed the chance that linked him with her, that wrought a tie between them, and cast her on his help. But he had guessed, before she opened her mouth, what she had to say—nay, for hours he had lain sleepless on his bed, with eyes staring into the darkness, anticipating it. He had been certain of the issue—he knew James McMurrrough; and, being a man who loved Flavia indeed, but loved life also, he had foreseen, with the cold sweat on his brow, what he would be driven to do.

He made no haste to answer, therefore, and his tone, when he did answer, was dull and lifeless. "Is it ill he is?" he said. "It's a bad morning to be ill, and a meeting on hand."

She did not answer.

"Is he too bad to stand?" he continued. He made no attempt to hide his comprehension or his scorn.

"I don't say that," she faltered.

"Perhaps he told you," Asgill said—and there was nothing of the lover in his tone—"to speak to me?"

She nodded.

"It is I am to—put it off, I suppose?"

"If it be possible," she cried. "Oh, if it be possible! Is it?"

He stood, thinking, with a gloomy face. From the first he had seen that there were two ways only of extricating The McMurrugh. The one by a mild explanation, which would leave his honour in the mud. The other by an explanation after a different fashion, *vi et armis, vehementer*, with the word "liar" ready to answer to the word "coward." But he who gave this last explanation must be willing and able to back the word with the deed, and stop cavilling with the sword-point.

Now, Asgill knew the Major's skill with the sword; none better. And under other circumstances the Justice—cold, selfish, scheming—would have gone many a mile about before he entered upon a quarrel with him. None the less, love and much night-thinking had drawn him to contemplate this very thing. For surely, if he did this and lived, Flavia would smile on him. Surely, if he saved her brother's honour, or came as near to saving it as driving the foul word down his opponent's throat could bring him, she would be won. It was a forlorn, it was a desperate expedient. For no worldly fortune, for no other advantage, would Luke Asgill have faced the Major's sword-point. But, whatever he was, he loved. He loved! And for the face and the form beside him, and for the quality of soul within them that shone from the girl's eyes, and made her what she was, and to him different from all other women, he had made up his mind to run the risk.

It went for something in his decision that he believed that Flavia, if he failed her, would go to the one person in the house who had no cause to fear Payton—to Colonel Sullivan. If she did that, Asgill was sure that his own chance was at an end. This was his chance. It lay with him now, to-day, at this moment—to dare or to retire, to win her favour at the risk of his life, or to yield her to another. In the chill morning hour he had discovered that the choice lay before him, that he must risk all or lose all: and he had decided. That decision he now announced.

"I will make it possible," he said slowly, questioning in his mind whether he could make terms with her—whether he dared make terms with her. "I will make it possible," he repeated, still more slowly, and with his eyes fixed on her face.

"If you could!" she cried, clasping her hands.

"I will!" he said, a sullen undertone in his voice. His eyes still dwelt darkly on her. "If he raises an objection, I will fight him—myself!"

She shrank from him. "Ah, but I can't ask that!" she cried, trembling.

"It is that or nothing."

"That or——"

"There is no other way," he said. He spoke with the same ungraciousness; for, try as he would, and though the habit and the education of a life cried to him to treat with her and make conditions, he could not; and he was enraged that he could not.

The more as her quivering lips, her wet eyes, her quick mounting colour, told of her gratitude. In another moment she might, almost certainly she would, have said a word fit to unlock his lips. And he would have spoken; and she would have pledged herself. But fate, in the person of old Darby, intervened. Timely or untimely, the butler appeared in the distant doorway, cried "Hist!" and, by a backward gesture, warned them of some approaching peril.

"I fear——" she began.

"Yes, go!" Asgill replied, almost roughly. "He is coming, and he must not find us together."

She fled swiftly, but the garden gate had barely closed on her skirts before Payton issued from the courtyard. The Englishman paused an instant in the gateway, his sword under his arm and a handkerchief in his hand. Thence he looked up and down the road with an air of scornful confidence that provoked Asgill beyond measure. The sun did not seem bright enough for him, nor the air scented to his liking. Finally he approached the Irishman, who, affecting to be engaged with his own thoughts, had kept his distance.

"Is he ready?" he asked, with a sneer.

With an effort Asgill controlled himself. "He is not," he said.

"At his prayers, is he? Well, he'll need them."

"He is not, to my knowledge," Asgill replied. "But he is ill."

Payton's face lightened with a joy not pleasant to see. "A coward!" he said coolly. "I am not surprised! Ill is he? Ay, I know that illness. It's not the first time I've met it."

Asgill had no wish to precipitate a quarrel. On the contrary, he had made up his mind to gain time if he could; at any rate, to put off the *ultima ratio* until evening, or until the next morning. Only in the last resort had he determined to fling off the mask. But at that word "coward," though he knew it to be well deserved, his temper, sapped by the knowledge that love was forcing him into a position which reason repudiated, gave way, and he spoke his true thoughts.

"What a d—d bully you are, Payton!" he said, in his slowest tone. "Sure, and you insult the man's sister in your drink——"

"What's that to you?"

"You insult the man's sister," Asgill persisted coolly, "and because he treats you like the tipsy creature you are, you'd kill him like a dog."

Payton turned white. "And you, too," he said, "if you say another word! What in Heaven's name is amiss with you, man, this morning? Are you mad?"

"I'll not hear the word 'coward' used of the family—I'll soon be one of!" Asgill returned, speaking on the spur of the moment, and wondering at himself the moment he had made the statement. "That's what I'm meaning! Do you see? And if you are for repeating the word, more by token, it'll be all the breakfast you'll have, for I'll cram it down your ugly throat!"

Payton stared dumbfounded, divided between rage and astonishment. But the former was not slow to get the upper hand, and "Enough said," he replied, in a voice that trembled, but not with fear. "If you are willing to make it good, you'll be coming this way."

"Willingly!" Asgill answered.

"I'll have one of my men for witness. Ay, that I will! I don't trust you, Mr. Asgill, and that's flat. Get you whom you please! In five minutes, in the garden, then?"

Asgill nodded. The Englishman looked once more at him to make sure that he was sober; then he turned on his heel and went back through the courtyard. Asgill remained alone.

He had taken the step there was no retracing. He had cast the dice, and the next few minutes would decide whether it was for life or death. He had done it deliberately; yet at the last he had been so carried away by impulse that, as he stood there, looking after the man he had insulted, looking on the placid water glittering in the early sunshine, looking along the lake-side road, by which he had come, he could hardly credit what had happened, or that in a moment he had thrown for a stake so stupendous, that in a moment he had changed all. The sunshine lost its warmth and grew pale, the hills lost their colour and their beauty, as he reflected that he might never see the one or the other again, might never return by that lake-side road by which he had come; as he remembered that all his plans for his aggrandisement, and they were many and clever, might end this day, this morning, this hour! Life! It was that, it was all, it was the future, with its pleasures, hopes, ambitions, that he had staked. And the stake was down. He could not now take it up. It might well be, for the odds were great against him, that it was to this day that all his life had led up; that life by which men would by-and-by judge him, recalling this and that, this chicane and that extortion, thanking God that he was dead, or perhaps one here and there shrugging his shoulders in good-natured regret.

From the hedge-school in which he had first grasped the clue-line of his life, to the day when his father had encouraged him to "turn Protestant," that he might the better exploit his Papist neighbours, ay, and forward to this day on which, at the bidding of a woman, he had given the lie to his instincts, his training, and his education—from the one to the other he saw his life stretched out before him! And he could have cried upon his folly. Yet for that woman——"

"Faith, Mr. Asgill," cried a voice in his ear, "it's if you're ill, the Major's asking. And, by the power, it's not very well you're looking this day!"

Asgill eyed the interrupter—it was Morty O'Beirne—with a sternness which his pallor made more striking. "I am coming," he said, "I am going to fight him."

"The devil you are!" the young man answered. "Now, are you meaning? This morning that ever is?"

"Ay, now. Where is——"

He stopped on the word, and was silent. Instead, he looked across the courtyard in the direction of the house. If he might see her again. If he might speak to her. But, no. Yet—

was it certain that she knew? That she understood? And if she understood, would she know that he had gone to the meeting well-nigh without hope, aware against what skill he pitted himself, and how large, how very large were the odds against him?

"But, faith, and it's no jest fighting him, if the least bit in life of what I've heard be true!" Morty said, a cloud on his face. He looked uncertainly from Asgill to the house and back. "Is it to be doing anything you want me?"

"I want you to come with me and see it out," Asgill said. He wheeled brusquely to the garden gate, but when he was within a pace of it he paused and turned his head. "Mr. O'Beirne," he said, "I'm going in by this gate, and it's not much to be expected I'll come out any way but feet first. Will you be telling her, if you please, that I knew that same?"

"I will," Morty answered, genuinely distressed. "But I'm asking, is there no other way?"

"There is none," Asgill said. And he opened the gate.

Payton was waiting for him on the path under the yew-trees, with two of his troopers on guard in the background. He had removed his coat and vest, and stood, a not ungraceful figure, in the sunshine, bending his rapier and feeling its point with his thumb. He was doing this when his eyes surprised his opponent's entrance, and, without desisting from his employment, he smiled.

If the other's courage had begun to wane—but, with all his faults, Asgill was brave—that smile would have restored it. For it roused in him a stronger passion than fear—the passion of hatred. He saw in the man before him, the man with the cruel smile, who handled his weapon with a scornful ease, a demon—a demon who, in pure malice, without reason and without cause, would take his life, would rob him of joy and love and sunshine, and hurl him into the blackness of the gulf. And he was seized with a rage at once fierce and deliberate. This man, who would kill him, and whom he saw smiling before him, he would kill! He thirsted to set his foot upon his throat and squeeze, and squeeze the life out of him! These were the thoughts that passed through his mind as he paused an instant at the gate to throw off the encumbering coat. Then he advanced, drawing his weapon as he moved, and fixing his eyes on Payton; who, for his part, reading the other's thoughts in his face—for more than once he had seen that look—put himself on his guard without a word.

Asgill had no more than the rudimentary knowledge of the sword which was possessed in that day by all who wore it. He knew that, given time and the decent observances of the fencing-school, he would be a mere child in Payton's hands; that it would matter nothing whether the sun were on this side or that, or his sword the longer or the shorter by an inch. The moment he was within reach therefore, and his blade touched the other's he rushed in, lunging fiercely at his opponent's breast and trusting to the vigour of his attack and the circular sweep of his point to protect himself. Not seldom has a man skilled in the subtleties of the art found himself confused and overcome by this mode of attack. But Payton had met his man too often on the green to be taken by surprise. He parried the first thrust, the second he evaded by stepping adroitly aside. By the same movement he put the sun in Asgill's eyes.

Again the latter rushed in, striving to get within his opponent's guard; and again Payton stepped aside, and allowed the random thrust to pass wasted under his arm. Once more the same thing happened—Asgill rushed in, Payton parried or evaded with the ease and coolness of long-learned skill. By this time Asgill, forced to keep his blade in motion, was beginning to breathe quickly. The sweat stood on his brow, he struck more and more wildly, and with less and less strength or aim. He was aware—it could be read in the glare of his eyes—that he was being reduced to the defensive; and he knew that to be fatal. An oath broke from his panting lips and he rushed in again, even more recklessly, more at random than before, his sole object now to kill the other, to stab him at close quarters, no matter what happened to himself.

Again Payton avoided the full force of the rush, but this time after a different fashion. He retreated a step. Then, with a flicker and a girding of steel on steel, Asgill's sword flew from his hand, and at the same instant—or so nearly at the same instant that the disarming and the thrust might have seemed to an untrained eye one motion—Payton turned his wrist and his sword buried itself in Asgill's body. The unfortunate man recoiled with a gasping cry, staggered and sank sideways to the ground.

"By the powers," O'Beirne exclaimed, springing forward, "a foul stroke! By G—d, a foul stroke! He was disarmed. I—"

"Have a care what you say!" Payton answered slowly, and in a terrible tone. "You'd do better to look to your friend—for he'll need it."

"It's you that struck him after he was disarmed!" Morty cried, almost weeping with rage. "Devil a bit of a chance did you give him! You—"

"Silence, I say!" Payton answered, in a fierce tone of authority. "I know my duty; and if you know yours you'll look to him."

He turned aside with that, and thrust the point of his sword twice and thrice into the sod before he sheathed the weapon. Meanwhile Morty had cast himself down beside the fallen man, who, speechless, and with his head hanging, continued to support himself on his hand. A patch of blood, bright-coloured, was growing slowly on his vest: and there was blood on his lips.

"Oh, whirra, whirra, what'll I do?" the Irishman exclaimed, helplessly wringing his hands. "What'll I do for him? He's murdered entirely!"

Payton, aided by one of the troopers, was putting on his coat and vest. He paused to bid the other help the gentleman. Then, with a cold look at the fallen man, for whom, though they had been friends, as friends go in the world, he seemed to have no feeling except one of contempt, he walked away in the direction of the rear of the house.

By the time he reached the back door the alarm was abroad, the maids were running to and fro and screaming, and on the threshold he encountered Flavia. Pale as the stricken man, she looked on Payton with an eye of horror, and, as he stood aside to let her pass, she drew—unconscious what she did—her skirts away, that they might not touch him.

He went on, with rage in his heart. "Very good, my lady," he muttered, "very good! But I've not done with you yet. I know a way to pull your pride down. And I'll go about it!"

He might have moved less at ease, he might have spoken less confidently, had he, before he retired from the scene of the fight, cast one upward glance in the direction of the house, had he marked an opening high up in the wall of yew, and noticed through that opening a window, so placed that it alone of all the windows in the house commanded the scene of action. For then he would have discovered at that casement a face he knew, and a pair of stern eyes that had followed the course of the struggle throughout, noted each separate attack, and judged the issue—and the man.

And he might have taken warning.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE PITCHER AT THE WELL

The surgeon of that day was better skilled in letting blood than in staunching it, in cupping than in curing. It was well for Luke Asgill, therefore, that none lived nearer than distant Tralee. It was still more fortunate for him that there was one in the house to whom the treatment of such a wound as his was an everyday matter, and who was guided in his practice less by the rules of the faculty than by those of experience and common sense.

Even under his care Asgill's life hung for many hours in the balance. There was a time, when he was at his weakest, when his breath, in the old phrase, would not raise a feather, and those about his bed despaired of detaining the spirit fluttering to be free. The servants were ready to raise the "keen," the cook sought the salt for the death-plate. But Colonel John, mindful of many a man found living on the field hours after he should, by all the rules, have died, did not despair; and little by little, though the patient knew nothing of the battle which was maintained for his life, the Colonel's skill and patience prevailed. The breathing grew stronger and more regular; and, though it seemed likely that fever would follow and the end must remain uncertain, death, for the moment, was repelled.

Now, he who possesses the habit of command in emergencies, who, when others are distraught and wring their hands, knows both what to do and how to do it, cannot fail to impress the imagination. Unsupported by Flavia, unaided by her deft fingers, Colonel John might have done less: yet she who seconded him the most ably, who fetched and carried for him, and shrank from no sight of blood or wound, was also the one who yielded him the fullest meed, and succumbed the most completely to his ascendancy. Flavia's feelings towards her cousin had been altering hour by hour; and this experience of him hastened her tacit surrender. She had seen him in many parts. It had been hers to witness, by turns, his defeat and his triumph. She had felt aversion, born of his unwelcome appearance in the character of her guardian, yield to a budding interest, which his opposition to her plans, and his success in foiling them, had converted anew into disdain and hatred.

But in all strong passions lurk the seeds of the opposite. The object of hatred is the object of interest. So it had been in her case. The very lengths to which she had allowed herself to be carried against him had revolted her, and pity had taken the place of hatred. Nor pity alone. For, having seen how high he could rise in adversity, what courage, what patience, what firmness he could exert—for her sake who persecuted him—she now saw also how naturally he took the lead of others, how completely he dominated the crowd. And while she no longer marvelled at the skill with which he had baffled the Admiral and Cammock, and thwarted plans which she began to appraise at their value, she found herself relying upon him, as she watched him moving to and fro, to an extent which startled and frightened her.

Was it only that morning that she had trembled for her brother's life? Was it only that morning that she had opened her eyes and known him craven, unworthy of his name and race? Was it only that morning that she had sent into peril the man who lay wan and moribund before her; only that morning that she had felt her unhappiness greater than she could bear, her difficulties insuperable, her loneliness a misery? For if that were so why did she now feel so different? Why did she now feel inexplicably relieved, inconceivably at ease, almost happy? Why, with the man whom she had thrust into peril lying *in extremis* before her, and claiming all her gratitude, did she find her mind straying to another? Finally, why, with her troubles the same, with her brother no less dishonoured, were her thoughts neither with him nor with herself, but with the man whose movements she watched, whose hands touched hers in the work of tendance, whose voice once chid her sharply—and gave her an odd pang of pleasure—who, low-toned, ordered her hither and thither, and was obeyed?

She asked herself the question as she sat in the darkened room, watching. And in the twilight she blushed. Once, at a crisis, Colonel John had taken her roughly by the wrist and forced her to hold the bandage so, while he twisted it. She looked at the wrist now, and, fancying she could see the imprint of his fingers on it, she blushed more deeply.

Presently there came, as they sat listening to the fluttering breath, a low scratching at the door. At a sign from Colonel Sullivan, who sat on the inner side of the bed, she stole to it and found Morty O'Beirne on the threshold. He beckoned to her, and, closing the door, she followed him downstairs, to where, in the living-room, she found the other O'Beirne standing sheepishly beside the table.

"It's not knowing what to do, we are," Morty said.

He did not look at her, nor did his brother. Her heart sank. "What is it?" she asked.

"The fiend's in the man," Morty replied, tapping with his fingers on the table. "But—it's you will be telling her, Phelim."

"It's he that's not content," Phelim muttered. "The thief of the world!"

"Curse him!" cried his brother.

"Not content?" she echoed. "Not content? After what he's done?" For an instant her eyes flashed hot indignation, her very hair seemed to rise about her head. Then the downcast demeanour of the two, their embarrassment, their silence, told the story; and she gasped. "He's for—fighting my brother?" she whispered.

"He'll be content with no less," Morty answered, with a groan. "Bad cess to him! And The McMurrrough—sure it's certain death, and who's blaming him, but he's no stomach for it. And whirra, whirra, on that the man says he'll be telling it in Tralee that he'd not meet him, and as far as Galway City he'll cut his comb for him! Ay, bedad, he says that, and that none of his name shall show their face there, night or day, fair or foul, race or cockfight—the bloody-minded villain!"

She listened, despairing. The house was quiet, as houses in the country are of an afternoon, and the quieter for the battle with death which was joined in the darkened room upstairs. Her thoughts were no longer with the injured man, however, but in that other room, where her brother lurked in squalid fear—fear that in a nameless man might have been pardoned, but in him, in a McMurrrough, head of his race, last of his race, never! She came of heroes, to her the strain had descended pure and untainted, and she would rather have seen him dead. The two men before her—who knew, alas! who knew!—she was sure that they would have taken up the glove, unwillingly and perforce, perhaps, but they would have fought! While her brother, The McMurrrough— But even while she thought of it, she saw through the open door the figure of a man saunter slowly past the courtyard gates, his sword under his arm. It was the Englishman. She felt the added sting. Her cheek, that had been pale, burned darkly, her eyes shone.

"St. Patrick fly away with the toad and the ugly smile of him!" Morty said. "I'm thinking it's between the two of us, Phelim, my jewel! And he that's killed will help the other."

"God forbid!" Flavia cried, pale with horror at the thought. "Not another!"

"But sure, and I'm not seeing how else we'll be rid of him handsomely," Phelim replied.

"No!" she repeated firmly. "No! I forbid it!"

Again the man sauntered by the entrance, and again he cast the same insolent, smiling look at the house. They watched him pass, an ominous shadow in the sunshine, and Flavia shuddered.

"But what will you be doing, then?" Morty asked, rubbing his chin in perplexity. "He's saying that if The McMurrrough'll not meet him by four o'clock, and it isn't much short of it, he'll be riding this day! And him once gone he's a bitter tongue, and 'twill be foul shame on the house!"

Flavia stood silent in thought, but at length she drew in her breath sharply—she had made up her mind. "I know what I will do," she said. "I will tell him all." And she turned to go.

"It's not worth the shoe-leather!" Morty cried after her, letting his scorn of James be seen.

But she was out of hearing, and when she returned a minute later she was followed, not by James McMurrrough, but by Colonel Sullivan. The Colonel's face, seen in the full light, had lost the brown of health; it was thin and peaky, and still bore signs of privation. But he trod firmly, and his eyes were clear and kind. If he was aware of the O'Beirnes' embarrassment, his greeting did not betray it.

"I am willing to help if I can," he said. "What is your trouble?"

"Tell him," Flavia said, averting her face.

They told him lamely—they were scarcely less jealous of the honour of the house than she was—in almost the same words in which they had broken the news to her. "And the curse of Cromwell on me, but he's parading up and down now," Morty continued, "and cocking his eye at the sun-dial whenever he passes, as much as to say, 'Is it coming, you are?' till the heart's fairly melted in me with the rage!"

"And it's shame on us we let him be!" cried Phelim.

Colonel John did not answer. He was silent even when, under the eyes of all, the ominous shadow passed again before the entrance gates—came and went. He was so long silent that Flavia turned to him at last, and held out her hands. "What shall we do?" she cried—and in that cry she betrayed her new dependence on him. "Tell us!"

"It is hard to say," Colonel John answered gravely. His face was very gloomy, and to hide it or his thoughts he turned from them and went to one of the windows—that very window through which Uncle Ulick and he had looked at his first coming. He gazed out, not that he might see, but that he might think unwatched.

They waited, the men expecting little, but glad to be rid of some part of the burden, Flavia with a growing sense of disappointment. She did not know for what she had hoped, or what she had thought that he would do. But she had been confident that he could help; and it seemed that he could do no more than others. Neither to her, nor to the men, did it seem as strange as it was that they should turn to him, against whose guidance they had lately revolted so fiercely.

He came back to them presently, his face sad and depressed. "I will deal with it," he said—and he sighed. "You can leave it to me. Do you," he continued, addressing Morty, "come with me, Mr. O'Beirne."

He was for leaving them with that, but Flavia put herself between him and the door. She fixed her eyes on his face. "What are you going to do?" she asked in a low voice.

"I will tell you all—later," he replied gently.

"No, now!" she retorted, controlling herself with difficulty. "Now! You are not going—to fight him?"

"I am not going to fight," he answered slowly.

But her heart was not so easily deceived as her ear. "There is something under your words," she said jealously. "What is it?"

"I am not going to fight," he replied gravely, "but to punish. There is a limit." Even while he spoke she remembered in what circumstances those words had been used. "There is a limit," he repeated solemnly. "He has the blood of four on his head, and another lies at death's door. And he is not satisfied. He is not satisfied! Once I warned him. To-day the time for warning is past, the hour for judgment is come. God forgive me if I err, for vengeance is His and it is terrible to be His hand." He turned to Phelim, and, in the same

stern tone, "my sword is broken," he said. "Fetch me the man's sword who lies upstairs."

Phelim went, awe-stricken, and marvelling. Morty remained, marvelling also. And Flavia—but, as she tried to speak, Payton's shadow once more came into sight at the entrance-gates and went slowly by, and she clapped her hand to her mouth that she might not scream. Colonel Sullivan saw the action, understood, and touched her softly on the shoulder. "Pray," he said, "pray!"

"For you!" she cried in a voice that, to those who had ears, betrayed her heart. "Ah, I will pray!"

"No, for him," he replied. "For him now. For me when I return."

She dropped on her knees before a chair, and, shuddering, hid her face in her hands. And almost at once she knew that they were gone, and that she was alone in the room.

Then, whether she prayed most or listened most, or the very intensity of her listening was itself prayer—prayer in its highest form—she never knew; but only that, whenever in the agony of her suspense she raised her head from the chair to hear if there was news, the common sounds of afternoon life in the house and without lashed her with a dreadful irony. The low whirr of a spinning-wheel, a girl's distant chatter, the cluck of a hen in the courtyard, the satisfied grunt of a roving pig, all bore home to her heart the bitter message that, whatever happened, and though nightfall found her lonely in a dishonoured home, life would proceed as usual, the men and the women about her would eat and drink, and the smallest things would stand where they stood now—unchanged, unmoved.

What was that? Only the fall of a spit in the kitchen, or the clatter of a pot-lid. Would they never come? Would she never know? At this moment—what was that? That surely was something. They were returning! In a moment she would know. She rose to her feet and stared with stony eyes at the door. But when she had listened long—it was nothing. Nothing! And then—ah, that surely was something—was news—was the end! They were coming now. In a moment she would know. Yes, they were coming. In a moment she would know. She pressed her hands to her breast.

She might have known already, for, had she gone to the door, she would have seen who came. But she could not go. She could not move.

And he, when he came in, did not look at her. He walked from the threshold to the hearth, and—strange coincidence—he set the unsheathed blade he carried in the self-same angle, beside the fire-back, from which she had once taken a sword to attempt his life. And still he did not look at her, but stood with bowed head.

At last he turned. "God forgive us all," he said.

She broke into wild weeping. And what her lips, babbling incoherent thanksgiving, did not tell him, the clinging of her arms, as she hung on him, conveyed.

CHAPTER XXV

PEACE

Uncle Ulick, with the mud of the road still undried on his boots, and the curls still stiff in the wig which the town barber at Mallow had dressed for him, rubbed his chin with his hand and, covertly looking round the room, owned himself puzzled. He had returned a week later to the day than he had arranged to return. But had his absence run into months instead of weeks the lapse of time had not sufficed to explain the change which he felt, but could not define, in his surroundings.

Certainly old Darby looked a thought more trim, and the room a trifle better ordered than he had left them. But he was sensible, though vaguely, that the change did not stop there—perhaps did not begin there. Full of news of the outer world as he was, he caught himself pausing in mid-career to question himself. And more than once his furtive eyes scanned his companions' faces for the answer his mind refused to give.

An insolent Englishman had come, and given reins to the *'ubris* that was in him, and, after running Luke Asgill through the body, had paid the penalty—in fight so fair that the very troopers who had witnessed it could make no complaint nor raise trouble. So much Uncle Ulick had learned. But he had not known Payton, and, exciting as the episode sounded, it did not explain the difference in the atmosphere of the house. Where he had left enmity

and suspicion, lowering brows and a silent table, he found smiles, and easiness, and a cheerful sense of well-being.

Again he looked about him. "And where will James be?" he asked, for the first time missing his nephew.

"He has left us," Flavia said slowly, with her eyes on Colonel Sullivan.

"It's away to Galway City he is," Morty O'Beirne explained with a chuckle.

"The saints be between us and harm!" Uncle Ulick exclaimed in astonishment. "And why's he there?"

"The story is long," said Colonel Sullivan.

"But I can tell it in a few words," Flavia continued with dignity. "And the sooner it is told the better. He has not behaved well, Uncle Ulick. And at his request and with—the legal owner's consent—it's I have agreed to pay him one-half of the value of the property."

"The devil you have!" Uncle Ulick exclaimed, in greater astonishment. And, pushing back his seat and rubbing his huge thigh with his hand, he looked from one to another. "By the powers! if I may take the liberty of saying so, young lady, you've done a vast deal in a very little time—faith, in no time at all, at all!" he added.

"It was done at his request," Flavia answered gravely.

Uncle Ulick continued to rub his thigh and to stare. These things were very surprising. "And they're telling me," he said, "that Luke Asgill's in bed upstairs?"

"He is."

"And recovering?"

"He is, glory be to God!"

"Nor that same's not the best news of him," Morty said with a grin. "Nor the last."

"True for you!" Phelim cried. "If it was the last word you spoke!"

"What are you meaning?" Uncle Ulick asked.

"He's turned," said Morty. "No less! Turned! He's what his father was before him, Mr. Sullivan—come back to Holy Church, and not a morning but Father O'Hara's with him making his soul and what not!"

"Turned!" Uncle Ulick cried. "Luke Asgill, the Justice? Boys, you're making fun of me!" And, unable to believe what the O'Beirnes told him, he looked to Flavia for confirmation.

"It is true," she said.

"Bedad, it is?" Uncle Ulick replied. "Then I'll not be surprised in all my life again! More by token, there's only one thing left to hope for, my jewel, and that's certain. Cannot you do the same to the man that's beside you?"

Flavia glanced quickly at Colonel John, then, with a heightened colour, she looked again at Uncle Ulick. "That's what I cannot do," she said.

But the blush, and the smile that accompanied it, and something perhaps in the way she hung towards her neighbour as she turned to him, told Uncle Ulick all. The big man smacked the table with his hand till the platters leapt from the board. "Holy poker!" he cried, "is it that you're meaning? And I felt it, and I didn't feel it, and you sitting there forenent me, and prating as if butter wouldn't melt in your mouth! It is so, is it? But there, the red of your cheek is answer enough!"

For Flavia was blushing more brightly than before, and Colonel John was smiling, and the two young men were laughing openly.

"You must get Flavia alone," Colonel John said, "and perhaps she'll tell you."

"Bedad, it's true, and I felt it in the air," Ulick Sullivan answered, smiling all over his face. "Ho, ho! Ho, ho! Indeed you've not been idle while I've been away. But what does Father O'Hara say, eh?"

"The Father——" Flavia began in a small voice.

"Ay, what does the Father say?"

"He says," Flavia continued, looking down demurely, "that it's a rare stick that's no bend in it, and—and 'tis very little use looking for it on a dark night. Besides, he——" she

glanced at her neighbour, "he said he'd be master, you know, and what could I do?"

"Then it's the very wrong way he's gone about it!" Uncle Ulick cried, with a chuckle. "For there's no married man that I know that's master! It's you, my jewel, have put the comether on him, and I'll trust you to keep it there!"

But into that we need not go. Our task is done. Whether Flavia's high spirit and her husband's gravity, her youth and his experience travelled the road together in unbroken amity, or with no more than the jars which the accidents of life occasion, however close the link, it does not fall within this story to tell. Nor need we say whether Father O'Hara proved as discreet in the long run as he had been liberal in the beginning. Probably the two had their bickerings which did not sever love. But one thing may be taken for granted; in that part of Kerry the King over the Water, if his health was sometimes drunk of an evening, stirred up no second trouble. Nor, when the '45 convulsed Scotland, and shook England to its centre, did one man at Morrinstown raise his hand or lose his life. For so much at least that windswept corner of Kerry, beaten year in and year out by the Atlantic rollers, had to thank Colonel Sullivan.

Nor for that only. In many unnamed ways his knowledge of the world blessed those about him. The small improvements, the little advances in civilisation which the English intruders were introducing into those parts, he adopted: a more orderly house, an increased neatness, a few more acres brought under the plough or the spade, whole roofs and few beggars—these things were to be seen at Morrinstown, and in few other places thereabouts. And, above all, his neighbours owned the influence of one who, with a reputation gained at the sword's point, stood resolutely, unflinchingly, abroad as at home, at fairs and cockfights as on his own hearth, for peace. More than a century was to elapse before private war ceased to be the amusement of the Irish gentry. But in that part of Kerry, and during a score of years, the name and weight of Colonel Sullivan of Morrinstown availed to quiet many a brawl and avert many a meeting.

To follow the mean and the poor of spirit beyond the point where their fortunes cease to be entwined with those of better men is a profitless task. James McMurrough, tried and found wanting, where all favoured him, was not likely to rise above his nature where the odds were equal, and all men his rivals. What he did in Galway City, that bizarre, half-foreign town of the west, how long he tarried there, and whither he went afterwards, in the vain search for a place where a man could swagger without courage and ruffle it without consequences, it matters not to inquire. A time came when his kin knew not whether he lived or was dead.

Luke Asgill, who could rise as much above The McMurrough as he had it in him to fall below him, who was as wicked as James was weak, was redeemed, one may believe, by the good that lurked in him. He lay many weeks on a sick-bed, and returned to everyday life another man. For, whereas he had succumbed, a passionate lover of Flavia, he rose wholly cured of that passion. It had ebbed from him with his blood, or waned with his fever. And whereas he had before sought both gain and power, restrained by as few scruples as the worst men of a bad age, he rose a pursuer of both, but within bounds; so that, though he was still hard and grasping and oppressive, it was possible to say of him that he was no worse than his class. Close-fisted, at Father O'Hara's instance he could open his hand. Hard, at the Father's prayer he would at times remit a rent or extend a bond. Ambitious, he gave up, for his soul's sake and the sake of the Faith that had been his fathers', the office which endowed him with power to oppress.

There were some who scoffed behind his back, and said that Luke Asgill had had enough of carrying a sword and now wished no better than to be rid of it. But, in truth, as far as the man's reformation went, it was real. The devil was well, but he was not the devil he had been. The hours he had passed in the presence of death, the thoughts he had had while life was low in him, were not forgotten in his health. The strong nature, slow to take an impression, was stiff to retain it. A moody, silent man, going about his business with a face to match the sullen bogs of his native land, he lived to a great age, and paid one tribute only to the woman he had loved and forgotten—he died a bachelor.

THE END

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*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE WILD GEESE ***

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