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Inconsistent hyphenation in the original document has been preserved.

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## AN ISLE IN THE WATER

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# An Isle in the Water

BY

**KATHARINE TYNAN**

(Mrs. H.A. Hinkson)

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1896

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TO

**JANE BARLOW**

THESE UNWORTHY PRESENTS

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[1]

## I

### THE FIRST WIFE

The dead woman had lain six years in her grave, and the new wife had reigned five of them in her stead. Her triumph over her dead rival was well-nigh complete. She had nearly ousted her memory from her husband's heart. She had given him an heir for his name and estate, and, lest the bonny boy should fail, there was a little brother creeping on the nursery floor, and another child stirring beneath her heart. The twisted yew before the door, which was heavily buttressed because the legend ran that when it died the family should die out with it, had taken another lease of life, and sent out one spring green shoots on boughs long barren. The old servants had well-nigh forgotten the pale mistress who reigned one short year; and in the fishing village the lavish benefactions of the reigning lady had quite extinguished the memory of the tender voice and gentle words of the woman whose place she filled. A new era of prosperity had come to the Island and the race that long had ruled it.

[2]

Under a high, stately window of the ruined Abbey was the dead wife's grave. In the year of his bereavement, before the beautiful brilliant cousin of his dead Alison came and seized on his life, the widower had spent days and nights of stony despair standing by her grave. She had died to give him an heir to his name, and her sacrifice had been vain, for the boy came into the world dead, and lay on her breast in the coffin. Now for years he had not visited the place: the last wreaths of his mourning for her had been washed into earth and dust long ago, and the grave was neglected. The fisherwives whispered that a despairing widower is soonest comforted; and in that haunted Island of ghosts and omens there were those who said that they had met the dead woman gliding at night along the quay under the Abbey walls, with the shape of a child gathered within her shadowy arms. People avoided the quay at night therefore, and no tale of the ghost ever came to the ears of Alison's husband.

[3]

His new wife held him indeed in close keeping. In the first days of his remarriage the servants in the house had whispered that there had been ill blood over the man between the two women, so strenuously did the second wife labour to uproot any trace of the first. The cradle that had been prepared for the young heir was flung to a fishergirl expecting her base-born baby: the small garments into which Alison had sewn her tears with the stitches went the same road. There was many an honest wife might have had the things, but that would not have pleased the grim humour of the second wife towards the woman she had supplanted.

Everything that had been Alison's was destroyed or hidden away. Her rooms were changed out of all memory of her. There was nothing, nothing in the house to recall to her widower her gentleness, or her face as he had last seen it, snow-pale and pure between the long ashen-fair strands of her hair. He never came upon anything that could give him a tender stab with the thought of her. So she was forgotten, and the man was happy with his children and his beautiful passionate wife, and the constant tenderness with which she surrounded every hour of his life.

[4]

Little by little she had won over all who had cause to love the dead woman,—all human creatures, that is to say: a dog was more faithful and had resisted her. Alison's dog was a terrier, old, shaggy and blear-eyed: he had been young with his dead mistress, and had seemed to grow old when she died. He had fretted incessantly during that year of her husband's widowhood, whimpering and moaning about the house like a distraught creature, and following the man in a heavy melancholy when he made his pilgrimages to the grave. He continued those pilgrimages after the man had forgotten, but the heavy iron gate of the Abbey clanged in his face, and since

he could not reach the grave his visits grew fewer and fewer. But he had not forgotten.

[5]

The new mistress had put out all her fascinations to win the dog too, for it seemed that while any living creature clung to the dead woman's memory her triumph was not complete. But the dog, amenable to every one else, was savage to her. All her soft overtures were received with snarling, and an uncovering of the strong white teeth that was dangerous. The woman was not without a heart, except for the dead, and the misery of the dog moved her—his restlessness, his whining, the channels that tears had worn under his faithful eyes. She would have liked to take him up in her arms and comfort him; but once when her pity moved her to attempt it, the dog ran at her ravening. The husband cried out: 'Has he hurt you, my Love?' and was for stringing him up. But some compunction stirred in her, and she saved him from the rope, though she made no more attempts to conciliate him.

After that the dog disappeared from the warm living-rooms, where he had been used to stretch on the rug before the leaping wood-fires. It was a cold and stormy autumn, with many shipwrecks, and mourning in the village for drowned husbands and sons, whose little fishing boats had been sucked into the boiling surges. The roar of the wind and the roar of the waves made a perpetual tumult in the air, and the creaking and lashing of the forest trees aided the wild confusion. There were nights when the crested battalions of the waves stormed the hill-sides and foamed over the Abbey graves, and weltered about the hearthstones of the high-perched fishing village. When there was not storm there was bitter black frost.

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The old house had attics in the gables, seldom visited. You went up from the inhabited portions by a corkscrew staircase, steep as a ladder. The servants did not like the attics. There were creaking footsteps on the floors at night, and sometimes the slamming of a door or the stealthy opening of a window. They complained that locked doors up there flew open, and bolted windows were found unbolted. In storm the wind keened like a banshee, and one bright snowy morning a housemaid, who had business there, found a slender wet footprint on the floor as of some one who had come barefoot through the snow;—and fled down shrieking.

[7]

In one of the attics stood a great hasped chest, wherein the dead woman's dresses were mouldering. The chest was locked, and was likely to remain so for long, for the new mistress had flung away the key. From the high attic windows there was a glorious view of sea and land, of the red sandstone valleys where the deer were feeding, of the black tossing woods, of the roan bulls grazing quietly in the park, and far beyond, of the sea, and the fishing fleet, and in the distance the smoke of a passing steamer. But none observed that view. There was not a servant in the house who would lean from the casement without expecting the touch of a clay-cold finger on her shoulder. Any whose business brought them to the attic looked in the corners warily, while they stayed, but the servants did not like to go there alone. They said the room smelt strangely of earth, and that the air struck with an insidious chill: and a gamekeeper being in full view of the attic window one night declared that from the window came a faint moving glow, and that a wavering shadow moved in the room.

[8]

It was in this cold attic the dog took up his abode. He followed a servant up there one morning, and broke out into an excited whimpering when he came near the chest. After a while of sniffing and rubbing against it he established himself upon it with his nose on his paws. Afterwards he refused to leave it. Finally the servants gave up the attempt to coax him back into the world, and with a compunctious pity they spread an old rug for him on the chest, and fed him faithfully every day. The master never inquired for him: he was glad to have the brute out of his sight: the mistress heard of the fancy which possessed him, and said nothing: she had given up thinking to win him over. So he grew quite old and grizzled, and half blind as summers and winters passed by. It grew a superstition with the servants to take care of him, and with them on their daily visits he was so affectionate and caressing as to recall the days in which some of them remembered him when his mistress lived, and he was a happy dog, as good at fighting and rat-hunting and weasel-catching as any dog in the Island.

[9]

But every night as twelve o'clock struck the dog came down the attic stairs. He was suddenly alert and cheerful, and trotted by an invisible gown. Some said you could hear the faint rustle of silk lapping from stair to stair, and the dog would sometimes bark sharply as in his days of puppyhood, and leap up to lick a hand of air. The servants would shut their doors as they heard the patter of the dog's feet coming, and his sudden bark. They were thrilled with a superstitious awe, but they were not afraid the ghost would harm them. They remembered how just, how gentle, how pure the dead woman had been. They whispered that she might well be dreeing this purgatory of returning to her dispossessed house for another's sake, not her own. Husband and wife were nearly always in their own room when she passed. She went everywhere looking to the fastenings of the house, trying every door and window as she had done in the old days, when her husband declared the old place was only precious because it held her. Presently the servants came to look on her guardianship of the house as holy, for one night some careless person had left a light burning where the wind blew the curtains about, and they took fire, and were extinguished, by whom none knew; but in the morning there was the charred curtain, and Molly, the kitchenmaid, confessed with tears how she had forgotten the lighted candle.

[10]

The husband was the last of all to hear of these strange doings, for the new wife took care that they should never be about the house at midnight. But one night as he lay in bed he had forgotten something and asked her to fetch it from below. She looked at him with a disdain out of the mists of her black hair, which she was combing to her knee. Perhaps for a minute she resented his unfaithfulness to the dead. 'No,' she said, with deliberation, 'not till that dog and his companion pass.' She flung the door open, and looked half with fear, half with defiance, at the black void outside. There was the patter of the dog's feet coming down the stairs swiftly. The man lifted

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himself on his elbow and listened. Side by side with the dog's feet came the swish, swish of a silken gown on the stairs. He looked a wild-eyed inquiry at his second wife. She slammed the door to before she answered him. 'It has been *so* for years,' she said; 'every one knew but you. She has not forgotten as easily as you have.'

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One day the dog died, worn out with age. After that they heard the ghost no longer. Perhaps her purgatory of seeing the second wife in her place was completed, and she was fit for Paradise, or her suffering had sufficed to win another's pardon. From that time the new wife reigned without a rival, living or dead, near her throne.

[12]

## II

### THE STORY OF FATHER ANTHONY O'TOOLE

ToC

On the wall of the Island Chapel there is a tablet which strangers read curiously. The inscription runs:

**FATHER ANTHONY O'TOOLE**

**FOR THIRTY YEARS THE SHEPHERD OF  
HIS FLOCK**

***Died 18th December 1812***  
**Aged 80 years.**

**'He will avenge the blood of his servants, and will be merciful  
unto his land, and to his people.'**

Many a time has a summer visitor asked me the meaning of the Old Testament words on the memorial tablet of a life that in all probability passed so quietly.

Any child in the Island will tell you the story of Father Anthony O'Toole. Here and there an old man or woman will remember to have seen him and will describe him—tall despite his great age, with the frost on his head but never in his heart, stepping down the cobbles of the village street leaning on his gold-headed cane, and greeting his spiritual children with such a courtesy as had once been well in place at Versailles or the Little Trianon. Plainly he never ceased to be the finest of fine gentlemen, though a less inbred courtesy might well rust in the isolation of thirty years. Yet he seems to have been no less the humblest and simplest of priests. Old Peter Devine will tell you his childish memory of the old priest sitting by the turf fire in the fisherman's cottage, listening to the eternal complaint of the winds and waters that had destroyed the fishing and washed the potato-gardens out to sea, and pausing in his words of counsel and sympathy to take delicately a pinch of the finest snuff, snuff that had never bemeaned itself by paying duty to King George.

[13]

But that was in the quite peaceful days, when the country over there beyond the shallow water lay in the apathy of exhaustion—helpless and hopeless. That was years after Father Anthony had flashed out as a man of war in the midst of his quiet pastoral days, and like any Old Testament hero had taken the sword and smitten his enemies in the name of the Lord.

[14]

Father Anthony was the grandson of one of those Irish soldiers of fortune who, after the downfall of the Jacobite cause in Ireland, had taken service in the French and Austrian armies. In Ireland they called them the Wild Geese. He had risen to high honours in the armies of King Louis, and had been wounded at Malplaquet. The son followed in his father's footsteps and was among the slain at Fontenoy. Father Anthony, too, became a soldier and saw service at Minden, and carried away from it a wound in the thigh which made necessary the use of that gold-headed cane. They said that, soldier as he was, he was a fine courtier in his day. One could well believe it looking at him in his old age. From his father he had inherited the dashing bravery and gay wit of which even yet he carried traces. From his French mother he had the delicate courtesy and *finesse* which would be well in place in the atmosphere of a court.

[15]

However, in full prime of manhood and reputation, Father Anthony, for some reason or other, shook the dust of courts off his feet, and became a humble aspirant after the priesthood at the

missionary College of St. Omer. He had always a great desire to be sent to the land of his fathers, the land of faith and hope, of which he had heard from many an Irish refugee, and in due time his desire was fulfilled. He reached the Island one wintry day, flung up out of the teeth of storms, and was in the Island thirty years, till the *reveille* of his Master called him to the muster of the Heavenly host.

Father Anthony seems to have been innocently ready to talk over his days of fighting. He was not at all averse from fighting his battles over again for these simple children of his who were every day in battle with the elements and death. Peter Devine remembers to have squatted, burning his shins by the turf fire, and watching with fascination the lines in the ashes which represented the entrenchments and the guns, and the troops of King Frederick and the French line, as Father Anthony played the war-game for old Corney Devine, whose grass-grown grave is under the gable of the Island Chapel. [16]

Now and again a fisherman was admitted by special favour to look upon the magnificent clothing which Father Anthony had worn as a colonel of French Horse. The things were laid by in lavender as a bride might keep her wedding-dress. There were the gold-laced coat and the breeches with the sword-slash in them, the sash, the belt, the plumed hat, the high boots, the pistols, and glittering among them all, the sword. That chest of Father Anthony's and its contents were something of a fairy tale to the boys of the Island, and each of them dreamt of a day when he too might behold them. The chest, securely locked and clamped, stood in the sacristy; and Father Anthony would have seen nothing incongruous in its neighbourhood to the sacred vessels and vestments. He generally displayed the things when he had been talking over old fighting days, to the Island men mostly, but occasionally to a French captain, who with a cargo, often contraband, or wines and cigars, would run into the Island harbour for shelter. Then there were courtesies given and exchanged; and Father Anthony's guest at parting would make an offering of light wines, much of which found its way to sick and infirm Island men and women in the days that followed. [17]

Father Anthony had been many placid years on the Island when there began to be rumours of trouble on the mainland. Just at first the United Irish Society had been quite the fashion, and held no more rebellious than the great volunteer movement of a dozen years earlier. But as time went by things became more serious. Moderate and fearful men fell away from the Society, and the union between Northern Protestants and Southern Catholics, which had been a matter of much concern to the Government of the day, was met by a policy of goading the leaders on to rebellion. By and by this and that idol of the populace was flung into prison. Wolfe Tone was in France, praying, storming, commanding, forcing an expedition to act in unison with a rising on Irish soil. Father Anthony was excited in these days. The France of the Republic was not his France, and the stain of the blood of the Lord's Anointed was upon her, but for all that the news of the expedition from Brest set his blood coursing so rapidly and his pulses beating, that he was fain to calm with much praying the old turbulent spirit of war which possessed him. [18]

Many of the young fishermen had left the Island and were on the mainland, drilling in secrecy. There were few left save old men and women and children when the blow fell. The Government, abundantly informed of what went on in the councils of the United Irishmen, knew the moment to strike, and took it. The rebellion broke out in various parts of the country, but already the leaders were in prison. Calamity followed calamity. Heroic courage availed nothing. In a short time Wolfe Tone lay dead in the Provost-Marshal's prison of Dublin; and Lord Edward Fitzgerald was dying of his wounds. In Dublin, dragoonings, hangings, pitch-capping and flogging set up a reign of terror. Out of the first sudden silence terrible tidings came to the Island. [19]

At that time there was no communication with the mainland except by the fishermen's boats or at low water. The Island was very much out of the world; and the echoes of what went on in the world came vaguely as from a distance to the ears of the Island people. They were like enough to be safe, though there was blood and fire and torture on the mainland. They were all old and helpless people, and they might well be safe from the soldiery. There was no yeomanry corps within many miles of the Island, and it was the yeomanry, tales of whose doings made the Islanders' blood run cold. Not the foreign soldiers—oh no, they were often merciful, and found this kind of warfare bitterly distasteful. But it might well be that the yeomanry, being so busy, would never think of the Island. [20]

Father Anthony prayed that it might be so, and the elements conspired to help him. There were many storms and high tides that set the Island riding in safety. Father Anthony went up and down comforting those whose husbands, sons, and brothers were in the Inferno over yonder. The roses in his old cheeks withered, and his blue eyes were faded with many tears for his country and his people. He prayed incessantly that the agony of the land might cease, and that his own most helpless flock might be protected from the butchery that had been the fate of many as innocent and helpless.

The little church of gray stone stands as the vanguard of the village, a little nearer to the mainland, and the spit of sand that runs out towards it. You ascend to it by a hill, and a wide stretch of green sward lies before the door. The gray stone presbytery joins the church and communicates with it. A ragged boreen, or bit of lane, between rough stone walls runs zigzag from the gate, ever open, that leads to the church, and wanders away to the left to the village on the rocks above the sea. Everything is just the same to-day as on that morning when Father Anthony, looking across to the mainland from the high gable window of his bedroom, saw on the sands something that made him dash the tears from his old eyes, and go hastily in search of the telescope which had been a present from one of those wandering sea-captains. [21]

As he set his glass to his eye that morning, the lassitude of age and grief seemed to have left him. For a few minutes he gazed at the objects crossing the sands—for it was low water—in an attitude tense and eager. At last he lowered the glass and closed it. He had seen enough. Four yeomen on their horses were crossing to the island.

He was alone in the house, and as he bustled downstairs and made door and windows fast, he was rejoiced it should be so. Down below the village was calm and quiet. The morning had a touch of spring, and the water was lazily lapping against the sands. The people were within doors,—of that he was pretty well assured—for the Island was in a state of terror and depression. There was no sign of life down there except now and again the barking of a dog or the cackling of a hen. Unconsciously the little homes waited the death and outrage that were coming to them as fast as four strong horses could carry them. 'Strengthen thou mine arm,' cried Father Anthony aloud, 'that the wicked prevail not! Keep thou thy sheep that thou hast confided to my keeping. Lo! the wolves are upon them!' and as he spoke his voice rang out through the silent house. The fire of battle was in his eyes, his nostrils smelt blood, and the man seemed exalted beyond his natural size. Father Anthony went swiftly and barred his church doors, and then turned into the presbytery. He flashed his sword till it caught the light and gleamed and glanced. 'For this, for this hour, friend,' he said, 'I have polished thee and kept thee keen. Hail, sword of the justice of God!'

There came a thundering at the oaken door of the church. 'Open, son of Belial!' cried a coarse voice, and then there followed a shower of blasphemies. The men had lit down from their horses, which they had picketed below, and had come on foot, vomiting oaths, to the church door. Father Anthony took down the fastenings one by one. Before he removed the last he looked towards the little altar. 'Now,' he said, 'defend Thyself, all-powerful!' and saying, he let the bar fall.

The door swung open so suddenly that three of the men fell back. The fourth, who had been calling his blasphemies through the keyhole of the door, remained yet on his knees. In the doorway, where they had looked to find an infirm old man, stood a French colonel in his battle array, the gleaming sword in his hand. The apparition was so sudden, so unexpected, that they stood for the moment terror-stricken. Did they think it something supernatural? as well they might, for to their astonished eyes the splendid martial figure seemed to grow and grow, and fill the doorway. Or perhaps they thought they had fallen in an ambush.

Before they could recover, the sword swung in air, and the head of the fellow kneeling rolled on the threshold of the church. The others turned and fled. One man fell, the others with a curse stumbled over him, recovered themselves, and sped on. Father Anthony, as you might spit a cockroach with a long pin, drove his sword in the fallen man's back and left it quivering. The dying scream rang in his ears as he drew his pistols. He muttered to himself: 'If one be spared he win return with seven worse devils. No! they must die that the innocent may go safe,' and on the track of the flying wretches, he shot one in the head as he ran, and the other he pierced, as he would have dragged himself into the stirrups.

In the broad sunlight, the villagers, alarmed by the sound of shooting, came timidly creeping towards the presbytery to see if harm had befallen the priest, and found Father Anthony standing on the bloody green sward wiping his sword and looking about him at the dead men. The fury of battle had gone out of his face, and he looked gentle as ever, but greatly troubled. 'It had to be,' he said, 'though, God knows, I would have spared them to repent of their sins.'

'Take them,' he said, 'to the Devil's Chimney and drop them down, so that if their comrades come seeking them there may be no trace of them.' The Devil's Chimney is a strange, natural *oubliette* of the Island, whose depth none has fathomed, though far below you may hear a subterranean waterfall roaring.

One of the dead men's horses set up a frightened whinnying. 'But the poor beasts,' said Father Anthony, who had ever a kindness for animals, 'they must want for nothing. Stable them in M'Ora's Cave till the trouble goes by, and see that they are well fed and watered.'

An hour later, except for some disturbance of the grass, you would have come upon no trace of these happenings. I have never heard that they cast any shade upon Father Anthony's spirit, or that he was less serene and cheerful when peace had come back than he had been before. No hue and cry after the dead yeomen ever came to the Island, and the troubles of '98 spent themselves without crossing again from the mainland. After a time, when peace was restored, the yeomen's horses were used for drawing the Island fish to the market, or for carrying loads of seaweed to the potatoes, and many other purposes for which human labour had hitherto served.

But Father Anthony O'Toole was dead many and many a year before that tablet was set up to his memory. And the strange thing was that Mr. Hill, the rector, who, having no flock to speak of, is pretty free to devote himself to the antiquities of the Island, his favourite study, was a prime mover in this commemoration of Father Anthony O'Toole, and himself selected the text to go upon the tablet.

In a certain Wicklow country-house an O'Toole of this day will display to you, as they display the dead hand of a martyr in a reliquary, the uniform, the sword and pistols, the feathered hat and the riding boots, of Father Anthony O'Toole.

### III

#### THE UNLAWFUL MOTHER

ToC

In the Island the standard of purity is an extraordinarily high one, and it is almost unheard of that a woman should fall away from it. Purity is the unquestioned prerogative of every Island girl or woman, and it only comes to them as a vague far-off horror in an unknown world that there are places under the sun and the stars where such is not the case. The punishment is appalling in the very few cases where sin has lifted its head amongst these austere people. The lepers' hut of old was no such living death of isolation as surrounds an Island girl who has smirched her good name. Henceforth there is an atmosphere about her that never lifts—of horror for some, of tragedy for others, according to their temperament. There she stands lonely for all her days, with the seal set upon her that can never be broken, the consecration of an awful and tragic destiny. [29]

I knew of such an one who was little more than a child when this horror befell her. She has dark blue eyes and thick black lashes, and very white skin. The soft dark hair comes low on her white forehead. With a gaily-coloured shawl covering her head, and drawn across her chin, as they wear it in the Island, she looks, or looked when I last saw her, a hidden, gliding image of modesty. And despite that sin of the past she is modest. It was the ignorant sin of a child, and out of the days of horror and wrath that followed—her purging—she brought only the maternity that burns like a white flame in her. The virtuous were more wroth against her in old days that she carried her maternity so proudly. Why, not the most honourable and cherished of the young Island mothers dandled her child with such pride. No mother of a young earl could have stepped lighter, and held her head higher, than Maggie when she came down the fishing street, spurning the very stones, as it seemed, so lightly she went with the baby wrapped in her shawl. She did not seem to notice that some of the kindly neighbours stepped aside, or that here and there a woman pulled her little daughter within doors, out of the path of the unlawful mother. Those little pink fingers pushed away shame and contempt. The child was her world. [30]

She was the daughter of a fisherman who died of a chest complaint soon after she was born. Her mother still lives, a hard-featured honest old woman, with a network of fine lines about her puckered eyes. Her hair went quite white the year her daughter's child was born, but I remember it dark and abundant with only a silver thread glistening here and there. She has grown taciturn too; she was talkative enough in the old days when I was a child in the Island, and, often and often, came clattering in by the half-door to shelter from a shower, and sat till fine weather on a stool by the turf ashes, gravely discussing the fishing and the prospects of pigs and young fowl that season. [31]

There are three sons, but Jim was married and doing for himself before the trouble befell the family. Tom and Larry were at home, Tom, gentle and slow-spoken, employed about the Hall gardens. Larry, a fisherman like his father before him. Both were deeply attached to their young sister, and had been used to pet and care for her from her cradle.

There is yet a tradition in the island of that terrible time when Maggie's mother realised the disgrace her daughter had brought on an honest name. There had been a horrified whisper in the Island for some time before, a surmise daily growing more certain, an awe-stricken compassion for the honest people who never suspected the ghastly shadow about to cross their threshold. People had been slow to accept this solution of Maggie's pining and weakness. This one had suggested herb-tea, and that one had offered to accompany Maggie to see the dispensary doctor who came over from Breagh every Tuesday. But Maggie accepted none of their offices, only withdrew herself more and more in a sick horror of herself and life, and roamed about the cliffs where but the gulls and the little wild Island cattle looked on at her restless misery. [32]

Her mother was half-fretted and half impatient of her daughter's ailing. She was a very strong woman herself, and except for a pain in the side which had troubled her of late, she had never known a day of megrims. She listened chafing to the neighbours' advice—and every one of them had their nostrum—and heeded none of them. She had an idea herself that the girl's sickness was imaginary and could be thrown off if she willed it. When the neighbours all at once ceased offering her advice and sympathy she felt it a distinct relief. She had not the remotest idea that she was become the centre of an awe-stricken sympathy, that her little world had fallen back and stood gaping at her and hers as they might at one abnormally stricken: if their gabble ceased very suddenly and no more idlers came in for a chat by the fireside she was not the one to fret; she had always plenty to do without idle women hindering her, and, now the girl had her sick fit on her, all the work fell to the mother's share. [33]

The girl's time was upon her before the mother guessed at the blinding and awful truth. She was a proud, stern, old woman, come of a race strong in rectitude, and she would scarcely have believed an angel if one had come to testify to her daughter's dishonour. But the time came when it could no longer be hidden, when the birth-pains were on the wretched girl, and in the quietness of the winter night, her sin stood forth revealed.

Some merciful paralysis stiffened the mother's lips when she would have cursed her daughter. She lifted up her voice indeed to curse, but it went from her; her lips jabbered helplessly; over



her face came a bluish-gray shade, and she fell in a chair huddled with one hand pressed against her side.

The two men came in on this ghastly scene. The girl was crouched on the floor with her face hidden, shrinking to the earth from the terrible words she expected to hear. The men lifted the sister to her bed in the little room. They forced some spirit between their mother's lips, and in a few minutes the livid dark shade began to pass from her face. Her lips moved. 'Take her,' she panted, 'take that girl and her shame from my honest house, lest I curse her.'

The two men looked at each other. They turned pale through their hardy brownness, and then flushed darkly red. It flashed on them in an instant. This was the meaning of the girl's sickness, of a thousand hints they had not understood. Tom, with characteristic patience, was the first to bend his back to the burden.

'Whisht, mother,' he said, 'whisht. Don't talk about cursing. If there's one black sin under our roof-tree, we won't open the door to another.' He put his arm round her in a tender way. 'Come, achora,' he said, as if he were humouring a child, 'come and lie down. You're not well, you creature.'

'Oh Tom,' said the mother, softening all at once, 'the black shame's on me, and I'll never be well again in this world.'

She let him lift her to her bed in one of the little rooms that went off the kitchen. Then he came back to where Larry stood, with an acute misery on his young face, looking restlessly from the turf sods he was kicking now and again to the door behind which their young sister lay in agony.

'There's no help for it, Larry,' said Tom, touching him on the shoulder. 'We can't trust her and the mother under one roof. We must take her to the hospital. It's low water to-night, and you can get the ass-cart across the sand. You'll take her, Larry, an' I'll stay an' see to the mother.'

They wrapped the girl in all the bedclothes they could find and lifted her into the little cart full of straw. The Island lay quiet under the moon, all white with snow except where a black patch showed a ravine or cleft in the rocks. In the fishing village the doors were shut and the bits of curtains drawn. It was bitterly cold, and not a night for any one to be abroad. The ass-cart went quietly over the snow. The two men walked by it, never speaking; a low moaning came from the woman in the cart. They did not meet a soul on their way to the shore.

At that point the Island sends out a long tongue of rock and sand towards the mainland. At very low water there is but a shallow pool between the two shores; over this they crossed. Sometimes the ass-cart stuck fast in the sand. Then the men lifted the wheels gently, so as not to jerk the cart, and then encouraging the little ass, they went on again. When they had climbed up the rocky shore to the mainland, and the cart was on the level road, they parted. Before Tom turned his face homewards he bent down to Maggie. 'You're goin' where you'll be taken care of, acushla. Don't fret; Larry'll fetch you home as soon as you can travel,' he said. And then, as if he could scarcely bear the sight of her drawn face in the moonlight, he turned abruptly, and went striding down the rocky shore to the strand.

Because Tom and Larry had forgiven out of their great love, it did not therefore follow that the shame did not lie heavily on them. Tom went with so sad a face and so lagging a step that people's hearts ached for him; while young Larry, who was always bright and merry, avoided all the old friends, and when suddenly accosted turned a deep painful red and refused to meet the eyes that looked their sympathy at him.

A few weeks passed and it was time for the girl to leave the hospital. There had been long and bitter wrangles—bitter at least on one side—between the mother and sons. She had sworn at first that she would never live under the roof with the girl, but the lads returned her always the same answer, 'If she goes we go too.' And by degrees their dogged persistence dulled the old woman's fierce anger. Maggie came home, and the cradle was established beside the hearth. At first the brothers had whispered together of righting her, but when she had answered them a question—a dull welt of shame tingling on their cheeks and hers as though some one had cut them with a whip—they knew it was useless. The man had gone to America some months before, and was beyond the reach of their justice.

But the child throve as if it had the fairest right to be in the world, and was no little nameless waif whose very existence was a shame. He was a beautiful boy, round and tender, with his mother's dark-blue eyes, and the exquisite baby skin which is softer than any rose-leaf. From very early days he crowed and chuckled and was a most cheerful baby. Left alone in his cradle he would be quietly happy for hours; he slept a great deal, and only announced his waking from sleep by a series of delighted chuckles, which brought his mother running to his side to hoist him in her arms.

He must have been about a year old when I first saw him. Maggie intruded him on no one, though people said that if any one admired her baby it made her their lover for life. I happened to be in the Island for a while, and one evening on a solitary ramble round the cliffs I came face to face with Maggie,—Maggie stepping high, and prettier than ever with that rapt glory of maternity in her face which made ordinary prettiness common beside her.

I saw by the way she wisped the shawl round her full white chin that I was welcome to pass her if I would. But I did not pass her. I stopped and spoke a little on indifferent topics, and then I asked for the baby. A radiant glow of pleasure swept over the young mother's healthily pale face. She untwisted the shawl and lifted a fold of it, and stood looking down at the sleeping child with a brooding tenderness, almost divine. He was indeed lovely, with the flush of sleep upon him and

one little dimpled hand thrust against her breast. 'What a great boy!' I said. 'But you must be half killed carrying him.' She laughed out joyfully, a sweet ringing laughter like the music of bells. 'Deed then,' she said, 'tis the great load he is entirely, an' any wan but meself 'ud be droppin' under the weight of him. But it 'ud be the quare day I'd complain of my jewel. Sure it's the light heart he gives me makes him lie light in my arms.'

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But Maggie's mother remained untouched by the child's beauty and winsomeness. Mother and daughter lived in the same house absolutely without speech of each other. The girl was gentleness and humility itself. For her own part she never forgot she was a sinner, though she would let no one visit it on the child. I have been told that it was most pathetic to see how she strove to win forgiveness from her mother, how she watched and waited on her month after month with never a sign from the old woman, who was not as strong as she had been. The pain in her side took her occasionally, and since any exertion brought it on she was fain at last to sit quietly in the chimney-corner a good deal more than she had been used to. She had seen the doctor, very much against her will, and he had said her heart was affected, but with care and avoiding great excitement, it might last her to a good old age.

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Maggie was glad of the hard work put upon her. She washed and swept and scrubbed and polished all day long, with a touching little air of cheerfulness which never ceased to be sad unless when she was crooning love-songs to the baby. She made no effort to take up her old friends again, though she was so grateful when any one stopped and admired the baby. She quite realised that her sin had set her apart, that nothing in all the world could give her back what she had lost, and set her again by the side of those happy companions of her childhood.

As the time passed she never seemed to feel that her mother was hard and unrelenting. She bore her dark looks and her silence with amazing patience. Usually the old woman seemed never to notice the child; but once Maggie came in and saw her gazing at the sleeping face in the cradle with what seemed to her a look of scorn and dislike. She gave a great cry, like the cry of a wounded thing, and snatching the child, ran out with him bareheaded, carrying him away to the high cliffs covered with flowers full of honey, and there she crooned and cried over him till the soothing of the sweet wind and the sunshine eased her heart, and the blighting gaze that had fallen upon her darling had left no shadow.

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For her two brothers she felt and displayed a doglike devotion and gratitude. The big fellows were sometimes almost uneasy under the love of her eyes, and the thousand and one offices she was always doing for them to try to make up to them for her past. They had come to take an intense interest, at first half shamefaced, in the baby. But as he grew older and full of winning ways, one could not always remember that he was a child of shame, and he made just as much sunshine as any lawful child makes in a house. More indeed, for in all the Island was never so beautiful a child. The sun seemed to shed all its rays on his head; his eyes were blue as the sea; his limbs were sturdy and beautiful, and from the time he began to take notice he sent out little tendrils that gathered round the hearts of all those who looked upon him. So kind is God sometimes to a little nameless child.

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But to see Maggie while her brothers played with the boy, tossing him in their arms, and letting him spring from one to the other, was indeed a pretty sight. You know the proud confidence with which an animal that loves you looks on at your handling of her little ones—her anxiety quite swallowed up in her pride and confidence and her benevolent satisfaction in the pleasure she is giving you. That is how Maggie watched those delightful romps. But the old woman in the chimney-corner turned away her head; and never forgot that Maggie had stolen God's gift, and that the scarlet letter was on the boy's white forehead.

As the years passed and the boy throve and grew tall, I heard of Maggie becoming very devout. 'A true penitent,' said Father Tiernay to me, 'and I believe that in return for the patience and gentleness with which she has striven to expiate her sin God has given her a very unusual degree of sanctity.' In the intervals of her work she was permitted as a great privilege to help about the altar linen, and keep the church clean. She used to carry the boy with her when she went to the church, and I have come upon him fast asleep in a sheltered corner, while his mother was sweeping and dusting, with a radiant and sanctified look on a face that had grown very spiritual.

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But still the old mother remained inexorable. I am sure in her own mind she resented as a profanation her daughter's work about the church. She herself had never entered that familiar holy place since her daughter's disgrace. Sunday and holiday all these years she had trudged to Breagh, a long way round by the coast, for mass. All expostulations have been vain, even Father Tiernay's own. Whatever other people may forget, the sin has lost nothing of its scarlet for her.

It was the last time I was on the Island that I was told of Maggie's marriage. Not to an Island man: oh no, no Island man would marry a girl with a stain on her character, not though she came to be as high in God's favour as the blessed Magdalen herself. He was the mate of a Scotch vessel, a grave, steady, strong-faced Highlander. He had come to the Island trading for years, and knew Maggie's story as well as any Islander. But he had seen beyond the mirk of the sin the woman's soul pure as a pearl.

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Maggie could not believe that any man, least of all a man like Alister, wanted to marry her. 'I am a wicked woman,' she said with hot blushes, 'and you must marry a good woman.'

'I mean to marry a good woman, my lass,' he said, 'the best woman I know. And that is your bonny self.' Maggie hesitated. He smoothed back her hair with a fond proprietary touch. 'We'll give the boy a name,' he said, 'and before God, none will ever know he's not my own boy.'

That settled it. Jack was a big lad of six now, and would soon begin to understand things, and

perhaps ask for his father. It opened before her like an incredible exquisite happiness that perhaps he need never know her sin. She put her hand into Alister's and accepted him in a passion of sobbing that was half joy, half sorrow.

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The brothers were all in favour of the marriage. They loved her too much not to want her to have a fair chance in a new life. Here on the Island, though she were a saint, she would still be a penitent. It came hardest on Tom,—for Larry was soon to bring home a wife of his own, but neither man talked much of what he felt. They put aside their personal sorrow and were glad for Maggie and her boy.

But Maggie's mother was consistent to the last. No brazen and flaunting sinner could have seemed to her more a lost creature than the girl who had been so dutiful a daughter, so loving a sister, so perfect a mother, all those years. Tom told her the news. 'I wash my hands of her,' she said. 'Let her take her shame under an honest man's roof if she will. I wish her neither joy nor sorrow of it.' And more gentle words than these Tom could not bring her to say.

So Maggie was married, the old woman preserving her stony silence and apparent unconcern. She only spoke once,—the day the girl was made a wife. It was one of her bad days, and she had to lie down after an attack of her heart. Maggie dressed to go to the church and meet her bridegroom. She was not to return to the cottage, and her modest little luggage and little Jack's were already aboard the Glasgow brig. At the last, hoping for some sign of softening, the girl went into the dim room where her mother lay, ashen-cheeked. The mother turned round on her her dim eyes. 'What do you want of me?' she asked, breaking the silence of years. The girl helplessly covered her eyes with her hands. 'Did you come for my blessing?' gasped the old woman. 'It is liker my curse you'd take with you. But I promised Tom long ago that I would not curse you. Go then. And I praise God that Larry will soon give me an honest daughter instead of you, my shame this many a year.'

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That was the last meeting of mother and daughter. They say Alister is a devoted husband, but he comes no more to the Island. He has changed out of his old boat, and his late shipmates say vaguely that he has removed somewhere Sunderland or Cardiff way, and trades to the North Sea. Tom is very reticent about Maggie, though Miss Bell, the postmistress, might tell, if she were not a superior person, and as used to keeping a secret at a pinch as Father Tiernay himself, how many letters he receives with the post-mark of a well-known seaport town.

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Poor Maggie! Said I not that in the Island the way of transgressors is hard?

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## IV

### A RICH WOMAN

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Margret Laffan was something of a mystery to the Island people. Long ago in comparative youth she had disappeared for a half-dozen years. Then she had turned up one day in a coarse dress of blue and white check, which looked suspiciously like workhouse or asylum garb, and had greeted such of the neighbours as she knew with a nod, for all the world as if she had seen them yesterday. It happened that the henwife at the Hall had been buried a day or two earlier, and when Margret came asking a place from Mrs. Wilkinson, the lord's housekeeper, the position was yet unfilled and Margret got it.

Not every one would have cared for the post. Only a misanthropic person indeed would have been satisfied with it. The henwife's cottage and the poultry settlement might have been many miles from a human habitation, so lonely were they. They were in a glen of red sandstone, and half the wood lay between them and the Hall. The great red walls stood so high round the glen that you could not even hear the sea calling. As for the village, it was a long way below. You had to go down a steep path from the glen before you came to an open space, where you could see the reek of the chimneys under you. Every morning Margret brought the eggs and the trussed chickens to the Hall. But no one disturbed her solitude, except when the deer, or the wild little red cattle came gazing curiously through the netting at Margret and her charges. There, for twenty-seven years, Margret lived with no company but the fowl. On Sundays and holidays she went to mass to the Island Chapel, but gave no encouragement to those who would have gone a step of the road home with her. The Island women used to wonder how she could bear the loneliness.—'Why, God be betune us and harm!' they often said, 'Sure the crathur might be robbed and murdered any night of the year and no wan the wiser.' And so she might, if the Island possessed robbers and murderers in its midst. But it is a primitively innocent little community, which sleeps with open doors as often as not, and there is nothing to tempt marauders or even beggars to migrate there.

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By and by a feeling got about that Margret must be saving money. Her wage as a henwife was

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no great thing, but then, as they said, 'she looked as if she lived on the smell of an oil-rag,' and there was plenty of food to be had in the Hall kitchen, where Margret waited with her eggs and fowl every morning. Certainly her clothes, though decent, were worn well-nigh threadbare. But the feelers that the neighbours sent out towards Margret met with no solid assurance. Grim and taciturn, Margret kept her own counsel, and was like enough to keep it till the day of her death.

Jack Laffan, Margret's brother, is the village carpenter, a sociable poor man, not the least bit in the world like his sister. Jack is rather fond of idling over a glass with his cronies in the public-house, but, as he is well under Mrs. Jack's thumb, the habit is not likely to grow on him inconveniently. There are four daughters and a son, a lad of fifteen or thereabouts. Two of the daughters are domestic servants out in the big world, and are reported to wear streamers to their caps and fine lace aprons every day. Another is handmaiden to Miss Bell at the post office, and knows the contents of all the letters, except Father Tiernay's, before the people they belong to. Fanny is at home with her father and mother, and is supposed to be too fond of fal-lals, pinchbeck brooches and cheap ribbons, which come to her from her sisters out in the world. She often talks of emigration, and is not sought after by the young men of the Island, who regard her as a 'vain paycocky thing.'

Mrs. Jack has the reputation of being a hard, managing woman. There was never much love lost between her and Margret, and when the latter came back from her six years' absence on the mainland, Mrs. Jack's were perhaps the most ill-natured surmises as to the reasons for Margret's silence and the meaning of that queer checked garb.

For a quarter of a century Margret lived among her fowl, untroubled by her kin. Then the talk about the money grew from little beginnings like a snowball. It fired Mrs. Jack with a curious excitement, for she was an ignorant woman and ready to believe any extravagant story. She amazed Jack by putting the blame of their long ignoring of Margret upon his shoulders entirely, and when he stared at her, dumb-founded, she seized and shook him till his teeth rattled. 'You great stupid omadhaun!' she hissed between the shakes, 'that couldn't have the nature in you to see to your own sister, an' she a lone woman!'

That very day Jack went off stupidly to try to bridge over with Margret the gulf of nearly thirty years. He got very little help from his sister. She watched him with what seemed like grim enjoyment while he wriggled miserably on the edge of his chair and tried to talk naturally. At length he jerked out his wife's invitation to have a bit of dinner with them on the coming Sunday, which Margret accepted without showing any pleasure, and then he bolted.

Margret came to dinner on the Sunday, and was well entertained with a fat chicken and a bit of bacon, for the Laffans were well-to-do people. She thoroughly enjoyed her dinner, though she spoke little and that little monosyllabic; but Margret was taciturn even as a girl, and her solitary habit for years seemed to have made speech more difficult for her. Mrs. Jack heaped her plate with great heartiness and made quite an honoured guest of her. But outside enjoying the dinner Margret did not seem to respond. Young Jack was brought forward to display his accomplishments, which he did in the most hang-dog fashion. The cleverness and good-looks and goodness of the girls were expatiated upon, but Margret gave no sign of interest. Once Fanny caught her looking at her with a queer saturnine glance, that made her feel all at once hot and uncomfortable, though she had felt pretty secure of her smartness before that. Margret's reception of Mrs. Jack's overtures did not satisfy that enterprising lady. When she had departed Mrs. Jack put her down as 'a flinty-hearted ould maid.' 'Her sort,' she declared, 'is ever an' always sour an' bitther to them the Lord blesses wid a family.' But all the same it became a regular thing for Margret to eat her Sunday dinner with the Laffans, and Mrs. Jack discovered after a time that the good dinners were putting a skin and roundness on Margret that might give her a new lease of life—perhaps a not quite desirable result.

The neighbours looked on at Mrs. Jack's 'antics' with something little short of scandal. They met by twos and threes to talk over it, and came to the conclusion that Mrs. Jack had no shame at all, at all, in her pursuit of the old woman's money. Truth to tell, there was scarcely a woman in the Island but thought she had as good a right to Margret's money as her newly-attentive kinsfolk. Mrs. Devine and Mrs. Cahill might agree in the morning, with many shakings of the head, that 'Liza Laffan's avarice and greed were beyond measure loathsome. Yet neither seemed pleased to see the other a little later in the day, when Mrs. Cahill climbing the hill with a full basket met Mrs. Devine descending with an empty one.

For all of a sudden a pilgrimage to Margret's cottage in the Red Glen became the recognised thing. It was surprising how old childish friendships and the most distant ties of kindred were furnished up and brought into the light of day. The grass in the lane to the glen became trampled to a regular track. If the women themselves did not come panting up the hill they sent the little girsha, or wee Tommy or Larry, with a little fish, or a griddle cake, or a few fresh greens for Margret. The men of the Island were somewhat scornful of these proceedings on the part of their dames; but as a rule the Island wives hold their own and do pretty well as they will. All this friendship for Margret created curious divisions and many enmities.

Margret, indeed, throve on all the good things, but whether any one person was in her favour more than another it would be impossible to say. Margret got up a way of thanking all alike in a honeyed voice that had a queer sound of mockery in it, and after a time some of the more independent spirits dropped out of the chase, 'pitching,' as they expressed it, 'her ould money to the divil.' Mrs. Jack was fairly confident all the time that if any one on the Island got Margret's nest-egg it would be herself, but she had a misgiving which she imparted to her husband that the whole might go to Father Tiernay for charities. Any attempt at getting inside the shell which hid

Margret's heart from the world her sister-in-law had long given up. She had also given up trying to interest Margret in 'the childher,' or bidding young Jack be on his best behaviour before the Sunday guest. The young folk didn't like the derision in Margret's pale eyes, and kept out of her way as much as possible, since they feared their mother too much to flout her openly, as they were often tempted to do.

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Two or three years had passed before Margret showed signs of failing. Then at the end of one very cold winter people noticed that she grew feebler. She was away from mass one or two Sundays, and then one Sunday she reappeared walking with the aid of a stick and looking plainly ill and weak. After mass she had a private talk with Father Tiernay at the presbytery; and then went slowly down to Jack's house for the usual dinner. Both Jack and Mrs. Jack saw her home in the afternoon, and a hard task the plucky old woman found it, for all their assistance, to get back to her cottage up the steep hill. When they had reached the top she paused for a rest. Then she said quietly, 'I'm thinkin' I'll make no more journeys to the Chapel. Father Tiernay'll have to be coming to me instead.'

'Tut, tut, woman dear,' said Mrs. Jack, with two hard red spots coming into her cheeks, 'we'll be seein' you about finely when the weather gets milder.' And then she insinuated in a wheedling voice something about Margret's affairs being settled.

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Margret looked up at her with a queer mirthfulness in her glance. 'Sure what wud a poor ould woman like me have to settle? Sure that's what they say when a sthrong-farmer takes to dyin'.'

Mrs. Jack was too fearful of possible consequences to press the matter. She was anxious that Margret should have Fanny to look after the house and the fowl for her, but this Margret refused. 'I'll be able to do for myself a little longer,' she said, 'an' thank you kindly all the same.'

When it was known that Margret was failing, the attentions to her became more urgent. Neighbours passed each other now in the lane with a toss of the head and 'a wag of the tail.' As for Mrs. Jack, who would fain have installed herself altogether in the henwife's cottage, she spent her days quivering with indignation at the meddlesomeness of the other women. She woke Jack up once in the night with a fiery declaration that she'd speak to Father Tiernay about the pursuit of her moneyed relative, but Jack threw cold water on that scheme. 'Sure his Riverince himself, small blame to him, 'ud be as glad as another to have the bit. 'Twould be buildin' him the new schoolhouse he's wantin' this many a day, so it would.' And this suggestion made Mrs. Jack look askance at her pastor, as being also in the running for the money.

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It was surprising how many queer presents found their way to Margret's larder in those days. They who had not the most suitable gift for an invalid brought what they had, and Margret received them all with the same inscrutability. She might have been provisioning for a siege. Mrs. Jack's chickens were flanked by a coarse bit of American bacon; here was a piece of salt ling, there some potatoes in a sack; a slice of salt butter was side by side with a griddle cake. Many a good woman appreciated the waste of good food even while she added to it, and sighed after that full larder for the benefit of her man and the weans at home; but all the time there was the dancing marsh-light of Margret's money luring the good souls on. There had never been any organised robbery in the Island since the cattle-lifting of the kernes long ago; but many a good woman fell of a tremble now when she thought of Margret and her 'stocking' alone through the silent night, and at the mercy of midnight robbers.

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There was not a day that several offerings were not laid at Margret's feet. But suddenly she changed her stereotyped form of thanks to a mysterious utterance, 'You're maybe feeding more than you know, kind neighbours,' was the dark saying that set the women conjecturing about Margret's sanity.

Then the bolt fell. One day a big, angular, shambling girl, with Margret's suspicious eyes and cynical mouth, crossed by the ferry to the Island. She had a trunk, which Barney Ryder, general carrier to the Island, would have lifted to his ass-cart, but the new-comer scornfully waved him away. 'Come here, you two gorsoons,' she said, seizing upon young Jack Laffan and a comrade who were gazing at her grinning, 'take a houl't o' the thrunk an' lead the way to Margret Laffan's in the Red Glen. I'll crack sixpence betune yez when I get there.' The lads, full of curiosity, lifted up the trunk, and preceded her up the mile or so of hill to Margret's. She stalked after them into the sunny kitchen where Margret sat waiting, handed them the sixpence when they had put down the trunk, bundled them out and shut the door before she looked towards Margret in her chimney-corner.

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The explanation came first from his Reverence, who was walking in the evening glow, when Mrs. Jack Laffan came flying towards him with her cap-strings streaming.

'Little Jack has a quare story, yer Riverince,' she cried out panting, 'about a girl's come visitin' ould Margret in the glen, an' wid a thrunk as big as a house. Him an' little Martin was kilt draggin' it up the hill.'

His Reverence waved away her excitement gently.

'I know all about it,' he said. 'Indeed I've been the means in a way of restoring Margret's daughter to her. You never knew your sister-in-law was married, Mrs. Laffan? An odd woman to drop her married name. We must call her by it in future. Mrs. Conneely is the name.'

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But Mrs. Jack, with an emotion which even the presence of his Reverence could not quell, let what the neighbours described afterwards as a 'screech out of her fit to wake the dead,' and fled into her house, where on her bed she had an attack which came as near being hysterical as the strong-minded woman could compass. She only recovered when Mrs. Devine and Mrs. Cahill and

the widow Mulvany, running in, proposed to drench her with cold water, when her heels suddenly left off drumming and she stood up, very determinedly, and bade them be off about their own business. She always spoke afterwards of Margret as the robber of the widow and orphan, which was satisfying if not quite appropriate.

We all heard afterwards how Margret had married on the mainland, and after this girl was born had had an attack of mania, for which she was placed in the county asylum. In time she was declared cured, and it was arranged that her husband should come for her on a certain day and remove her; but Margret, having had enough of marriage and its responsibilities, left the asylum quietly before that day came and made her way to the Island. She had been well content to be regarded as a spinster till she felt her health failing, and then she had entrusted to Father Tiernay her secret, and he had found her daughter for her. [64]

Margret lived some months after that, and left at the time of her death thirty pounds to the fortunate heiress. The well-stocked larder had sufficed the two for quite a long time without any recourse to 'the stocking.' There was very little further friendship between the village and the Red Glen. Such of the neighbours as were led there at first by curiosity found the door shut in their faces, for Mary had Margret's suspiciousness many times intensified. After the Laffan family had recovered from the first shock of disappointment Fanny made various approaches to her cousin when she met her at mass on the Sundays, and, unheeding rebuffs, sent her a brooch and an apron at Christmas. I wish I could have seen Margret's face and Mary's over that present. It was returned to poor Fanny, with a curt intimation that Mary had no use for it, and there the matter ended. [65]

I once asked Mary, when I knew her well enough to take the liberty, about that meeting between her and her mother, after the door was shut on young Jack's and little Martin's departing footsteps. 'Well,' said Mary, 'she looked hard at me, an' then she said, "You've grown up yalla an' bad-lookin', but a strong girl for the work. You favour meself, though I've a genteeler nose." And then,' said Mary, 'I turned in an' boiled the kettle for the tay.'

The money did not even remain in the Island, for as soon as Margret was laid in a grave in the Abbey—with a vacant space beside her, for, said Mary, 'you couldn't tell but I'd be takin' a fancy to be buried there myself some day,'—Mary fled in the early morning before the neighbours were about. Mary looked on the Island where so many had coveted her money as a 'nest of robbers,' and so she fled, with 'the stocking' in the bosom of her gown, one morning at low tide. She wouldn't trust the money to the post office in the Island, because her cousin Lizzie was Miss Bell's servant. 'Divil a letter but the priest's they don't open an' read,' she said, 'an' tells the news afterwards to the man or woman that owns it. The news gets to them before the letter. An' if I put the fortune in there I'm doubtin' 'twould ever see London. I know an honest man in the Whiterock post office I'd better be trustin'.

And that is how Margret's 'stocking' left the Island. [66]

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## V

### HOW MARY CAME HOME

The Island people seldom marry outside the Island. They are passionately devoted to each other, but as a rule look coldly upon the stranger. Swarthy Spanish sailors put in sometimes, and fair-skinned, black-eyed Greeks, and broad-shouldered Norwegians, all as ripe for love as any other sailor, but that they should carry away an Island girl to their outlandish places over sea is a thing almost unheard of. The Island girls are courted by their own blue-jerseyed fisher-lads—and what a place for love-making, with the ravines and caves in the cliff-sides, and the deep glens in the heart of the Island, so lonely except for the lord's red deer and little fierce black cattle. Why, if one of those foreign sailors attempted love-making with an Island lass, just as likely as not a pair of little brown fists would rattle about his amazed ears; the girls there know how to defend their dignity. [67]

But one spring there was a sensation little short of a scandal when it became known that Mary Cassidy, the handsomest girl of the Island, was keeping company with a Spanish sailor who had come into harbour on a Glasgow barque. The stage of keeping company was not long. So violent was the passion that flamed up between the two that there was no gainsaying it. Mary was the one girl in a family of five tall fishermen. Father and mother were dead—the father drowned in a wild night while trying to make the treacherous mouth of the inadequate harbour, the mother dead of her grief. Mary had known fathering and mothering both from the brothers. She was the youngest of them all, and their pride and glory. [68]

She was tall and generously proportioned, with ropes of red gold hair round her small head,

and her face had the colour of the sea-shell. In her large brown eyes, sleepily veiled by long lashes, smouldered a hidden fire: her step was proud and fearless, and she was as strong as a beautiful lithe young animal. The brothers brought her gay prints and woollens and rows of beads when they came home with the fishing fleet, and with these she adorned her beauty—a beauty so brilliant that it glittered of itself.

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There was no use opposing her once she had fallen in love with Jacopo. He was a handsome, dark fellow, with insinuating manners, and a voice like a blackbird. When the two were together there was no one else in the world for them. He had flamed up with the fierceness of his southern nature: she with the heat of a heart slow to love, and once fired slow to go out.

When Jacopo had settled things with Father Tiernay and had gone on his last trip before he should come to make Mary his wife, the girl walked the Island like one transfigured. The light burned steadily in her deep eyes, her cheeks flamed scarlet, her lips were red as coral. She went about her household duties with her head in the air and her eyes far away. The brothers when they came home of an evening sat silent in a ring, for the grief was on them: but if the girl knew she did not seem to know. Of the five brothers not one had thought of marrying. What any one might do as soon as the golden thread that held them together was snapped no one could say; but they were grizzled or grizzling men, and had long ago been put down by the Island folk as confirmed bachelors.

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Father Tiernay had talked with Jacopo about his religion, and had declared him an excellent son of Mother Church, so there was nothing against him on that ground. The captain of his ship gave him a good character, and Jacopo had been with him three seasons. He had a tidy little house near Greenock, and a bit of money saved. Yet the brothers were not satisfied. 'Why couldn't she have fancied a lad of the kindly neighbours?' grumbled William, the eldest. And the youngest, Patrick, answered in the same strain, 'Wasn't the Island good enough for her but she must go to foreign lands?' And then five melancholy heads shook in the twilight.

They had a cold, awkward, insular distrust and shyness of the Spaniard. They made no response to his professions of goodwill and brotherhood, poured out fluently in his yet difficult Scots-English. They noticed and commented afterwards upon his contemptuous shrug, when one feast night he was invited to join the family at its Rosary,—for they are devout people, the Islanders.

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Yet, distrust or no distrust, the girl must go to him. He came back one summer day with a fine rig-out for his wedding, and a bonnet and cloak for the bride such as were never dreamt of in the Island. She was an impassioned bride, and as she came down the church with her husband, her eyes uplifted and shining like stars, she seemed rather to float like a tall flame than to walk like a mortal woman.

Five men watched her then with melancholy and patient faces. The five went with her to the boat on which she was to cross to the mainland to take the Glasgow steamer. As the little ferry plied away from the pier it was at her husband she looked, not at them and the Island, though it stood up purple and black, and she had well loved the rocks and glades of it, and though they had fostered her.

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The five men went back to their lonely cottage and began to do for themselves. They were handy fellows, as good at frying a fish as catching it, and they were not minded to put a woman in Mary's place. They kept the cottage tidy enough, yet it was a dreary tidiness. The fire generally went out when it was no longer required for meals, and as the brothers came in one after the other, from smoking a pipe on the quay, they went to bed in the dark, or by the shaft of moonlight that came in through the window overlooking the old Abbey and its graves. They were always silent men, and now they grew more taciturn. Even when at first letters came from Mary full of her husband and her happiness, they spelt them out to themselves and did not take the neighbours into their confidence. And more and more they came to be regarded as 'oddities' by the Island people.

About a year after Mary's marriage there came a letter from Jacopo announcing that she was the mother of a son. That child formed a tremendous interest to his five uncles. They did not talk much about it, but a speech from one or another told what was in all their minds.

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'The lad'll be fine and tall by this,' one would say. 'Ay,' the other would respond, 'he'll be maybe walking by now.' 'He'll have the looks of his mother,' suggested James. 'Ay: he was a fair child from the beginning,' Thomas would agree.

Seeing the child was so much in their minds it was strange none of them had ever seen it. At first after she was married Mary had been fond of pressing them to come to the Clyde, if it was only for a look at her. But little by little the invitations had dropped off and ceased. They had been shy of going in the early days. It was not that they feared the journey, for some of the brothers had fared much further afield than Scotland; but in their hearts, though they never complained, they remembered how she had not looked back on them as the ferry swung from the pier, and feared that they might be but half-welcome guests in the house of her husband.

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At first Jacopo often wrote for his wife, but after a time this too ceased. Then the praises of him by degrees grew spasmodic. There were often two or three letters in which his name found no place. The brothers with the keenness of love noted this fact, though each of them pondered it long in his mind before one evening Patrick spoke of his fear, and then the others brought theirs out of its hiding-place.

Mary had been going on for four years married, when in a wild winter David and Tom were drowned. They were laid with many another drowned fisherman in the Abbey graveyard. Mary

wrote the other brothers ill-spelt, tear-stained letters, which proved her heart had not grown cold to them; and the three brothers went on living as the five had done.

It was a bitter, bitter spring when Mary's letters ceased altogether. They had had a short letter from her early in January, and then no word afterwards. February went by gray and with showers of sleet: no word came. In the first week of March there came a great storm, with snow pelting on the furious wind. All the fishing boats were drawn high on the land, and the fishers sat in their cottages benumbed, despite the fires on the hearth, for the wind roared through doors and windows and often seemed minded to take up the little houses and smash them on the rocks as an angry child smashes a flimsy toy. No one went out of doors, and the Cassidys sat with their feet on the turf embers and smoked. The sky was lurid green all that March day, and in the little cottage there was hardly light for the men to see each other's brooding faces. If they spoke it was only to say, 'God betune us and all harm!' or, 'God help all poor sowl's at say!' when the wind rattled with increasing fury the stout door and windows.

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It was some time in the afternoon that William spoke out of his meditations. 'Boys,' he said, 'if the ferry goes to-morrow, and they'll be fain to put out, for there isn't much food on the Island, I'll start wid her in the name of God, and take the Glasga' boat. It's on my mind there's something wrong wid our Mary.'

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The other two breathed a sigh of relief. 'The same was on my tongue,' said one and the other, and almost simultaneously both cried, 'Why should you go? Let me go.'

'Stay where yez are, boys!' said the other authoritatively, 'an' get what comfort yez can about the house. I'm thinkin' I'll be bringin' the girsha home.'

He gave no reason for this supposition, and they asked none. That night the storm subsided, and though the sea was churned white as wool, and no fishing boats would put out for days to come, the tiny steam ferry panted its way through the trough of waters to bring stores from the mainland. Will Cassidy was the only passenger, and he carried with him small provision for himself, but at the last moment Patrick had come running after him with a bundle of woollens.

'It'll be fine and cold travelling back,' he panted, 'so I run over to Clancy's (Clancy's was the village shop) and got a big shawl for her, an' a small one for the child. The things'll be no worse for your keeping them warm on the way over.'

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But William did not keep them warm in his brother's sense. He hugged them under his big *cotamor*, and now and again he took them out and regarded them with interest. Once he said aloud, 'Well, to think of Patrick havin' the thought, the crathur'; and then put them hurriedly back because a big wave was just sousing over the deck.

The next evening he was in the streets of the unfriendly Scotch town that was covered with snow. The green sky of the day of the storm had fulfilled its prophecy and spilt its burden on the earth. As he passed on, inquiring his way from one or another, there were few passengers to enlighten him, and his footsteps fell with a muffled sound on the causeways. At last he came to where the houses grew thinner, and found the place he sought, a little cottage not far from the water's edge.

There was a light in the window, but when he had knocked no one came in answer. He knocked two or three times. Then he lifted the latch and went in. There was a woman sitting by the fireless grate. Her arms were round a child on her bosom, and a thin shawl about her shoulders trailed over the child's face. She did not turn round as he came in, but he saw it was Mary's figure. He had to speak to her before she looked up. Then she gave a faint cry and her frozen face relaxed. She held out the child to him with an imploring gesture: it reminded him of her running to him with a wound when she had fallen down in her babyhood. He took the child from her and felt it very heavy. The mother came to him gently and put her head on his rough coat. 'O William,' she cried, 'he's dead; my little Willie's dead and cold. It was at three o'clock the breath went out of him, and no one ever came since.'

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He looked at the child then and saw that he was indeed dead. He put her back gently in her chair, and laid the child's little body on the bright patchwork quilt of the bed. He remembered that quilt: it was part of Mary's bridal gear. Then he came again to the mother and soothed her, with her bright head against his rough coat.

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'Whisht, acushla,' he said, 'sure you're famished. Aisy now, till I make a bit of fire for you.'

The girl watched him with wide dry eyes of despair. He gathered the embers on the hearth and set a light to them. He lit a candle and extinguished the smoking lamp, which had apparently been burning all day. Then he went here and there gathering the materials for a meal. The kettle was soon boiling, and he made some tea and forced her to drink a cup. He was very glad of its warmth himself, for he was weary with long fasting. Afterwards he sat down beside her and asked for Jacopo.

'Him,' turning away her head, 'he's wid another woman.' She said no more, and William asked no more. Instead, he said gently, 'Well, acushla, you'll be putting together the few things you'll take with you. There's a cattle boat going at six in the mornin', an' we can get a passage by that.'

She looked up at him. 'But the child?' she said.

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'He'll go wid us,' the man replied. 'He'll sleep sweeter on the Island than in this sorrowful town.'

'May God reward you, William,' she said. 'You're savin' more than you know. For if he'd come back I wouldn't answer for it that I wouldn't have kilt him as he slep.'



The morning rose green and livid, with a sky full of snow though the world was covered with it. Now and again the snow drifted in their faces as they trudged through the streets before daybreak, and it came dryly pattering when they were out on the waste of green waters cleaving their way under the melancholy daylight. William had found a corner for the woman under shelter of the bridge, and there she sat through the hours with the dead child wrapped in her shawl, and the cold of it aching at her heart. The snow came on faster, and the deck passengers huddled in for shelter. 'God save you, honest woman,' said a ruddy-faced wife to her. 'Give me the child, and move yourself about a bit. You'll be fair frozen before we're half way across.' Mary shook her head with a gesture that somehow disarmed the kind woman's wrath at the rejection of her overtures. 'That crature looks to me,' she said to her husband, 'fair dazed wid the sorrow. Maybe it's the husband of her the crature's after buryin'.' There were a great many curious glances at Mary in her corner, but no one else had the temerity to offer her help.

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William brought her a cup of tea at mid-day, which she drank eagerly, still holding the child with one arm, but she pushed away the food he offered with loathing.

In the evening they disembarked, and from a pier swept by the north wind were huddled into a train, ill lit and cold as the grave. Mary crouched into a corner with her face bent over the dead child. 'A quiet sleeper, ma'am,' said a cheerful sea-faring man. Mary looked at him with lack-lustre eyes and turned away her head.

Presently she began to sing, a quaint old Island lullaby, which rang weird and melancholy. William looked at her in alarm, but said nothing, and the other passengers watched her curiously, half in fear. She lifted her child from her knee to her breast, and held it there clasped a moment. 'I can't warm him,' she said, looking helplessly at all the wondering faces. 'The cold's on him and on me, and I doubt we'll ever be warm again.'

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Presently they drew up at a bleak way-side station for the ferry, and the brother and sister without a word stepped out in the night and the snow. The man did not offer to carry the child. He knew it was no use. But he put a strong arm round the woman and her burden, where the snow was heaviest, and the wind from the sea blew like a hurricane.

They were the only passengers by the ferry, and neither the ferryman nor his mate knew Mary Cassidy, with the shawl drawn over her eyes. But as they stepped ashore and touched the familiar rock on which she and hers for many a forgotten generation had been born and cradled, the piteous frozen madness melted away from her face. She turned to her brother—

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'Tis the sad home-coming,' she said, 'but I've brought back all I prized.' She snatched the ring from her finger suddenly and hurled it out in the tossing waters, on which even in the dark they could see the foam-crests. 'Now I'm Mary Cassidy again,' she said, 'and the woman that left you is dead.' She lifted her shawl and kissed the little dead face under it. 'You've no father, avic,' she said passionately. 'You're mine, only mine. Never a man has any right in you at all, but only Mary Cassidy.'

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## VI

### MAURYEEN

[84]

ToC

Against Con Daly's little girl there was never a word spoken in the Island. Con had been well liked, God rest his soul!—but the man was drowned nigh upon twenty years ago. There was some old tragic tale about it, how he had volunteered to swim with a rope round his waist to a ship breaking up a few yards from the rocks in a sea that a gannet could scarcely live upon. He had pushed aside the men who remonstrated with him, turning on them a face ghastly in the moonlight. 'Stand aside, men,' he cried, 'and if I fail, see to the girsha!' He was the strongest man in all the Island, and as much at home in the water as a porpoise. They saw his sleek head now and again flung out of the trough of the waves, and his huge shoulders labouring against the weight of the storm. Then suddenly the rope they were holding fell slack in their hands,—they said afterwards it had snapped on a jagged razor of rock,—and the man disappeared. A day or two later his battered and bruised body was flung up on the bathing strand, where in summer the city ladies take their dip in the sea. He was buried with some of the drowned sailors he had tried to rescue, and an iron cross put at his head by the fishermen. But for a long time there was a talk that the man had gone to meet his death gladly, had for some reason or another preferred death to life; but people were never quite sure if there was anything in it.

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The Islanders had looked askance at Ellen Daly, Con's wife, before that, though to her husband she was the apple of his eye. She had been a domestic servant on the mainland when Con Daly met and married her, and she had never seemed to have any friends. She had been handsome in her day, at least so some people thought, but there were women on the Island who said they

never could abide her, with her pale face and sneering smile, and her eyes that turned green as a cat's when she was angry. However, she never tried to ingratiate herself with the women: if the men admired her it was as much as she asked. When she liked she could be fascinating enough. She bewitched Mrs. Wilkinson, the housekeeper at the Hall, into taking her on whenever his Lordship filled the house with gentlemen and an extra hand was needed. She was deft and clever, and could be insinuating when it served her purpose. But the friendship of the Island women she had never desired, and when her husband was drowned there was not a fisher-wife to go and sit with her in the desolate house. As the years went by her good looks went with them. She yellowed, and her malevolent eyes took on red rims round their greenness; while her dry lips, parted over her snarling teeth, were more ill than they had been when they were ripe and ruddy.

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The neighbours were kind by stealth to Con's girsha. Those were long days of her childhood when her mother was at work in the Hall, and the child was locked in the empty cottage; but many was the kind word through the window, from the women as they passed up and down, and now and again a hot griddle-cake, or some little dainty of the kind, was passed through to the child as she sat so dull and lonely on her little creepy stool.

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Poor little Mauryeen! She was a child with social instincts, and often, often she used to wonder in those lonely hours why she might not be out with the other children, playing at shop in the crevices of the rocks, or wading for cockles, or dancing round in a ring to the sing-song of 'Green Gravel,' or playing at 'High Gates.' Her mother coldly discouraged any friendship with the children of her foes; and little Mauryeen grew up a silent child, with something more delicate and refined about her than the other children,—with somehow the air of a little lady.

But Mauryeen was not her mother's child to be without a will of her own. As she grew from childhood to girlhood she began to assert herself, and though her mother tried hard to break her spirit she did not succeed. After a time she seemed to realise that here was something she had not counted upon, and to submit, since she could not hope to fight it. All the same she hated the girl whom she could not rule, hated her so furiously that the glitter of her eyes as she looked at her from the chimney-corner was oftentimes murderous. For, little by little Mauryeen grew to be friends with all the fishing village.

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Even though she asserted herself the girl did her duty bravely and humbly. Any mother of them all would have been proud to own Mauryeen. When her mother had employment at the Hall Mauryeen took care of the house, and having cleaned and tidied to her heart's content, sat in the sun at her knitting till Ellen Daly came home to find a comfortable meal prepared for her. The woman's one good quality was that she had always been a good housewife, and the girl took after her. Then when her mother was at home Mauryeen went out sewing to the houses of the few gentry who lived on the hill; and the house was well kept and comfortable, though an unnatural hatred sat beside the hearth.

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The neighbours pitied and praised Mauryeen all the more. They used to wonder how long it would last, the silent feud between mother and daughter, especially since Mauryeen was so capable and clever that she might for the asking join even Mrs. Wilkinson's chosen band of handmaidens.

The girl meanwhile throve as happily as though she lived in the very sunshine of love rather than in this malignant atmosphere. She saw little of her mother. The hours when they were under one roof were few; and across the threshold she found abundant kindness and praise. Mauryeen was small and graceful, with the olive-tinted fairness which had been her mother's in her best days. But Mauryeen's blue eyes were kindly and her lips smiled, and her soft voice was gentle; she had a pretty way of decking herself which the fisher-girls could never come by. Mauryeen in a pink cotton frock, with a spray of brown seaweed in her belt, might have passed for one of the young ladies who visited at the Hall. If the other girls copied her pretty tricks of decoration they carried the tame air of the mere copyist. But no one grudged Mauryeen her charm; she was so kind and gentle, and she had always the tragedy of that ghastly old mother of hers to stir pity for her. Then too she always seemed so anxious that the other girls should look well, and so willing to take trouble to this end, that no one could envy her her own prettiness.

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There came a time when a young man of the Island, Randal Burke by name, declared to Mauryeen that her voice could coax the birds off the trees, and that her head when she listened was like the prettiest bird's head, all covered with golden feathers. She had indeed a very pretty way of listening, with her head on one side and her eyes bright and attentive. Mauryeen was used to compliments, and could usually hold her own in a bit of light love-making; but it was remarkable that at this speech of Randal Burke's she went pale. She always turned pale when another girl would have blushed.

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Mauryeen's was a sudden and rapid wooing. The young fellow was fairly independent, possessing as he did a little bit of land with his cottage, as well as a boat. His mother was one of the most prosperous women of the Island, and had been in days gone by Ellen Daly's bitterest enemy. But for all that she welcomed Mauryeen tenderly as a daughter.

There was a terrible to-do when Mauryeen told her mother of her intentions. She turned so livid that Mauryeen for all her brave heart was frightened, and faltered. The old woman choked and gasped with the whirlwind of passion that possessed her. As soon as she could speak she hissed out:—

'The day you marry him I curse you, and him, your house, your marriage, and every child born of you.'

Mauryeen's anger rose and shook her too like a whirlwind, but it drove out fear.

'And if you do, you wicked woman,' she said, 'it's not me it'll harm. Do you think God will listen to the like of you or let harm befall me and mine because of your curse?'

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For a day or two after Mauryeen's defiance her mother brooded in quietness, only now and again turning on her daughter those terrible green eyes. No word passed between the two, and meanwhile Randal Burke was hastening the preparations for the marriage by every means in his power. Father Tiernay had 'called' them at the mass three Sunday mornings. The priest was greatly pleased with the marriage. Mauryeen was a pet lamb of his flock, and he deeply disliked and distrusted her mother.

It was the feast day of the year on the Island, a beautiful bright sunny June day. On a plateau the men played at the hurley and putting the stone; and there was a tug of war for married men and single, and after that for the women, amid much jollity and laughter. Above the plateau the hill sloped, and that long sunny slope was the place from which the girls and women looked on at the prowess of their male kind. That day out of all the year there was a general picnic on the hill, and meals were eaten and the long day spent out of doors, till the dews came on the grass.

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Now one of the events was a rowing contest, and the course was right under the hill-slope. Father Tiernay every year gave a money prize for the winner, and the distinction in itself was ardently coveted. Randal Burke was rowing against another young fisherman, and it was not easy to forecast the winner, both men were so strong, so practised, and so eager in the contest.

The race had begun, and the people on the hillside were standing up in their excitement watching the boats, which were nearly dead level. Mauryeen stood by Randal's mother, with one hand thrust childishly within her arm, and the other shading her eyes from the bright sun. Suddenly the people were startled by the sound of running feet, and all looking in one direction they saw Mauryeen's mother coming without bonnet or cloak, her face working with passion and her hands clenched. The people fell back before her. She had an evil reputation, and for a minute or two they thought she had gone mad. Mauryeen, who did not fall back with the others, found herself standing in the centre of an empty space, while her mother panted before her, struggling for words. All the women-folk behind pressed together and craned over each other's shoulders, half alarmed and half curious.

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At last the woman found her breath. She pointed a yellow finger at the girl, who stood before her with her head proudly lifted, and her eyes amazed but fearless.

'Look at her,' shrieked the beldame, 'all of you, and you, Kate Burke, that boasts your family's the oldest on the Island. Look well at her! Och, the good ould ancient blood! Look at *her*, for her blood's ancients still. Do you see anything of Con Daly in her?'

The girl looked round with a forlorn sense of being held up to public scorn, but the women were huddling together, and the fear kept any one from coming to stand by her side.

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'Look at her,' again shrieked the hoarse voice. 'D'yez know where she gets her pride and the courage to dare me? She gets it from her father, th' ould lord. Con Daly had never act nor part in her.'

A scream, the like of which the Island had never heard, broke from Mauryeen's lips. It was such a cry as if body and soul were tearing asunder. With that scream she flung her arms above her head. The little group, closing round her awe-stricken, looked to see her fall face downward to the ground. But with a wild movement of her arms, as if she swept the whole world out of her path, she fled down the hill towards the village. Ellen Daly had vanished. No one had seen her go. And down in the dancing bay at their feet Randal Burke proudly shot ahead of his opponent and won the race.

The girl meanwhile had fled on and on, with only the blind instinct to hide her disgrace. The village was empty of all but the sick and the bed-ridden. There was not an eye on Mauryeen Daly as she fled by the open doors. With a mechanical instinct she turned in at the door of her mother's house. The cool darkness of it after the glare outside was grateful to her. She closed the door and barred it. Then she turned into a room off the kitchen, her own little room, where there was a picture of the Mother of Sorrows with seven swords through her heart, and dropped on the floor before the picture with an inarticulate moaning.

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She lay there half unconscious, and only feeling her misery dumbly. On the wall hung her blue cashmere dress, in which she was to have been married a day or two later. On the chest of drawers was a box containing the little wreath and veil her mother-in-law had presented her with. But she saw none of these things, with her mouth and eyes against the floor.

She came back to life presently, hearing her name called. The voice had called many times before she heard it. Now it was imperative, almost sharp in its eagerness. 'Open, acushla, open, or I burst the door.' It was Randal's voice; and she answered it, advancing a step or two, groping with outstretched hands, and a wild look of fear in her dilated eyes. Then she heard the door straining and creaking, and a man panting, striving outside. In a little while, almost before she had time to stand clear of it, the door rattled on the floor, and her lover leapt into the cabin.

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She put out her hands to fence him off, swaying blindly towards the wall. He sprang to her with a murmur of pity, and was just in time to catch her as her senses left her, and she lay a limp and helpless thing in his arms.

Father Tiernay was standing at his window gazing over a surpassingly fair plain of sea, dotted with silver green islands. He was glad the people had so fine a day for their sports. In the afternoon he would be with them to distribute the prizes and congratulate the winners, and to add to the general enjoyment by his presence; but this morning he was alone, except for his deaf

old housekeeper, and Jim the sacristan, who was too dignified to be out on the Fair Hill with the others. The priest's look of perplexity deepened as he watched some one climbing the steep hill to his house. 'It looks like Cody's ghost carrying his wife's body,' he muttered to himself. The figure or figures came nearer. At last his Reverence took in what he saw, and made but one or two steps to the hall door. 'Come in here,' he said, asking no questions, like a practical man; and indeed for a few minutes the young fisherman was incapable of answering any. It was not until the priest had forced some brandy between the girl's lips, when they had laid her on a sofa, and her breath came fluttering back, that Father Tiernay drew the lover aside into the window recess and learnt in a few words what had happened.

'She's so proud, my little girl,' pleaded the lover. 'She won't live under the shame of it unless your Reverence 'ud help us out of it. Couldn't your Reverence say the words over us? We've been called three times, and I've the ring in my pocket. Oh, 'twas well that unnatural woman calculated her time when our happiness was at the full. Couldn't your Reverence do it for us?' he said again in a wheedling tone.

His Reverence looked at him thoughtfully. Then he drew out his watch. 'Yes,' he said, 'there's time enough, and I think you're right, my lad. Just step outside while I speak to her, for I see she's coming to.'

The young man whispered: 'God bless you, Father! If I waited till to-morrow I'd never put the ring on her. I know the pride of her.' And then he went out obediently.

No one knew how Father Tiernay persuaded Mauryeen. But a little while later a very pale bride stood up at the altar of Columb Island Chapel, and was married, with Father Tiernay's housekeeper and the sacristan for witnesses.

When they were married Father Tiernay said to the bridegroom: 'Take her home by the back road. You won't meet a soul, and I'll tell the people when I join them what has been done. But above all, impress on her that the story is a wicked lie.'

So Mauryeen went home with her husband to his little cottage on the cliffs. And in the afternoon, when Father Tiernay came to distribute the prizes and to merry-make with his people, he raised his hand for silence and addressed them.

'Children,' he said, 'I hear there has been a grave scandal among you, and a great sin committed before you this day. The wicked sought to crush the innocent, as I believe, by bearing false witness, but the wicked has not triumphed. A few hours ago I made Randal Burke and Mauryeen Daly man and wife. And I give you solemn warning that the one who gives ear and belief to the story of the miserable woman who dishonoured herself to crush her innocent flesh and blood, shares in that unnatural guilt.'

So after a time Mauryeen crept back to the sunshine, and let herself be persuaded that her mother was mad. No one on the Island saw Ellen Daly again; they said she had crossed to the mainland by the afternoon ferry. She never came back, and there were some in the Island who believed she had sold her soul to the devil, and that he had claimed her fulfilment of the compact. But Mauryeen is an honest man's wife, and whatever people may conjecture in their inmost hearts as to the truth or falsity of her mother's tale, they say nothing, for did not Father Tiernay declare such gossip to be a sin? But for all that Mauryeen's ways are finer and gentler than those of any woman in the Island.

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## VII

### A WRESTLING

Mike Sheehan tossed awake in the moonlight. The gulls were quiet, and there was no noise in the night save the sound that had rocked his cradle—the Atlantic foaming up the narrow ravine before his door, and withdrawing itself with a loud sucking noise. The cabin was perched on a bleached hillside. A stony, narrow path went by the door and climbed the ravine to the world; a bed of slaty rock slanted sheer below it to the white tossing water. A dangerous place for any one to pass unless he had his eyes and his wits well about him; but Mike Sheehan was such a one, for he had the eye of the eagle over Muckcross, he could climb like the mountain goat, and could carry his drink so well that no man ever saw him less than clear-headed.

Mike, with his six-feet-six of manhood, was well in request at the country gatherings. But of late, said the folk, the man had turned queer: in that melancholy, stately country by the sea, madness—especially of the quiet, melancholic kind—is a thing very common. A year ago a wrestling match between him and Jack Kinsella had gathered two counties to see it. No man could say which was the champion. Now one was the victor, again the other. They kept steady

pace in their victories. Jack was captain of the Kilsallagh team of hurlers, Mike of the Clonegall. No one could say which captain led his team oftenest to victory. The men had begun by being friends, and their equality at first had only made them genial laughter. The wrestling was on Sunday, after mass, in a quiet green place at the back of the churchyard. The backers of the two champions took fire at the rivalry long before the men themselves. That would be a great day for the men and women of his following, when either champion should decisively lead. But the day seemed ever receding in the future, and no one could say which was the better man. June came, when not only the hurling, but the wrestling, had its thin fringe of female spectators perched on the low wall of the churchyard—girls mainly, with little shawls over their soft hair, and their little bare feet tucked demurely under their petticoats.

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The country people scarcely guessed at the time their two champions became enemies. Indeed, it was a secret locked in their own breasts, scarcely acknowledged even when in his most hidden moments each man looked at the desires of his heart. It only showed itself in a new fierceness and determination in their encounters. Each had sworn to himself to conquer the other. The soreness between them came about when by some sad mischance they fell in love with the same girl. Worse luck, she wanted neither of them, for she was vowed to the convent: the last feminine creature on earth for these two great fighters to think of, with her soft, pure eyes, her slender height, and her pale cheeks. Any girl in the country might have jumped at either man, and she, who wanted neither, had their hearts at her feet. She was shy and gentle, and never repelled them so decisively as to make them give up hope. In the long run one or the other might have tempted her to an earthly bridal; but she made no choice between them; and each man's chance seemed about equal when she slipped from them both into Kilbride churchyard. When she lay there neither man could say she had distinguished him by special kindness from the other. And their rivalry waxed more furious with the woman in her grave.

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But six months later, and their battles still undecided, Jack Kinsella fell sick and followed Ellen to Kilbride. Then Mike Sheehan was without an equal for many miles. But little comfort it was to him, with the girl of his heart dead, and the one man he had desired to overthrow dead and unconquered. He secluded himself from the sports and pastimes, and lived lonely in his cabin among the gulls, eating out his unsatisfied heart. Somehow it seemed to him that at the last his rival had cheated him, slipping into the kingdom of souls hard on the track of those slender feet he had desired to make his own. At times he hated him because he had died unconquered; yet again, he had a hot desire upon him, not all ungenerous, for the old days when he met those great thews and sinews in heavy grips—when the mighty hands of the other had held him, the huge limbs embraced him; and his eyes would grow full of the passion of fight and the desire of battle. None other would satisfy him to wrestle with but his dead rival, and indeed he in common with the country people thought that no other might be found fit for him to meet.

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Kilbride churchyard is high on the mainland, and lies dark within its four stone walls. The road to it is by a tunnel of trees that make a shade velvety black even when the moon is turning all the sea silver. The churchyard is very old, and has no monuments of importance: only green headstones bent sideways and sunk to their neck and shoulders in the earth. A postern gate, with a flight of stone steps, opens from Kilbride Lane. Here every night you may see the ghost of Cody the murderer, climbing those steps with a rigid burden hanging from his shoulder.

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But as Mike Sheehan ascended the steps out of the midnight dark he felt no fear. He clanged the gate of the sacred quiet place in a way that set the silence echoing. The moon was high overhead, and was shining straight down on the square enclosure with its little heaped mounds and ancient stones. Some mad passion was on Mike Sheehan surely, or he would not so have desecrated the quiet resting-place of the dead. There by the ruined gable of the old abbey was a fresh mound unusually great in size. Mike Sheehan paused by it. 'Jack!' he cried in a thunderous voice, hoarse with its passion. 'Come! let us once for all see which is the better man. Come and fight me, Jack, and if you throw me let Ellen be yours now and for ever!'

The blood was in his eyes, and the sea-mist curling in from sea. His challenge spoken, he swayed dizzily a moment. Then his eyes saw. The place seemed full of the sea-mist silvered through with the moon. As he looked to right and left substantial things vanished, but he saw all about him in a ring long rows of shadowy faces watching him. Many of them he knew. They were the boys and girls, the men and women, of his own village who had died in many years. Others were strange, but he guessed them ghosts from Kilsallagh, beyond Roscarbery, the village where Jack used to live. He looked eagerly among the folk he remembered for Ellen's face. There was one who might be she, the ghost of a woman veiled in her shadowy hair, whose eyes he could not see. And then Jack was upon him.

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That was a great wrestling in Kilbride churchyard. The dead man wound about the living with his clay-cold limbs, caught him in icy grips that froze the terrified blood from his heart, and breathed upon him soundlessly a chill breath of the grave that seemed to wither him. Yet Mike fought furiously, as one who fights not only to satisfy a hate, but as one who fights to gain a love. He had a dim knowledge of the fight he was making, a dim premonition that the dead man was more than his match. The ghostly spectators pressed round more eagerly, their shadowy faces peered, their shadowy forms swayed in the mist. The ghost had Mike Sheehan in a death-grip. His arms were imprisoned, his breath failed, his flesh crept, and his hair stood up. He felt himself dying of the horror of this unnatural combat, when there was a whisper at his ear. Dimly he seemed to hear Ellen's voice; dimly turning his failing eyes he seemed to recognise her eyes under the veil of ashen fair hair. 'Draw him to the left on the grass,' said the voice, 'and trip him.' His old love and his old jealousy surged up in Mike Sheehan. With a tremendous effort he threw off those paralysing arms. Forgetting his horror he furiously embraced the dead, drew him to the

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left on the grass, slippery as glass after the summer heats, for a second or two swayed with him to and fro; then the two went down together with a great violence, but Mike Sheehan was uppermost, his knee on the dead man's breast. [110]

When he came to himself in the moonlight, all was calm and peaceful. An owl hooted from the ruined gable, and from far away came the bark of a watch-dog, but the graveyard kept its everlasting slumber. Mike Sheehan was drenched with the dews as he stood up stiffly from Jack Kinsella's grave, upon which he had been lying. It was close upon dawn, and the moon was very low. He looked about him at the quietness. Another man might have thought he had but dreamt it; not so Mike Sheehan. He remembered with a fierce joy how he had flung the ghost and how Ellen had been on his side. 'You're mine now, asthoreen,' he said in a passionate apostrophe to her, 'and 'tis I could find it in my heart to pity him that's lying there and has lost you. He was the fair fighter ever and always, and now he'll acknowledge me for the better man.' And then he added, as if to himself, 'Poor Jack! I wish I'd flung him on the broken ground and not on the slippery grass. 'Tis then I'd feel myself that I was the better man.' [111]

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## VIII

### THE SEA'S DEAD

In Achill it was dreary wet weather—one of innumerable wet summers that blight the potatoes and blacken the hay and mildew the few oats and rot the poor cabin roofs. The air smoked all day with rain mixed with the fine salt spray from the ocean. Out of doors everything shivered and was disconsolate. Only the bog prospered, basking its length in water, and mirroring Croghan and Slievemore with the smoky clouds incessantly wreathing about their foreheads, or drifting like ragged wisps of muslin down their sides to the clustering cabins more desolate than a deserted nest. Inland from the sheer ocean cliffs the place seemed all bog; the little bits of earth the people had reclaimed were washed back into the bog, the gray bents and rimy grasses that alone flourished drank their fill of the water, and were glad. There was a grief and trouble on all the Island. Scarce a cabin in the queer straggling villages but had desolation sitting by its hearth. It was only a few weeks ago that the hooker had capsized crossing to Westport, and the famine that is always stalking ghost-like in Achill was forgotten in the contemplation of new graves. The Island was full of widows and orphans and bereaved old people; there was scarce a window sill in Achill by which the banshee had not cried. [113]

Where all were in trouble there were few to go about with comfort. Moya Lavelle shut herself up in the cabin her husband Patrick had built, and dreed her weird alone. Of all the boys who had gone down with the hooker none was finer than Patrick Lavelle. He was brown and handsome, broad-shouldered and clever, and he had the good-humoured smile and the kindly word where the people are normally taciturn and unsmiling. The Island girls were disappointed when Patrick brought a wife from the mainland, and Moya never tried to make friends with them. She was something of a mystery to the Achill people, this small moony creature, with her silver fair hair, and strange light eyes, the colour of spilt milk. She was as small as a child, but had the gravity of a woman. She loved the sea with a love unusual in Achill, where the sea is to many a ravening monster that has exacted in return for its hauls of fish the life of husband and son. Patrick Lavelle had built for her a snug cabin in a sheltered ravine. A little beach ran down in front of it where he could haul up his boat. The cabin was built strongly, as it had need to be, for often of a winter night the waves tore against its little windows. Moya loved the fury of the elements, and when the winter storms drove the Atlantic up the ravine with a loud bellowing, she stirred in sleep on her husband's shoulder, and smiled as they say children smile in sleep when an angel leans over them. [114]

Higher still, on a spur of rock, Patrick Lavelle had laid the clay for his potatoes. He had carried it on his shoulders, every clod, and Moya had gathered the seaweed to fertilise it. She had her small garden there, too, of sea-pinks and the like, which rather encouraged the Islanders in their opinion of her strangeness. In Achill the struggle for life is too keen to admit of any love for mere beauty. [115]

However, Patrick Lavelle was quite satisfied with his little wife. When he came home from the fishing he found his cabin more comfortable than is often the case in Achill. They had no child, but Moya never seemed to miss a child's head at her breast. Daring the hours of his absence at the fishing she seemed to find the sea sufficient company. She was always roaming along the cliffs, gazing down as with a fearful fascination along the black sides to where the waves churned hundreds of feet below. For company she had only the seagulls and the bald eagle that screamed far over her head; but she was quite happy as she roamed hither and thither, gathering the coloured seaweeds out of the clefts of the rocks, and crooning an old song softly to herself, as a

child might do.

But that was all over and gone, and Moya was a widow. She had nothing warm and human at all, now that brave protecting tenderness was gone from her. No one came to the little cabin in the ravine where Moya sat and moaned, and stretched her arms all day for the dear brown head she had last seen stained with the salt water and matted with the seaweeds. At night she went out, and wandered moon-struck by the black cliffs, and cried out for Patrick, while the shrilling gusts of wind blew her pale hair about her, and scourged her fevered face with the sea salt and the sharp hail. [116]

One night a great wave broke over Achill. None had seen it coming, with great crawling leaps like a serpent, but at dead of night it leaped the land, and hissed on the cottage hearths and weltered gray about the mud floors. The next day broke on ruin in Achill. The bits of fields were washed away, the little mountain sheep were drowned, the cabins were flung in ruined heaps; but the day was fair and sunny, as if the elements were tired of the havoc they had wrought and were minded to be in a good humour. There was not a boat on the Island but had been battered and torn by the rocks. People had to take their heads out of their hands, and stand up from their brooding, or this wanton mischief would cost them their dear lives, for the poor resources of the Island had given out, and the Islanders were in grips with starvation. [117]

No one thought of Moya Lavelle in her lonely cabin in the ravine. None knew of the feverish vigils in those wild nights. But a day or two later the sea washed her on a stretch of beach to the very doors of a few straggling cabins dotted here and there beyond the irregular village. She had been carried out to sea that night, but the sea, though it had snatched her to itself, had not battered and bruised her. She lay there, indeed, like that blessed Restituta, whom, for her faith, the tyrant sent bound on a rotting hulk, with the outward tide from Carthage, to die on the untracked ocean. She lay like a child smiling in dreams, all her long silver hair about her, and her wide eyes gazing with no such horror, as of one who meets a violent death. Those who found her so wept to behold her. [118]

They carried her to her cottage in the ravine, and waked her. Even in Achill they omit no funeral ceremony. They dressed her in white and put a cross in her hand, and about her face on the pillow they set the sea-pinks from her little garden, and some of the coloured seaweeds she had loved to gather. They lit candles at her head and feet, and the women watched with her all day, and at night the men came in, and they talked and told stories, subdued stories and ghostly, of the banshee and the death-watch, and wraiths of them gone that rise from the sea to warn fishermen of approaching death. Gaiety there was none: the Islanders had no heart for gaiety: but the pipes and tobacco were there, and the plate of snuff, and the jar of poteen to lift up the heavy hearts. And Moya lay like an image wrought of silver, her lids kept down by coins over her blue eyes.

She had lain so two nights, nights of starlit calm. On the fourth day they were to bury her beside Patrick Lavelle in his narrow house, and the little bridal cabin would be abandoned, and presently would rot to ruins. The third night had come, overcast with heavy clouds. The group gathered in the death chamber was more silent than before. Some had sat up the two nights, and were now dazed with sleep. By the wall the old women nodded over their beads, and a group of men talked quietly at the bed-head where Moya lay illumined by the splendour of the four candles all shining on her white garments. [119]

Suddenly in the quietness there came a roar of wind. It did not come freshening from afar off, but seemed to waken suddenly in the ravine and cry about the house. The folk sprang to their feet startled, and the eyes of many turned towards the little dark window, expecting to see wild eyes and a pale face set in black hair gazing in. Some who were nearest saw in the half-light—for it was whitening towards day—a wall of gray water travelling up the ravine. Before they could cry a warning it had encompassed the house, had driven door and window before it, and the living and the dead were in the sea. [120]

The wave retreated harmlessly, and in a few minutes the frightened folk were on their feet amid the wreck of stools and tables floating. The wave that had beaten them to earth had extinguished the lights. When they stumbled to their feet and got the water out of their eyes the dim dawn was in the room. They were too scared for a few minutes to think of the dead. When they recovered and turned towards the bed there was a simultaneous loud cry. Moya Lavelle was gone. The wave had carried her away, and never more was there tale or tidings of her body.

Achill people said she belonged to the sea, and the sea had claimed her. They remembered Patrick Lavelle's silence as to where he had found her. They remembered a thousand unearthly ways in her; and which of them had ever seen her pray? They pray well in Achill, having a sure hold on that heavenly country which is to atone for the cruelty and sorrow of this. In process of time they will come to think of her as a mermaid, poor little Moya. She had loved her husband at least with a warm human love. But his open grave was filled after they had given up hoping that the sea would again give her up, and the place by Patrick Lavelle's side remains for ever empty. [121]

The little house where Katie lived was over the fields. She was a dimpled, brown child, as soft as the yellow ducklings she used to carry in her pinafore. Her little fat shoulders were bare as I remember them, and you could see the line where the sunburn ended with her frock and the whiteness began. She was the late child of a long-married couple, vouchsafed long after they had given up hopes of a living child.

Her mother was an angular woman who walked a little crookedly, throwing one hip into ungainly prominence as she went. Her face, too, was brown as a russet apple, with a pleasant hard redness on the cheeks. She had white teeth, brown eyes, and an honest expression. But people said she was a difficult woman to live with. She had extreme ideas of her own importance, especially since the honest fellow she was married to had become steward to his master, a 'strong farmer,' as they say in Ireland, and the owner of broad acres. She expected a certain deference from the folk she had grown up amongst, and who were often not quite inclined to yield it. In a sense she was a fortunate woman, for her good man was as much a lover as in the days when he had come whistling his lover's signal, like any blackbird, to call her out from her mother's chimney-corner. She told me about those days herself when I was but a callow girl. I don't know why, except from some spirit of romance in her, which she could not reveal to folk of her own age and circumstances. She was the mother of many dead babies, for never a one had lived but Katie; but the romance of her marriage was still new. I remember one summer evening, when the low sun shone between the slats of her dairy window, and I, on a creepy stool by the wall, alternately read *The Arabian Nights* and talked to her while she gathered the butter from the churn, that her man came in, and, not seeing me in the shadow, drew her head back and kissed her brown face and head with a passion not all common after courting days.

The house was by the roadside, only shut off by its own garden-wall and a high gate, which it was comfortable to lock of winter evenings. There were two small rooms in it beside the kitchen and the dairy, and a loft reached by a ladder, wherein to store many a sack of potatoes, or wood for the winter firing. The kitchen was very pleasant, with its two square windows full of geraniums in bloom, the pictures of saints on its white-washed walls, the chimney-piece with its china shepherdeses and dogs, and the dresser with a very fine show of crockery. There was always a sweet smell of cream there from the dairy, which opened on one side. The two rooms went off each side of the fire-place. The walls were cleanly white-washed, the tiled floor ochred; altogether it was a charming little house for love to build a home in.

Little Katie, precious as she was, roamed at her own sweet will. No harm could come to her in the fields where she strayed. She was home-keeping, and never went far from her own doorstep; nor need she for variety. On one side of the field there was a violet bank, mossy, and hung over with thorn trees. Under the thorns it was possible to hide as within a greenhouse, and children love such make-believe. On the other side of the bank was a steep descent to a tiny stream prattling over shining stones; and fox-gloves grew in the water with the meadow orchis, and many other water-loving flowers. That field was a meadow every year, and once hidden between the hedge and the meadow-grasses a child was invisible to all but the bright-eyed birds, who themselves have a taste for such mysteries, and the corn-crake, which one thinks of as only half bird, that scuttled on Katie's approach down one of a million aisles of seeding brown grasses.

Then on the other side of the field there was a deep, dry ditch under great curtains of blackberry bushes, which in autumn bore luscious fruit. And by Katie's door, if she would sit in the sun, was a primrose bank, about which the hens stalked and clucked with their long-legged chickens or much prettier ducklings. Katie did not want for playmates. She had none of her own kind, but was sociable to the fowl and the pig in his sty, and the white and red cattle that browsed in the pastures. She held long colloquies with the creatures all day, and if it rained would fetch her stool into an out-house which the hens frequented.

But her grand playmate, the confidant and abettor of all her games, was a placid motherly cat, which had grown up with Katie. A good-natured workman had fetched the pretty brindled kitten from the city, and had made an offering of it at the baby's cradle. Katie with almost her first words called the cat after him. Pussy Hogan was the brindle's name to her dying day. When I hear people say that cats have no attachment for people I always make a mental reservation in Pussy Hogan's favour. No dog could have shown a more faithful and moving devotion. Katie's instincts in the direction of cleanliness led her to wash Pussy Hogan in her kittenish days, till she was come to an age for performing her own ablutions with the requisite care. Many a time have I seen the child washing the kitten in soap-suds, and setting her to dry on the primrose bank, which was in the face of the southern sun, and there with admirable patience the creature would lie, paws extended, till her little mistress deemed she was dry enough to get up from her bleaching.

But Pussy Hogan grew a handsome, stately, well-furred cat, despite her washings; and it was pretty to see her stalking at the child's heels everywhere, with much the same responsible air that a serious dog might assume. For all her gravity, she was not above understanding and enjoying those games under the hedgerows, when Katie set up house, and made banquets with broken bits of crockery, to which she entertained her admiring friend. Even in the winter the cat trotted about over snow and leaped roaring gullies, in attendance on her hardy little mistress; as



in summer she followed her to the evening milking, where as a special favour Katie was permitted, with her dimpled fingers, to draw a few sprints of the sweet-smelling milk.

They were beginning to discuss Katie's schooling when she fell ill. The grown people thought school would come hard upon her, she had been so used to a life in the open air. She was very babyish too, even for her age, though there were many younger than she perched on that platform of steps in the Convent Infant School—pupils, so little and drowsy-headed that two or three special couches had to be retained close by to receive those who from time to time toppled off their perch. I remember asking if Katie would take the cat to school, after the manner of Mary and her lamb in the rhyme. I make no doubt Pussy Hogan would have attempted the Irish mile of distance to the school every day, if there were not pressure brought to bear to keep her at home. However, the child was attacked by that horrible dread of mothers, the croup. She was just the one to succumb, being a little round ball of soft flesh. She only fought it a day and night, lifting up her poor little hands to her straining throat incessantly. In less than thirty-six hours Katie was dead. [129]

Her mother took it in a blank stupor. She scarcely seemed to heed the friends who came and went, the Sisters of Mercy, in their black bonnets and cloaks, the priest with his attempts at comfort. Her husband sat by her those days, his eyes turning from the heart-breaking face of his wife to the brown baby on the bed, as piteous as a frozen robin. After the funeral the mother went about her usual occupations. She milked the cow, fed the hens, churned, swept, and baked as of old. Yet she did all those things as with a broken heart, and it would have been less dreadful in a way to see her sitting with folded hands. She was incessantly weeping in those months that followed Katie's death. One would have thought that her eyes would be drained dry, but still the tears followed each other all day long, and no one seemed able to comfort her. It was wretched enough for her husband, poor fellow, coming home of an evening from his work, but he did all unwearying patience could do to comfort her. [130]

The only desire she seemed to have in those days was that she might keep Katie's pussy with her, but that was not gratified. The cat had moped and fretted greatly during the child's short illness, and had cried distressingly about the house when Katie lay dead. Then after the funeral had gone she had turned her back on the desolate house, and had walked across the couple of fields that separated it from the farmhouse. She came into the big airy kitchen that July day with so evident an intention of remaining that no one disputed her right. Once she had a sudden impulse to go and seek her little mistress, and went running and leaping over the long pastures to the low white house. They said it was the thing that wakened Katie's mother from the first merciful stupor of her bereavement, the cat running in and moaning piteously about the empty rooms, and the places where they had played their jolly games. They said she inspected every possible place where the child might be hiding, turning again and again, after moments of disappointed bewilderment, to a new search. At last she gave it up, and seemed to realise that Katie was gone. She turned then and trotted back quickly to the farmhouse, from whence no one's coaxing afterwards could bring her. Every one wanted that the poor mother should have her as she seemed to crave, but the cat would not; she escaped over and over from her captors, and at last we gave up trying to constrain her, though her desertion seemed a new cruelty to the stricken woman across the fields. [131]

I don't know how many months the mother's weeping went on. It was a day close upon Christmas when I opened the half-door and went in and saw, for the first time since the child's death, that her eyes were dry. She was making bread at a table under the window, and her face had grown wonderfully calm since I had last seen her. I made no remark, but she led up to the subject herself, with a pathetic, wintry smile. [132]

'You remember the poem you read to me one day, miss,' she said, 'about the dead child that couldn't be glad in heaven because its mother's crying wet its fine dress?' I remembered perfectly; it was my poor little way of trying to insinuate some comfort, for like many of her class in Ireland, she loved poetry. 'Well,' she went on, 'I've been thinking a power over it since. Who knows but that there might be the truth behind it?' I nodded assent. 'Now there's Christmas coming,' she said, 'and I think that would be a fine time for the children in heaven, so I'm not going to spoil Katie's glory among them.'

She didn't say much more after this curious little bit of confidence, but it was a comfort to every one when she left off crying. Her husband was rejoiced at the change. He began to build on it that presently she would be cheerful once more, and they would be quite happy again; for a man doesn't miss a child as a woman does, and, dear as his little Katie was, the love of his boyhood was yet spared to him, and could still make earth paradise if she would. [133]

However, there was a new cause for apprehension in those latter days. I remember that the women shook their heads and looked gloomy when it came to be known that Katie's mother was likely to have a baby in the spring. She had been very ill before, and after this long interval and all the trouble things were not likely to go easier with her. I know the old doctor, who was kind and fatherly, and had been full of sorrow about Katie, seemed vexed at the new turn of affairs. I heard him telling a matron much in his confidence that he wouldn't answer for the woman's life.

She herself plucked up heart from the time she was certain that the baby was coming. I don't think now that she expected to live through it. She probably thought that through that gate she would rejoin Katie. She was very sweet to her husband in those days, very gentle and considerate to the neighbours, to whom she had often been peevish and haughty in old times. Many a one changed their former opinion of her that winter, and her kindness made kindness for her. This neighbour would often help her at the washing-tub, and that would send her grown boy in at [134]

dinner-time to see if Katie's mother wanted wood chopped or water carried. I am always glad to think of those four or five months, when a great calm, as it seems to me, settled down on the little house in the fields.

The baby was born in April—dead, as people had feared. It was a boy, and had died in being born. They said the little waxen image bore traces of a pathetic struggle for life. As for the mother, she never rallied at all; I think she would not. She passed away quite calmly, with not a flutter of the eyelids to answer her husband, who prayed for a parting word from her.

They sleep together, mother and children, in Kilbride, in the shadow of a great thorn-bush, and not far from St. Brigid's Tower. Lonely and far as the churchyard is, there is not a Sunday in the year that the husband and father does not find his way there after mass, trudging along that solitary way, between bare hedges or blooming, as faithfully as the day comes round. All those things were over a dozen years ago, and he is married again, to a spare, unattractive woman, who looks after his food and clothes, and makes him in her way a very excellent wife. She was long past middle age when he married her and took her out of service. But there was no pretence of love-making about it. She would be the first herself to tell you that her man's heart was in Kilbride. She said to me once: 'He's a good man to me, and I'm glad to do my duty by him; but if you talked to him about his wife he'd think you meant Kitty, God rest her! Men's seconds, miss, don't count.'

She said it in a simple, open-faced way, but I thought there was a homely tragedy concealed behind it. I am sure that in the heaven, of which those Irish peasants think as confidently as of the next room, he will forget all about poor hard-working Margaret, and will look with eager eyes for the love of his youth.

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## X

### THE DEATH SPANSEL

High up among the dusty rafters of Aughagree Chapel dangles a thin shrivelled thing, towards which the people look shudderingly when the sermon is of the terrors of the Judgment and the everlasting fire. The woman from whose dead body that was taken chose the death of the soul in return for a life with the man whom she loved with an unholy passion. Every man, woman, and child in that chapel amid gray miles of rock and sea-drift, has heard over and over of the unrepentant deathbed of Mauryeen Holion. They whisper on winter nights of how Father Hugh fought with the demons for her soul, how the sweat poured from his forehead, and he lay on his face in an agony of tears, beseeching that the sinner whom he had admitted into the fold of Christ should yet be saved. But of her love and her sin she had no repentance, and the servants in Rossatorc Castle said that as the priest lay exhausted from his vain supplications, and the rattle was in Dark Mauryeen's throat, there were cries of mocking laughter in the air above the castle, and a strange screaming and flapping of great wings, like to, but incomparably greater than, the screaming and flapping of the eagle over Slieve League. That devil's charm up there in the rafters of Aughagree is the death-spansel by which Dark Mauryeen bound Sir Robert Molyneux to her love. It is of such power that no man born of woman can resist it, save by the power of the Cross, and 'twas little Robert Molyneux of Rossatorc recked of the sweet Christ who perished that men should live—against whose Cross the demons of earth and the demons of air, the malevolent spirits that lurk in water and wind, and all witches and evil doctors, are powerless. But the thought of the death-spansel must have come straight from the King of Fiends himself, for who else would harden the human heart to desecrate a new grave, and to cut from the helpless dead the strip of skin unbroken from head to heel which is the death-spansel? Very terrible is the passion of love when it takes full possession of a human heart, and no surer weapon to the hand of Satan when he would make a soul his own. And there is the visible sign of a lost soul, and it had nearly been of two, hanging harmlessly in the rafters of the holy place. A strange thing to see where the lamp of the sanctuary burns, and the sea-wind sighs sweetly through the door ever open for the continual worshippers.

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Sir Robert Molyneux was a devil-may-care, sporting squire, with the sins of his class to his account. He drank, and gambled, and rioted, and oppressed his people that they might supply his pleasures; nor was that all, for he had sent the daughter of honest people in shame and sorrow over the sea. People muttered when they heard he was to marry Lord Dunlough's daughter, that she would be taking another woman's place; but it was said yet again that it would be well for his

tenants when he was married, for the lady was so kind and charitable, so gentle and pure, that her name was loved for many a mile. She had never heard the shameful story of that forlorn girl sailing away and away in the sea-mist, with her unborn child, to perish miserably, body and soul, in the streets of New York. She had the strange love of a pure woman for a wild liver; and she thought fondly when she caressed his fine, jolly, handsome face that soon his soul as well as his dear body would be in her keeping; and what safe keeping it would be.

Sir Robert had ever a free way with women of a class below his own, and he did not find it easy to relinquish it. When he was with the Lady Eva he felt that under those innocent, loving eyes a man could have no desire for a lesser thing than her love; but when he rode away, the first pretty girl he met on the road he held in chat that ended with a kiss. He was always for kissing a pretty face, and found the habit hard to break, though there were times when he stamped and swore great oaths to himself that he would again kiss no woman's lips but his wife's—for the man had the germ of good in him. [140]

It was a fortnight to his wedding day, and he had had a hard day's hunting. From early morning to dewy eve they had been at it, for the fox was an old one and had led the dogs many a dance before this. He turned homeward with a friend, splashed and weary, but happy and with the appetite of a hunter. Well for him if he had never set foot in that house. As he came down the stairs fresh and shining from his bath, he caught sight of a girl's dark handsome face on the staircase. She was one of the servants, and she stood aside to let him pass, but that was never Robert Molyneux's way with a woman. He flung his arm round her waist in a way so many poor girls had found irresistible. For a minute or two he looked in her dark splendid eyes; but then as he bent lightly to kiss her, she tore herself from him with a cry and ran away into the darkness. [141]

He slept heavily that night, the dead sleep of a man who has hunted all day and has drunk deep in the evening. In the morning he awoke sick and sorry, a strange mood for Robert Molyneux; but from midnight to dawn he had lain with the death-spangel about his knees. In the blackness of his mind he had a great longing for the sweet woman, his love for whom awakened all that was good in him. His horse had fallen lame, but after breakfast he asked his host to order out a carriage that he might go to her. Once with her he thought all would be well. Yet as he stood on the doorstep he had a strange reluctance to go.

It was a drear, gray, miserable day, with sleet pattering against the carriage windows. Robert Molyneux sat with his head bent almost to his knees, and his hands clenched. What face was it rose against his mind, continually blotting out the fair and sweet face of his love? It was the dark, handsome face of the woman he had met on the stairs last night. Some sudden passion for her rose as strong as hell-fire in his breast. There were many long miles between him and Eva, and his desire for the dark woman raged stronger and ever stronger in him. It was as if ropes were around his heart dragging it backward. He fell on his knees in the carriage, and sobbed. If he had known how to pray he would have prayed, for he was torn in two between the desire of his heart for the dark woman, and the longing of his soul for the fair woman. Again and again he started up to call the coachman to turn back; again and again he flung himself in the bottom of the carriage, and hid his face and struggled with the curse that had come upon him. And every mile brought him nearer to Eva and safety. [142]

The coachman drove on in the teeth of the sleet and wondered what Sir Robert would give him at the drive's end. A half-sovereign would not be too much for so open-handed a gentleman, and one so near his wedding; and the coachman, already feeling his hand close upon it, turned a brave face to the sleet and tried not to think of the warm fire in the harness-room from which they had called him to drive Sir Robert. [143]

Half the distance was gone when he heard a voice from the carriage window calling him. He turned round. 'Back! Back!' said the voice. 'Drive like hell! I will give you a sovereign if you do it under an hour.' The coachman was amazed, but a sovereign is better than a half-sovereign. He turned his bewildered horses for home.

Robert Molyneux's struggle was over. Eva's face was gone now altogether. He only felt a mad joy in yielding, and a wild desire for the minutes to pass till he had traversed that gray road back. The coachman drove hard and his horses were flecked with foam, but from the windows Robert Molyneux kept continually urging him, offering him greater and greater rewards for his doing the journey with all speed.

Half way up the cypress avenue to his friend's house a woman with a shawl about her head glided from the shadow and signalled to the darkly flushed face at the carriage window. Robert Molyneux shouted to the man to stop. He sprang from the carriage and lifted the woman in. Then he flung the coachman a handful of gold and silver. 'To Rossatorc,' he said, and the man turned round and once more whipped up his tired horses. The woman laughed as Robert Molyneux caught her in his arms. It was the fierce laughter of the lost. 'I came to meet you,' she said, 'because I knew you must come.' [144]

From that day, when Robert Molyneux led the woman over the threshold of his house, he was seen no more in the usual places of his fellow-men. He refused to see any one who came. His wedding-day passed by. Lord Dunlough had ridden furiously to have an explanation with the fellow and to horsewhip him when that was done, but he found the great door of Rossatorc closed in his face. Every one knew Robert Molyneux was living in shame with Mauryeen Holion. Lady Eva grew pale and paler, and drooped and withered in sorrow and shame, and presently her father took her away, and their house was left to servants. Burly neighbouring squires rode up and knocked with their riding-whips at Rossatorc door to remonstrate with Robert Molyneux, for his father's sake or for his own, but met no answer. All the servants were gone except a furtive- [145]

eyed French valet and a woman he called his wife, and these were troubled with no notions of respectability. After a time people gave up trying to interfere. The place got a bad name. The gardens were neglected and the house was half in ruins. No one ever saw Mauryeen Holion's face except it might be at a high window of the castle, when some belated huntsman taking a short-cut across the park would catch a glimpse of a wild face framed in black hair at an upper window, the flare of the winter sunset lighting it up, it might be, as with a radiance from hell. Sir Robert drank, they said, and rack-rented his people far worse than in the old days. He had put his business in the hands of a disreputable attorney from a neighbouring town, and if the rent was not paid to the day the roof was torn off the cabin, and the people flung out into the ditch to rot.

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So the years went, and folk ever looked for a judgment of God on the pair. And when many years were over, there came to Father Hugh, wringing her hands, the wife of the Frenchman, with word that the two were dying, and she dared not let them die in their sins.

But Mauryeen Holion, Dark Mauryeen, as they called her, would not to her last breath yield up the death-spangle which she had knotted round her waist, and which held Robert Molyneux's love to her. When the wicked breath was out of her body they cut it away, and it lay twisted on the ground like a dead snake. Then on Robert Molyneux, dying in a distant chamber, came a strange peace. All the years of sin seemed blotted out, and he was full of a simple repentance such as he had felt long ago when kneeling by the gown of the good woman whom he had loved. So Father Hugh absolved him before he died, and went hither and thither through the great empty rooms shaking his holy water, and reading from his Latin book.

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And lest any in that place, where they have fiery southern blood in their veins, should so wickedly use philtres or charms, he hung the death-spangle in Aughagree Chapel for a terrible reminder.

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## XI

### A SOLITARY

ToC

There was a difference of twenty years between the brothers, yet, to look at them, it might have been more. Patrick, the younger, was florid and hearty; the elder, James, was unpopular—a gray, withered old churl, who carried written on his face the record of his life's failure. His conversation, when he made any, was cynical. When he came into a room where young people were enjoying themselves, playing cards or dancing, his shadow came before him and lay heavily on the merry-makers. Fortunately, he did not often so intrude; he was happier in his room at the top of the fine house, where he had his books and his carpenter's tools. If one of those young people whom his cynicism withered could have seen him at his carpentry, how different he would have seemed! They would have seen him with his grimness relaxed, and his gray face lit up with interest, and would have been amazed to hear his low, cheery whistle, full and round as the pipe of a bullfinch; at night, when his telescope swept the stars, and he trembled with the delight of the visionary and the student, he was a new man. He was a clever man, born out of his proper sphere, and with only so much education as he had contrived to get at during a hard life. What came to him he assimilated eagerly, and every one of those books in his cupboard, rare old friends, had been read over a hundred times.

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He ought to have had a chance in his youth, but his father was the last man in the world to encourage out-of-the-way ambitions in his sons. Father and mother were alike—hard, grasping, and ungracious. The father, on the whole, was a pleasanter person than the mother, with her long, pale, horse-face and ready sneer; he was only uncompromisingly hard and ungenial to all the world.

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There were other children besides these two, all long since dead or scattered. Two of the boys had run away and gone to America; their first letters home remained unanswered, and after one or two attempts they ceased to write. The one girl had slipped into a convent, after a horrified glimpse at the home-life of her parents when she had returned from her boarding-school. She had been sent away to a convent in a distant town while still a mere child. She had come and gone in recurring vacations, still too childish to be more than vaguely repelled by the unlovely rule of her home. But at sixteen she came home 'for good'; very much for evil, poor little Eily would have said, as she realised in its full sordidness the grinding manner of life which was to be hers. No wonder she wet her pillow night after night with her tears for the pure and gentle atmosphere of the convent, for the soft-voiced and mild-eyed nuns, and the life of the spirit which shone ideally fair by this appalling life of the world. So, after a time, she had her will and escaped to the convent.

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James could never understand why he, too, had not broken bounds, and run off to America with

Tom and Alick. Perhaps he was of a more patient nature than they. Perhaps the life held him down. It was, indeed, such a round of hard, unvarying toil that at night he was content to drop down in his place like a dead man, and sleep as the worn-out horses sleep, dreaming of a land of endless green pastures, beyond man's harrying. Alick and Tom were younger. They had not had time to get broken to hardship like him, and Patrick was yet a baby. Friends or social pleasures were beyond their maddest dreams. Their parents' idea of a life for them was one in which hard work should keep them out of mischief. James could never remember in those days a morning when he had risen refreshed; he was always heavy with sleep when following the plough-horses, or feeding the cattle. Food of the coarsest, sleep of the scantiest, were the rule of the house. Joy, or love, or kindness, never breathed between those walls.

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Meanwhile, the father was getting old, and a time came when he sat more and more by the fire in winter, sipping his glass of grog and reading the country papers, or listening to his wife's acrid tattle. Mrs. Rooney hated with an extreme hatred all the good, easy-going neighbours who were so soft with their children, and encouraged dancing, and race-going and card-playing—the amusements of the Irish middle classes. She had a bitter tongue, and once it was set agoing no one was safe from it—not the holiest nor purest was beyond its defilement.

It was about this time that the labourers began to think the young master rather more important than the old one; but for their connivance, James Rooney could never have been drawn into Fenianism. The conspiracy was just the thing to fascinate the boy's impressionable heart. The poetry, the glamour of the romantic devotion to Mother Country fed his starved idealism; the midnight drillings and the danger were elements in its attraction. James Rooney drilled with the rest, swore with them their oaths of fealty to Dark Rosaleen, was out with them one winter night when the hills were covered with snow, and barely escaped by the skin of his teeth from the capture which sent some of his friends into penal servitude.

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Mrs. Rooney's amazed contempt when she found that her eldest son was among 'the boys' was a study in character. The lad was not compromised openly; and though the police had their suspicions, they had nothing to go upon, and the matter ended in a domiciliary visit which put Mrs. Rooney in a fine rage, for she had a curious subservient ambition to stand well with the gentry.

However, soon after that, as she was pottering about the fowl-yard one bitter day—she would never trust anybody to collect the eggs from the locked henhouse but herself—she took a chill, and not long afterwards died. If she had lived perhaps James would never have had the courage to assert himself and take the reins of management as he did. But with her going the iron strength of the old man seemed to break down. He fulfilled her last behest, which was that her funeral was to take place on a Sunday, so that the farm hands should not get a day off; and then, with some wonder at the new masterful spirit in his son, he gave himself up to an easy life.

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This independence in James Rooney was not altogether the result of his Fenianism. As a matter of fact, he had fallen in love, with the overwhelming passion of a lad who had hitherto lived with every generous emotion repressed. The girl was a gay, sweet, yet impassioned creature who was the light of her own home. At that home James Rooney had first realised what a paradise home may be made; and coming from his own gloomy and horrid surroundings, the sunshine of hers had almost blinded him. In that white house among the wheatfields love reigned. And not only love, but charity, hospitality, patriotism, and religion. There was never a rough word heard there; even the household creatures, the canary in the south window, the comfortable cats, the friendly dogs, partook of the general sunniness.

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They were rebels of the hottest type. The one son had been out with the Fenians and was now in America. His exile was a bitter yet proud grief to his father and mother; but their enthusiasm was whetted rather than damped by the downfall of the attempted rebellion. At night, when the curtains were drawn and the door barred against all fear of 'the peelers,' the papers that had the reports of the Dublin trials were passed from hand to hand, or read aloud amid intense silence, accompanied by the flushing cheek, the clenching hand, often the sob, that told of the passionate feeling of the hearers.

Sometimes Ellen would sing to them, but not the little gay songs she trilled so delightfully, now when their friends were in prison or the dock. Mournful, impassioned songs were hers, sung in a rich voice, trembling with emotion, or again a stave of battle and revenge, which set hearts beating and blood racing in the veins of the listeners. At such moments Ellen, with her velvety golden-brown eyes, and the bronze of her hair, was like the poet's 'Cluster of Nuts.'

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I've heard the songs by Liffey's wave  
That maidens sung.  
They sang their land, the Saxon's slave,  
In Saxon tongue.  
Oh, bring me here that Gaelic dear  
Which cursed the Saxon foe.  
When thou didst charm my raptured ear  
*Mo craoibhin cno!*

Among those admitted freely to that loving circle, James Rooney was one held in affectionate regard. The man who had been the means of bringing him there, Maurice O'Donnell, was his Jonathan, nay more than his Jonathan, for to him young Rooney had given all his hero-worship. He was, indeed, of the heroic stuff, older, graver, wiser than his friend.

James Rooney spoke to no one of his love or his hopes. For he had hopes. Ellen, kind to every

one, singled him out for special kindness. He had seen in her deep eyes something shy and tender for him. For some time he was too humble to be sure he had read her gaze aright, but at last he believed in a flood of wild rapture that she had chosen him. [157]

He did not speak, he was too happy in dallying with his joy, and he waited on from day to day. One evening he was watching her singing, with all his heart in his eyes. Among people less held by a great sincerity than these people were at the time, his secret would have been an open amusement. But the father and mother heard with eyes dim with tears; the young sisters about the fire flushed and paled with the emotion of the song; the hearts of the listeners hung on the singer's lips, and their eyes were far away.

Suddenly James Rooney looked round the circle with the feeling of a man who awakes from sleep. His friend was opposite to him, also gazing at the singer; the revelation in his face turned the younger man cold with the shock. When the song was done he said 'good-night' quietly, and went home. It was earlier than usual, and he left his friend behind him; for this one night he was glad not to have his company; he wanted a quiet interval in which to think what was to be done. [158]

Now, when he realised that Maurice O'Donnell loved her, he cursed his own folly that he had dared to think of winning her. What girl with eyes in her head would take him, gray and square-jawed, before the gallant-looking fellow who was the ideal patriot. And Ellen—Ellen, of all women living, was best able to appreciate O'Donnell's qualities. That night he sat all the night with his head bowed on his hands thinking his sick thoughts amid the ruin of his castles. When he stood up shivering in the gray dawn, he had closed that page of his life. He felt as if already the girl had chosen between them, and that he was found wanting.

That was not the end of it, however. If he had been left to himself he might have carried out his high, heroic resolve to go no more to the house which had become Paradise to him. But his friend followed him, with the curious tenderness that was between the two, and with an arm on his shoulder, drew his secret from him. When he had told it he put his face down on the mantelpiece by which they were standing, ashamed to look O'Donnell in the face because they loved the same woman. There was a minute's silence, and then O'Donnell spoke, and his voice, so far from being cold and angry, was more tender than before. [159]

'So you would have taken yourself off to leave me a clear field, old fellow!'

'Oh, no,' said the other humbly, 'I never had a chance. If I had had eyes for any one but her, I would have known your secret, and should not have dared to love her.'

'Dear lad!' said O'Donnell. 'But now you must take your chance. If she chooses you rather than me—and, by heavens! I'm not sure that she won't—it will make no difference, I swear, between us. Which of us shall try our luck first?'

They ended by drawing lots, and it fell to O'Donnell to speak first. A night or two later he overtook James Rooney as the latter was on his way to Ellen's house. He put his arm through Rooney's and said, 'Well, old fellow, I've had my dismissal. I'm not going your way to-night, but I believe your chance is worth a good deal. Presently I shall be able to wish you joy, Jim.' [160]

They walked on together in a silence more full of feeling than speech could be. At the breen that turned up to the white house they parted with a hand-clasp that said their love was unchanging, no matter what happened. That night James Rooney got his chance and spoke. The girl heard him with a rapt, absent-minded look that chilled him as he went on. When he had done she answered him:—

'I can never be your wife, Jim. I have made my choice.'

'But——' stammered the lad.

'I know what you would say,' she answered quietly. 'I gave the same answer to Maurice O'Donnell. Why did two such men as you care for me? I am not worth it, no girl is worth it. 'Tis the proud woman I ought to be and am, but I can't marry the two of you, and perhaps I can't choose.' She laughed half sadly. 'Put me out of your head, Jim, and forgive me. I'm away to the Convent at Lady Day.' [161]

And from this resolve it was impossible to move her. Whether she had really resolved before on the conventual life, or whether she feared to separate the two friends, no one knew. From that time neither O'Donnell nor Jim Rooney was seen at the white house, and in the harvest-time Ellen, as she said she would, entered St. Mary's Convent. Jim Rooney never loved another woman, and when, in the following year, Maurice O'Donnell went to New Orleans to take up a position as the editor of a newspaper, Jim Rooney said good-bye to friendship as lastingly as he had to love.

The old father died, and left what wealth he had to be divided between his two sons. For all the pinching and scraping it was not much; there seemed something unlucky about the farm, poor, damp, and unkindly as it was. Jim was a good brother to the young lad growing up. He kept him at a good school during his boyhood, and nursed his share of the inheritance more carefully than he did his own. They had the reputation of being far wealthier than they were, and many a girl would have been well pleased to make a match with Jim Rooney. But he turned his back on all social overtures, and by and by he got the name of being a sour old bachelor, 'a cold-hearted naygur,' going the way of his father before him. But the rule on the farm was very different, every one admitted; to his men James Rooney was not only just but generous. [162]

Presently the young fellow came home from school, gay and light-hearted. He was a tall young giant, who presently developed a fine red moustache, and had a rollicking gait well in keeping

with his bold blue eyes. He was soon as popular as James was the reverse, and his reputation of being 'a good match' made him welcome in many a house full of daughters.

One day the youth came to his brother with a plan for bettering himself. He wanted to draw out his share from the farm and to invest it in a general shop which was for sale in the country town, close by. Now Jim Rooney had a queer pride in him that made the thought of the shop very distasteful. The land was quite another thing, and farming, to his mind, as ennobling an occupation as any under heaven. But he quite understood that he could not shape the young fellow to his ways of thinking. He said, gently: 'And why, Patrick, are you bent on leaving the farm and bettering yourself?' [163]

The young fellow scratched his head awkwardly, and gave one or two excuses, but finally the truth came out. He had a fancy for little Janie Hyland, and she had a fancy for him, but there was a richer man seeking her, and, said the young fellow simply, 'I'm thinking if the father knew how little came to my share he'd be showing me the door.'

'Does Janie know, Patrick?' asked the elder brother.

'Oh, divil a thing!' said the younger, with a half-shamed laugh. 'I don't trust women with too much; but if I had Grady's, I'd soon be a richer man than they think me. Old Grady cut up for a lot of money, and he was too old for business. It's a beautiful chance for a young man.' [164]

'Well, Patrick,' said the other at last, with a sigh, 'your share won't buy Grady's, but yours and mine together will. I'll make it over to you, and you can keep your share in the farm too. I'll work the farm for you if you won't ask me to have anything to do with the shop. Tut, tut, man!' he said, pushing away Patrick's secretly delighted protests, 'all I have would come to you one day, and why not now, when you think it will make you happy?'

So Patrick bought Grady's and brought home Janie Hyland. He has prospered exceedingly, and makes the lavish display of his wealth which is characteristic of the Irishman. They have added to the old house, thrown out wings and annexes, planted it about with shrubberies, and made a carriage drive. Young Patrick, growing up, is intended for the University and one of the learned professions, and Mrs. Patrick has ideas of a season in Dublin and invitations to the Castle. Her house is very finely furnished, with heavy pile carpets and many mirrors, and buhl and ormolu everywhere. [165]

She feels her brother-in-law to be the one blot in all her splendour and well-being. When Patrick first brought her home, she took a vehement dislike to James, which has rather waxed than waned during the years. He minds her as little as may be, working on the farm during the day-time, and in the evening departing, with his slow, heavy step, to his sanctum upstairs, where he has his books, his carpenter's tools, and his telescope. Yet her words worry him like the stinging of gnats, and the nagging of years has made him bitter.

He turns out delightful bits of carving and cabinet-making from time to time, and he mends everything broken in the house with infinite painstaking. Up there in his garret-room the troubles fall away from him, and he forgets the lash of Mrs. Patrick's tongue. The hardest thing is that she discourages the children's friendship for him, and he would dearly love the children if only he might. [166]

The other women are rather down on Mrs. Patrick about it; indeed, Mrs. Gleeson told her one day that the creature was worth his keep if it was only for his handiness about the house. Patrick has grown used to his wife's gibes and flings, which at first used to make him red and uncomfortable. He has half come to believe in the secret hoard his wife says old Jim is accumulating.

Meanwhile, the land is as poor as ever, for James has no money to spend in the necessary drainage that should make it dry and sweet. His share scarcely pays for his keep, and his money for clothes and books and tools is little indeed. His shabbiness is another offence to Mrs. Patrick. She has declared to some of her intimates that she will force James yet to take his face out of her house, and go live on his money elsewhere. She expresses her contempt to her husband for his brother's selfishness in holding his share in the farm, when he must be already, as she puts it, 'rotten with money.' Patrick is too much afraid of his wife to tell her now what he has so long kept a secret from her. [167]

But James, in his high attic, looks upon the mountains and the sky, and shakes off from him with a superb gesture the memory of her taunts.

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## XII

### THE MAN WHO WAS HANGED

ToC

It was outside the town of Ballinscreen, on the country side of the bridge over the Maeve, that Mr. Ramsay-Stewart was shot at in the League days, and that the shot struck a decent boy, Larry Byrne, a widow's only son, and killed him stone dead. The man that fired the shot would rather have cut off his right hand than hurt an innocent creature like Larry,—but there, when you go meddling with sin and wickedness, as often as not you plunge deeper into it than you could ever have foreseen. Anyhow the old women, who turn out everything to show the Lord's goodness, said it was plain to see that Larry was fitter to go than his master, and that was why the shot glanced by Mr. Stewart's ear to lodge in the poor coachman's brain as he leant forward, whipping up his horse with all his might, to get out of reach of that murderous shower of shot. [169]

Now a few months later all you comfortable people that sit reading your newspapers by an English fire, and thinking what a terrible place Ireland must be to live in, were comforted by the news that the man who shot Larry Byrne was swinging for it in the county jail at Ballinscreen. But you never made such a mistake in your born lives. That man was out on the mountains in the bleak, bitter winter weather, was in hiding all day in the caves up there in the clouds on top of Croghan, and by night was coming down to the lonely mountain farmhouses to beg what would keep the life in his big hungry body. The man that swung for the murder was as innocent as yourself, and more betoken, though he was great on war and revolutions, would no more fire on a man out of the dark night than you would yourself. He had little feeling for sin and crime, always barring the secret societies, by some considered a sin.

It was beautiful to hear Murty Meehan,—that was his name, God rest his soul!—having it out with old Father Phil on that same question. Why, he told the priest that he himself belonged to a secret society, for the matter of that, and the most powerful secret society of them all. Father Phil used to end it up with a laugh, for he was fond of Murty. He nearly broke his heart over the man when he was in jail, waiting to go to the gallows, and wouldn't open his lips to clear himself. Murty had been in every 'movement' from the '48 onwards. But like all the other old Fenians, he thought worse of the League than Mr. Ramsay-Stewart himself. His ideas were high-flown ones, and he could put them in beautiful language, about freeing his country, and setting her in her rightful place among the nations. But not by the League methods. There was a bit of poetry of Davis he was fond of quoting: [170]

For Freedom comes from God's right hand,  
And needs a godly train,  
And righteous men must make our land  
A Nation once again.

Many a time he hurled it at the Leaguers' heads, but they bore him no malice; the worst they did was to call him a crank. I often think that when Murty died on the gallows for a crime he hated, it was a sacrifice of more than his life. Well, God be good to him! [171]

Murty hadn't a soul in the world belonging to him. His father and mother died in the black '47, and the little girl he had set his heart on sailed in a coffin-ship for New York with her father and mother in the same bitter year, and went down somewhere out on the unkindly ocean. She had hung round Murty's neck imploring him to go with her, but Murty was drilling for the rising of the following year, and could see no duty closer than his duty to his country. He promised to follow her and bring her back if there were happier days in Ireland, but the boat and its freight were never heard of after they left Queenstown quay in that September of blight and storm. And so Murty grew with the years into a pleasant, kindly old bachelor, very full of whimsies and dreams, and a prophet to the young fellows. [172]

Now Mr. Ramsay-Stewart, though he kept himself and his tenants in hot water for a couple of years, wasn't a bad kind of gentleman, and now that things have settled down is well-esteemed and liked in the country. But when he came first he didn't understand the people nor they him, and there's no doubt he did some hard things as much out of pure ignorance, they say, as for any malice. He'd put his bit of money in the estate and meant to have it out of it, and he didn't like at all the easy-going ways he found there. The old Misses Conyers who preceded him were of a very ancient stock, and would rather turn out themselves than turn out a soul of their people. They had enough money to keep them while they lived; and 'pay when you can,' or 'when you like,' was the rule on the estate. Every man, woman and child was Paddy and Bidy and Judy to them. Oh, sure it was a bad day for the tenants when they went; and more betoken, they had laid up trouble for the man that was to succeed them. [173]

The people never gave Mr. Ramsay-Stewart a chance when he came. They disliked him, and he was an upstart and a *gombeen* man and a usurper, and such foolishness, in the mouths of every one of them. As if it was his fault, poor gentleman, that the Misses Conyers never married, and so let Coolacreva fall to strangers.

Now there was a widow and her daughter, Mrs. Murphy and little Fanny, that had a big patch of land on the estate, and the memory of man couldn't tell when they'd paid a penny of rent for it. It was so overgrown with weeds and thistles, and so strewn with big boulders, that it was more like a borean than decent fields. Well, it vexed Mr. Ramsay-Stewart, who was accustomed to the tidy Scotch fields, amazingly, and he got on his high horse that the widow should pay or go.

She couldn't or wouldn't pay, and she wouldn't go. She never thought the crow-bar brigade would be set on her cabin; but, sure, the new landlord wasn't a man to stop short of his word, and one bleak, bitter November day he was out with the police and bailiffs. Before the League could put one foot before another the roof was off Mrs. Murphy's cabin, the bits of furniture out in the road, and the pair of women standing over them shaking their fists at the Scotchman, and [174]



whimpering out the revenge they'd have, till Lanty Corcoran, a strong farmer, took them home, and set them up snug and easy in one of his outhouses.

Fanny was a pretty little girl, a golden-ringleted, blue-eyed slip of a *colleen*, with a sturdy and independent will of her own, that belied the soft shy glances she could cast at a man. She was promised to a boy over the seas, who was making a home for her and her mother in America, and there was another boy in the parish, John Sullivan, or Shawn Dhuv, as they usually called him because of his dark complexion, was fairly mad about her. Shawn was well off. He was the cleverest farmer that side of the country, just the kind of man Mr. Ramsay-Stewart wanted and was prepared to encourage when he got him. His land was clean and well-tilled, and he had a fine stock of cattle as well as horses, and hay, and straw, and machines that had cost a handful of money, for he was quick to take up new-fangled notions. People used to say Shawn would be a rich man one day, for he was prudent, drank little, and was a silent man, keeping himself to himself a good deal. [175]

Well, little Fanny had a hard time with the mother over her steady refusals to have anything to say to Black Shawn. She was an aggravating old woman, one of the whimpering sort; and sorely she must have tried poor Fanny often with her coaxing and crying, but the little girl was as stout as a rock where her absent boy was concerned.

Shawn Dhuv heard in time of the eviction, and in a bad moment for himself thought he'd press his suit once more; he knew he had the old woman on his side, and he thought he might find the young one in such a humour that she'd be glad to accept his hand and heart, and the cover of his little farmhouse. He had an idea too that he'd only to ask Mr. Ramsay-Stewart for the Murphys' farm and he'd get it, and he thought this would be a fine lever to work with. [176]

But he never made such a mistake, for little Fanny turned on him like the veriest spitfire.

'You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Black Shawn,' she cried, with her eyes flashing, 'to keep persecuting a girl that's as good as wife to another man. Why, if he was never in the world, do you think I'd take one like you, that's plotting and planning to take our bit of land before the ashes of our roof-tree are gone gray? If he was here he'd know how to avenge us, and not till he had done it would he look the girl he loved in the face.'

She was holding forth like this, her words tripping each other up in her anger; but sure, the poor little girl didn't mean what she was saying about revenge; it was likely some hot words she'd picked up out of the newspapers that came into her head in her passion, and tripped off her tongue without her knowing a word of what they meant. [177]

But Black Shawn heard her, turning first the deep red with which one of his complexion blushes, and then falling off as gray as the dead. Before she'd half said her say he took up his *caubeen*, put it on his head, and walked out of the place with an air as if he were dreaming.

Now he had an old carbine to frighten the crows, a crazy old thing that was as likely to hurt the man who fired it as the thing that was fired at. Black Shawn sat up all night cleaning it, and the grim mouth of the man never relaxed, nor did the colour come back to his ashy cheeks.

The next night he lay in wait for Mr. Ramsay-Stewart as he came home from the county clubhouse in Ballinscreen, and shot at him, killing poor Larry Byrne. It was only the length of the bridge from the police barracks, and as it was but nine o'clock at night, Ballinscreen people were up and about. So there wasn't much time for Black Shawn to see what mischief the blunderbuss had done. He saw at the first glance that one man was down in the dogcart, and another man swinging on by his arms to the mouth of the terrified horse. But already people were running across the bridge and shouting, and the dark quay seemed alive with lights. [178]

Luckily for Shawn the road away from the town was black as a tunnel. It runs between the two stone walls that shut out Lord Cahirmore's deer and black cattle from the public gaze. Down this black tunnel raced Shawn, sobbing like a child, for the black fit was gone over and the full horror of his crime was upon him. He was a quick runner, and he got the advantage, for the police in their flurry stopped for a minute or two debating whether to take the river banks or the road. But in Shawn's head the pursuing footsteps beat, beat, while he was yet far beyond them, and the trumpets of the Day of Judgment rang in his miserable ears. He had the smoking gun in his hands, for he hadn't the wit to get rid of it. And yet the man was safe, if he had had his wits about him, for he was the last man for Mr. Ramsay-Stewart to suspect or allow suspicion to fall upon. [179]

Well, he raced on blindly, and all of a sudden, as he turned a corner, a man flung up his arms in front of him, and then caught him by both wrists. It was Murty Meehan, and more betoken, he was on his way to a drilling of the Fenian boys in a quiet spot in Alloa Valley. Murty was wiry, despite his years, and his grip seemed to Black Shawn like the handcuffs already upon him. There was little struggle left in Shawn, and he just stood sobbing, while his gun smoked up between him and Murty.

'What black work is this, my fine fellow?' said Murty quietly.

Black Shawn came to himself, seeing he was stopped by a man and no ghost.

'Let me go, for God's sake,' he sobbed out. 'I've shot Ramsay-Stewart below at the bridge, and the police are after me.' Just then the moon rolled from behind a cloud, and Murty Meehan saw his prisoner, saw that he was young, and would be handsome if his face were not so distorted by emotion. Now there came a sudden sound of footsteps pelting along the road, and Shawn was taken with a tremor, though, mind you, he was a brave man, and it was horror of his sin was on him more than a fear of the rope. Murty Meehan made up his mind. [180]

'Give me the gun,' he said. 'I'm old and worn-out, and I might have had a son of your age.'

Shawn, hardly understanding, fled on the moment he was released. A bit further the lord's wall gave way to iron palings, and not far beyond was the open country and the road to the hills. Once in the hills Black Shawn was safe.

But they found Murty Meehan with the smoking gun in his hand, and what more evidence could be wanted? He was tried for the murder, and pleaded 'Not guilty'; and the number of witnesses called to testify to his character was enough to fill the court-house, but then, he couldn't or wouldn't explain the gun, and the judge declared it was the clearest case that had ever come before him. He was very eloquent in his charge over such a crime being committed by an old man, and expressed his abhorrence of poor Murty in a way that might have seared the face of a guilty man, though it didn't seem to come home very closely to the prisoner. [181]

A month later Murty was hanged in Ballinscreen jail. He was many a day in his quicklime grave before Black Shawn heard how another man had suffered for his crime. After long wandering he had escaped to the coast, and coming to a seaport town had been engaged by the captain of a sailing vessel, short of hands, who was only too glad to give him his grub and his passage in exchange for his work, and ask no questions. But it was a time of storms, and the ship was blown half-way to the North Pole, and as far south again, and arrived at New York long after all hope of her safety had been given up. If Black Shawn had known he would never have let an innocent man die in his place. So said the neighbours, who had known him from his boyhood. [182]

They will tell you this story in Munster, as they told it to me, sitting round the open hearth in the big farmhouse kitchens of winter nights. Down there there is not a man that won't lift his hat reverently when they name Murty.

For long enough no one knew what became of Black Shawn, and when the League was over and its power broken, and a better spirit was coming back to men's hearts, many a poor boy was laid by the heels through the use of that same name. Many in Munster will tell you of the stranger that used to come to the farmhouses begging a rest by the fire and a meal in the name of Black Shawn, and sitting there quietly would listen to the rash and trustful talk of the young fellows about fighting for their dear Dark Rosaleen, the country that holds men's hearts more than any prosperous mother-land of them all. His name is a name never mentioned in Ireland without a black, bitter curse, for he was a famous informer and spy, own brother to such evil spawn as Corydon, Massey, and Nagle. But 'tis too long a story to tell how the spy masqueraded as Black Shawn, and I think I'll keep it for another time. [183]

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### XIII

#### A PRODIGAL SON

Mrs. Sheehy was blest with two sons. Of the elder she had seen little since his early boyhood, when his love for handling tarry ropes and sails, and his passion for the water-side, had resulted in his shipping as cabin-boy on a China-bound ship. There was undoubted madness in the Sheehy blood, but in this sailor son, so long as he kept sober, there was no manifestation of it except it might be in a dreaminess and romanticism uncommon to his class. He was an olive-skinned, brown-eyed fellow, with such a refined face as might have belonged to an artist or musician. He had the mellow colour Murillo loved. The mad strain which, in the case of greatly gifted people, has often seemed to be the motive power of genius, in him took the form of a great cleverness,—an esoteric cleverness and ingenuity added to the sailor's dexterity. [185]

But it is not with Willie I have to deal, though the story of his marriage is a little romance in itself. It was Mick was the prodigal son. Every one about the country knew and liked Mick. He was a bit of an omadhaun, that is to say a simpleton,—but quite unlike the shambling idiots of whom every village possessed one, who was a sort of God's fool to the people, till some new legislation locked them all up in the work-houses, poor things!

Mick was a rosy-cheeked, innocent-looking lad, touched in the mind, certainly, but exceedingly harmless, likeable and entertaining. He was a strong fellow and when he 'took a hate (*i.e.* heat) o' work' he was as good or better than the best in harvest or hayfield. His softness procured for him a certain delightful immunity from responsibility. He worked when in the humour, but race, or fair, or cock-fight, or football match drew Mick irresistibly from his labours. He was off to every bit of 'divarision' in the country, and when there were big races at a distance Mick generally took the road a day beforehand, sleeping out in the soft spring night if it was dry weather, trusting to a convenient haystack or barn if it wasn't. He was known so widely that at every farmhouse along the road he was sure of a bite. And on the race-course every one was his friend; and the various parties picnicking were greeted by Mick with uproarious shouts and a flinging of his *caubeen* in [186]

the air, to signify his delight at meeting his friends so far from home.

Mick had the privileges of 'the natural,' as they call an idiot in Ireland, with only a few of his disabilities. He was even known to leave the church during a very tedious sermon of Father O'Herlihy's and smoke a pipe outside while awaiting the rest of the congregation. When he was tackled about this flagrant disrespect by his pastor, Mick replied unblushingly, 'Sure, I didn't lave durin' the mass, your Reverence: 'twas all over but a thing of nothing.' 'What do you mean by that?' asked his Reverence severely. 'Sure, your Reverence's sermon, I mane, what else?' responded Mick. [187]

Mick could be violent too in his cups, but somehow even his violence was humorous. The village butcher once was imprudent enough to remonstrate with him for drinking, while the drink was yet in him, and Mick acknowledged the good advice by unhooking a leg of mutton and belabouring him soundly, to the detriment of himself and his mutton, till the police interfered. On another occasion he addressed his energies to the Sisyphus-like task of endeavouring to roll a very large water-barrel through his mother's very small door, all one winter night, while his mother alternately coaxed and threatened. Mick's pranks were endless, but lest they meet with a severer judge than Mick ever met with, I spare you the recital of them.

Now Mrs. Sheehy was far less tolerated and tolerable than either of her peccant sons. She had a little withered face, with hard red cheeks and bright, rather mad black eyes, set in a frame of crinkly black hair. You might meet her on the road of a sweet summer morning, trapesing, to use the expressive Irish word, along, with a sunshade over her battered bonnet. Her attire was generally made up of very tarnished finery,—a befrilled skirt trailing in the dust behind her, and a tattered lace shawl disposed corner-wise over her shoulders. She seemed always to wear the cast-off garments of fine ladies, and we had an explanation of this fact. It was supposed that Mrs. Sheehy represented herself to pious Protestant ladies, for about a radius of twenty miles, as a Papist, who might easily be brought to see the error of her ways, and as one who for her liberal tendencies was much in disfavour with the priests. I know that to her co-religionists she complained that Protestant charities were closed to her because she had become a Catholic. There was a legend that Mrs. Sheehy came from a Protestant stock, but I do not know whether this were true or merely invented for convenience when the lady went asking alms. [188]

It was from some of these Protestant ladies the suggestion came that Mick should go to America under some precious emigration scheme. They are always, with their mistaken philanthropy, drafting away the boys and girls from Ireland, to cast them, human wreckage, in the streets of New York; always taking away the young life from the sweet glens over which the chapel bell sends its shepherding voice, and casting it away in noisome places, while at home the aged folk go down alone the path to the grave. [189]

Now we always thought that Mrs. Sheehy must have suggested Mick as an emigrant, for he was distinctly not eligible. But it was very easy to puff up poor Mick's mind with pictures of America as a Tom Tiddler's ground, and the mother did this in private, while in public she wrung her hands over the wilful boy that would go and leave her lonesome in her old age. Pretty soon the matter was settled, and Mick went about as vain as any young recruit when he has taken the Queen's shilling and donned the scarlet, and has not yet realised that he has been a fine fat goose for the fox-sergeant's plucking. [190]

But if Mick was full of the spirit of adventure, and looked forward to that spring Wednesday when he should leave for Queenstown, his mother made up for his heartless joy by her lugubriousness. As the time drew near she would buttonhole all and sundry whom she could catch to pour out her sorrows. The trailing gown and ragged lace shawl became a danger signal which we would all flee from, as it were not sprung upon us too suddenly. We had a shrewd suspicion that the tears Mrs. Sheehy shed so freely were of the variety known as crocodile. Rumour had it that Mick once out of the way she was to be accommodated comfortably for life as a lodgekeeper to one of those emigrating ladies. Sometimes she used to follow us to our very doors to weep, and on such occasions would be so overcome with grief that it took a little whisky and water and the gift of an old dress or some broken victuals to prepare her for the road again. [191]

On the Tuesday of the week Mick was to start he made a farewell progress round all the houses of the neighbourhood. We were called into the big farmhouse kitchen about five of the afternoon to bid him good-bye. Mick sat forward on the edge of his chair, thrusting now and then his knuckles into his eyes, like a big child, and trying to wink away his tears. We all did our best to console him, and after a time from being very sad he grew rather uproariously gay. Mick was no penman, but for all that he made the wildest promises about writing, and as for the gifts he was to send us, the place should be indeed a Tom Tiddler's ground if he were to fulfil his rash promises. Meanwhile we all pressed our parting gifts on him; some took the form of money, others were useful or beneficial, as we judged it. Mick added everything to the small pack he was carrying, which had indeed already swollen since he left home, and was likely to be considerably more swollen by the time he had concluded his round. [192]

Mick had got over the parting with his mother. The emigrants' train started in the small hours, and the emigrants were to rendezvous at a common lodging-house close by the big terminus. We inquired about poor Mrs. Sheehy with feeling. Mick responded with a return of tears that he'd left her screeching for bare life and tearing her hair out in handfuls. The memory caused Mick such remorse at leaving her that we hastened to distract his mind to his fine prospects once more.

He delayed so long over his farewells to us that we began to fear he'd never catch up with the other emigrants, for the road to the city was studded with the abodes of Mick's friends, whom he

had yet to call upon. However, at last he really said good-bye, and we accompanied him in a group to the gate of the farmyard, from which, with a last distracted wave of his hands, the poor fellow set off, running, as if he could not trust himself to look back, along the field-path. It was a dewy May evening after rain, and the hawthorn was all in bloom, and the leaves shaking out their crumpled flags of tender green. The blackbird was singing as he only sings after rain, and the fields were covered with the gold and silver dust of buttercup and daisy. It was sad to see the poor fellow going away at such a time, and from a place where every one knew and was kind to him, to an unknown world that might be very cruel. Once again as we watched him we anathematised the emigration which has so steadily been bleeding the veins of our poor country.

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We all thought of Mick the next morning, and imagined him on the various stages of his journey to Queenstown, and the big liner. For a week or so we did not see Mrs. Sheehy, but heard piteous accounts of her prostration. The poor woman seemed incapable of taking comfort. Report said that she could neither eat nor drink, so great was her grief. We felt rather ashamed of our former judgments of her, and were very full of good resolutions as to our future treatment of her. Only Mary, our maid, disbelieved in this excessive grief; but then Mary is the most profound cynic I have ever known, and we always discount her judgments.

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Anyhow, when Mrs. Sheehy reappeared in our kitchen she looked more wizened, yellow, and dishevelled than ever, and at the mention of Mick's name she rocked herself to and fro in such paroxysms of grief that we were quite alarmed. As for the benevolent ladies interested in the schemes of emigration, their eyes would have been rudely opened if they could have heard Mrs. Sheehy's denunciations of them. She called them the hard-hearted ould maids who had robbed her of her one child, who had persecuted her boy—her innocent child, and driven him out in the cold world, who had left her to go down a lone woman to the grave. Nor was this all, for she was an adept at eloquent Irish curses, and she sprinkled them generously on the devoted heads of the ladies aforesaid. It was really rather fine to see Mrs. Sheehy in this tragic mood, and we were all touched and impressed by her. We comforted her with the suggestion that a letter from Mick was nearly due, and with assurances, which we scarcely felt, that Mick was bound to do well in America and prove a credit to her; and we finally got rid of her, and were rejoiced to see her going off, with her turned-up skirt full as usual of heterogeneous offerings.

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Well, a few days after this, some one brought us the surprising story that Mick had returned or was on the way to return. One of the carters had given him a lift on the first stage of his journey from Dublin, and had left him by his own request at one of the houses where he had had such a sorrowful parting a little while before. The man had told Mick of his mother's grief, a bit of intelligence which somewhat dashed the radiant spirits with which he was returning home. However, he cheered up immediately: 'Tell th' ould woman,' he said, 'that I wasn't such a villain as to leave her at all, at all, an' that I'll be home by evenin'. She'll be havin' a bit o' bacon in the pot to welcome me.' The man told us this with a dry grin, and added, "'Tis meself wouldn't like to be afther bringin' the poor ould woman the good news. It might be too much joy for the crathur to bear.' This ironic speech revived all our doubts of Mrs. Sheehy.

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Mick took our house on the way across the fields to his mother's cottage. We received him cordially, though with less *empressement* than when we had parted from him, for now we were pretty sure of seeing Mick often during the years of our natural lives. We too told him of his mother's excessive grief, as much, perhaps, with a selfish design of hastening him on his way as anything else, for we had our misgivings about Mick's reception.

There were plenty of people to tell us of the prodigal's welcome. The village had buzzed all day with the dramatic sensation of Mick's return, but no one had told Mrs. Sheehy—though every one was on tiptoe for the hour of Mick's arrival. He came about six in the evening, and having passed through the village was escorted by a band of the curious towards his mother's cottage.

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Mrs. Sheehy lives in a by-road. On one side are the woods, on the other the fields, and at this hour of the May evening the woods were full of golden aisles of glory. Now Mrs. Sheehy had come out of her house to give a bit to the pig, when she saw a group of people advancing towards her down the sunshine and shadow of the road. She shaded her eyes and looked that way. For a minute or two she could not make out the advancing figures, but from one in the midst broke a yell, a too-familiar yell, for who in the world but Mick could make such a sound? Then her prodigal son dashed from the midst of the throng and flew to her with his arms spread wide.

Mrs. Sheehy seemed taken with a genuine faintness. She dropped the 'piggin,'—the little one-handed tub in which she was carrying the rentpayer's mess of greens,—and fell back against the wall. The spectators, and it seemed the whole village had turned out, came stealing in Mick's wake. They were safe from Mrs. Sheehy's dreaded tongue, for the lady had no eyes for them. As soon as she realised that it was Mick, really her son, come back to her, she burst into a torrent of abuse, the like of which has never been equalled in our country. The listeners could give no idea of it: it was too continuous and too eloquent. It included not only Mick, 'the villain, the thief of the world, the base unnatural deceiver,' but ourselves, and all to whom Mick had paid those farewell visits. Mick heard her with a grin, and when she had exhausted herself she suddenly clutched him by his mop-head, dragged him indoors, and banged the door to.

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She had apprehended the true state of the case. The potatoes at some houses, the gifts at others, had been the causes of the failure of Mick as an emigrant. When his round of visits was concluded he had slept comfortably in a hay-stack till long after the hour when his fellow emigrants were starting from Kingsbridge. The next morning he had gaily set out for 'a bit of a spree' in Dublin, and having sold his passage ticket and his little kit, had managed, with the proceeds and our gifts, to make the spree last a fortnight. For a little while we deemed it

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expedient to avoid passing by Mrs. Sheehy's door, though Mick assured us that it was 'the joy of the crathur had taken her wits from her, so that she didn't rightly know what she was saying.'

There was one more attempt made to emigrate Mick, but it was futile, Mick declaring that 'he'd deserve any misfortune, so he would, if he was ever to turn his back on the old woman again.' Mrs. Sheehy has forgiven us our innocent share in keeping Mick at home with her. The mother and son still live together, with varying times, just as the working mood is on or off Mick. I believe his favourite relaxation of an evening, when he stays at home, is to discover in the wood embers the treasures which would have fallen to him if his love for his mother hadn't kept him from expatriating himself. The Hon. Miss Ellersby's vacant gate-lodge has been filled up by Kitty Keegan, who is Mrs. Sheehy's special aversion out of all the world.

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## XIV

### CHANGING THE NURSERIES

ToC

To-day the fiat has gone forth, and we are already deep in consultation over paper and paint, chintz, and carpeting. How many years I have dreaded it; how many staved off, beyond my hope, the transformation of those two dear rooms! They have been a shabby corner in my big, stately house for many a day—a corner to which in the long, golden afternoons I could steal for an hour and shut out the world, and nurse my sorrow at my breast like a crying child. You may have heard Catholics talk about a 'retreat,' a quiet time in which one shuffles off earthly cares, and steeps one's soul in the silence that washes it and makes it strong. Such a 'retreat' I have given my heart in many and many an hour in the old nurseries. I have sat there with my hands folded, and let the long-still little voices sound sweet in my ear—the voices of the dead children, the voices of the grown children whose childhood is dead. The voices cry to me, indeed, many a time when I have no leisure to hear them. When I am facing my dear man at the other end of our long dining-table, when I am listening to the chatter of callers in my drawing-room, at dinner-parties and balls, in the glare of the theatre, I often hear the cries to which I must not listen.

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A mother has such times, though her matronhood be crowned like mine with beautiful and dear children, and with the love of the best husband in the world. I praise God with a full heart for His gifts; but how often in the night I have wakened heart-hungry for the little ones, and have held my breath and crushed back my sobs lest the dear soul sleeping so placidly by my side should discover my inexplicable trouble. In the nurseries that I shall have no more after to-day, the memories of them have crowded about my knees like gentle little ghosts. There were the screened fire-place and the tiny chairs which in winter they drew near the blaze, and the window overlooking the pleasance and a strip of the garden, where the wee faces crowded if I were walking below. Things are just as they were: the little beds huddled about the wall; the cheap American clock, long done ticking, on the mantelshelf; the doll's house, staring from all its forlorn windows, as lonely as a human habitation long deserted; the cupboard, through the open doors of which you may see the rose-bedecked cups that were specially bought for the nursery tea. Am I the same woman that used to rustle so cheerfully down the nursery corridor to share that happy afternoon tea? From the door, half denuded of its paint, peachy little faces used to peep joyfully at my coming; while inside there waited my little delicate one, long gone to God, who never ran and played with the others. I can see her still, with the pleasure lighting up her little, thin face, where she sat sedately, her scarlet shoes to the blaze and her doll clasped to a tenderly maternal breast.

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They will tear down the wall paper to-morrow, and the pictures of Beauty and the Beast, and those fine-coloured prints of children and doggies and beribboned pussy-cats that the children used to love. There is one of a terrier submitting meekly to be washed by an imperious small mistress. One of my babies loved that terrier so tenderly that he had to be lifted morning and night to kiss the black nose, whence the oily shine of the picture is much disfigured at that point. He is grown now and a good boy, but less fond of kissing, and somehow independent of his father and of me. There on the window shutter is a drawing my baby, Nella, made the year she died, a strange and wonderful representation of a lady and a dog. I have never allowed it to be washed out, and perhaps only mothers will understand me when I say that I have kissed it often with tears.

I shall miss my nurseries bitterly. No one ever came there but myself in those quiet afternoon hours, and my old Mary, my nurse, who nursed them all from first to last. She surprised me once as I sat strangling with sobs amid the toys I had lifted from their shelves, the dilapidated sheep, the Noah's Ark, the engine, which for want of a wheel lies on its side, and a whole disreputable regiment of battered dolls and tin soldiers. On my lap there were dainty garments of linen and wool, every one of which I kissed so often with a passion of regret. I have kept my baby clothes

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selfishly till now, hidden away in locked drawers, sweet with lavender. To-day I have parted with them. They are gone to dress the Christmas babies at a great maternity hospital. Each one I set aside to go tore my heart intolerably. May the Christmas Babe who lacked such clothing in the frost and snow, love the little ones, living or dead, to whom those tiny frocks and socks and shirts once belonged! Giving them away, I seem to have wrenched my heart from the dead children; each gift was a separate pang. The toys, too, go to-morrow to the Sisters of Charity, who have a great house near at hand. A Sister, a virginal creature whom I have seen holding the puny babies of the poor to a breast innocently maternal, has told me of the children who at Christmastide have no toys. This year they shall not go without; so I am sending them all—the doll's house and the rocking-horse, and all the queer contents of the nursery shelves, and the fairy stories well thumbed, with here and there a loose page, and the boxes of bricks and the clockwork mouse—all, all my treasures.

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Yet, if the children had all lived, I might yet have had my nurseries. The three youngest died one after another: my smallest boy, whom I have not ceased yet to regard as my baby, I kept in the nurseries as long as I could. He has not yet outgrown his guinea-pigs, and his bantams, his squirrels, and his litter of puppies. When he went to school he commended each to my care, with tears he in vain tried manfully to wink away. Dear little sweetheart, he gave way at last, and we cried together passionately. But I wish he need not have gone for another year. He was more babyish than the others, more content to remain long my baby. His first letters from school were tear-stained and full of babyish thoughts and reminiscences. But he is growing ashamed of the softness, I can see, and talks of 'fellows,' and 'fielding,' and 'runs,' and 'wickets' in a way that shows me that my baby has put on the boy.

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It was not fair, I see, to have kept the nurseries so long. The boys at the University, the girls, enjoying their first introduction to the gay world, have wanted rooms for their friends, and generous as the big house is, it does not do much more than hold its own happy brood. The nurseries are to be made into a couple of charming rooms, the one with a paper of tea-roses on a white satin ground, and yellow and white hangings, and paint and tiles in the pretty grate. The other is to be green and pink, with a suite of green furniture and rosy hangings. I entered into it with zest as my girls debated it. But all the time my heart cried out against the devastation of its dreams. To-morrow, when they begin to dismantle my nurseries, I do not know how I shall bear it. I feel to-night as if they were going to turn the gentle inhabitants out into the night and rain, the shades of my little children who used to sit round the fire of winter evenings, or by the window in the long, exquisite summer days. It is like long, long ago, when Nella and Cuckoo and Darling died.

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## XV

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### THE FIELDS OF MY CHILDHOOD

ToC

They lie far away, gray with the mists of memory, under a veil of distance, half-silver, half-gold, like the gossamer, so far that they might never have been save only in dreams. They are not nearly so real as the Eastern world of the stories I read yesterday, but I know where they lie—common fields nowadays, and seldom visited. Yet, there was a child once who knew every inch of them as well as the ant her anthill, or the silvery minnow her brown well under the stone cover, to which one descends by ancient water-stained steps.

The fields are there, but their face somewhat changed, as other things are changed. We were little ones when we came to live among them, in a thatched house full of little nests of rooms, the walls of which were run over by flowery trellises that made them country-like even by candle-light. Of candle-light I have not much memory, for we went to bed in the gloaming, when the long, long day had burned itself out and the skies were washed with palest green that held the evening star; and we slept dreamlessly till the golden day shot through the chinks of the shutters, and we leapt to life again with a child's zest for living. At the back of the house there was an overgrown orchard, a dim, delicious place where the gnarled boughs made a roof against heaven. It was our adventure, time and again, to escape through our windows and wash our feet in the May dew before we were discovered. One whole summer, indeed, these revels were hindered by a bull which was pastured on the lush herbage. But how entrancing it was to hear him roar at night, close by our bed's head, or to see his great shadow cross the chink of moonlight in the shutter! Sometimes he ate the rose-bushes that wreathed our window, and, rubbing his gigantic flanks against the house-wall, bellowed, while we shook in bed in delicious tremors, and imagined our cosy nest a tent in the African desert, with lions roaring outside. I remember the rooms so well: the chilly parlour, only used when we had grown-up visitors, for we were there in charge of a nurse; the red-tiled kitchen, with its settle and its little windows opening inward; the door that gave on a grass-grown approach; and the stone seat outside, where we sat to shell peas, or made

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'plays' with broken bits of crockery and the shreds of shining tin pared by the travelling tinker when he mended the porringers. I remember the very cups and saucers from which we drank our rare draughts of tea—delicate china, with sea-shells on it in tones of gray, the varied shapes of which gave us ever-new interest.

As I look back, I can never see that house in unwinking daylight, though it was perpetual summer then, and never a rainy day. Rooms and passages are always dim with a subdued green light, the reflection, I suppose, through the narrow windows wreathed with verdure, and from the grass and the plaited apple-boughs. But the spirit of improvement has laid all waste, has thrown the wee rooms into ample ones, has changed the narrow windows for bays and oriels, has thinned the apple-trees for the sake of the grass. There was once a pond, long and green, with a little island in the midst, where a water-hen had her nest. I always thought of it as the pond in Hans Andersen's *Ugly Duckling*, and never watched the ducks paddling among the reeds that I did not look to the sky to see the wild geese, that were contemptuously friendly with the poor hero, flecking the pearl-strewn blue. The pond is filled up now with the macadam of a model farmyard. Iron and stone have replaced the tumble-down yellow sheds, where we drank sheep's milk in a gloom powdered with sun-rays; the two shrubberies have gone, and the hedge of wild roses that linked the trees in the approach to the house. Naught remains save the thatched roof, many feet deep, the green porch over the hall door, the stone seat round the streaky apple-tree at the garden gate, and the garden itself, where the largest lilies I have ever seen stand in the sun, and the apple-trees are in the garden-beds, the holly-hocks elbow the gooseberries, and the violets push out their little clumps in the celery-bed.

But the fields. It is only to the ignorant all fields are the same; as there are some who see no individualities in animals because they have no heart for them. Here and there hedges have been levelled and dykes filled, and now their places are marked by a long dimple in the land's face. The well in the midst of one has been filled up, despite the warning of an old mountain farmer that ill-luck would surely follow whosoever demolished the fairy well. Over it grew a clump of briar and thorn-trees, where one found the largest, juiciest blackberries; that too is gone, but, practically, the fields remain the same. There is the Ten Acre field, stretching so far as to be weirdly lonely at the very far end. Every part of it was distinct. You turned to the left as you entered by a heavy hedge of wild-rose and blackberry. There the wild convolvulus blew its white trumpet gloriously and violets ran over the bank under the green veil, and stellaria and speedwell made in May a mimic heaven. I remember a meadow there, and yet again a potato-digging, where we picked our own potatoes for dinner and grew sun-burnt as the brown men and women who required so many cans of well-water to drink at their work. Where the hedge curved there was a little passage, through which the dyke-water flowed into the next field. It was delightful to set little boats of leaf and grass upon the stream, and to see them carried gaily by the current down that arcade of green light. Some of the inquisitive ones waded after them, and emerged wet and muddy in the next field. I preferred to keep the mystery of the place, and to believe it went a long, long way. For half the length of the field the water flowed over long grass that lay face downward in it. To see it you had to lift the grass and the meadow flowers. Once we were startled there in a summer dusk before the hay was cut, when all the corn-crakes were crying out that summer was in the land. As we threaded the meadow aisles, a heavy, dark body leapt from its lair and into the dyke. It was a badger, we learnt afterwards, and its presence there gave the place an attractive fearsomeness. Half-way down, where a boundary hedge had once made two fields of the Ten Acres, the low hedge changed to a tall wall of stately thorn trees. Below their feet the stream ran, amber, pellucid, over a line of transformed pebbles. By this we used to lie for hours, watching the silver-scaled minnows as they sailed on. At the far end there was watercress, and over the hedge a strange field, good for mushrooms, but which bore with us a somewhat uncanny reputation.

Across it you saw the gray house-chimneys of the lonely house reputed to be haunted. Opposite its door stood an old fort on a little hill, a noted resort of the fairies. Any summer gloaming at all, you might see their hundreds of little lamps threading a fantastic measure in and out on the rath. I never heard that any one saw more of them than those lights, which floated away if any were bold enough to approach them, like glorified balls of that thistledown of which children divine what's o'clock.

At the other side of the Ten Acres was a fantastic corner of grass, which was always a miniature meadow. There swung the scarlet and black butterflies which have flown into Fairyland, and there the corn-crake built her nest in the grass. It was a famous corner for bird's-nesting, which with us took no crueller form than liking to part the thick leaves to peep at the pretty, perturbed mother-thrush on her clutch. Sometimes we peeped too often, and she flew away and left the eggs cold. We saw the world from that corner, for one could see through the hedge on to the road by lying low where the roots of the hedge-row made a thinness. We should not have cared about this if it were not that we could look, unseen ourselves, at the infrequent passer-by, for the hedge grew luxuriantly. Further down it became partly a clay bank, and there on the coarse grass used to hang snail-shells of all sizes, and, as I remember them, of shining gold and silver. The inhabitant was the drawback to all that beauty, yet when we found an empty house, it was cold, dull, and with the sheen vanished.

Across the road was the moat-field, the great fascination of which was in the wild hill that gave it its name. What the moat originally was I know not. I think, now, it must have been a gravel-hill, for it was full of deep gashes, of pits and quarries, run over by briar, alight with furze-bushes. It must have been long disused, for the hedge that was set around it—to keep the cattle out, perhaps—was tall and sturdy, and grew up boldly towards the trees that studded it at intervals.

There was no other entry to it except by gaps we made in the close hedge, and, wriggling through these, we climbed among briars and all kinds of vegetation that made a miniature jungle overhead. Near the top we emerged on stunted grass, with the wide sky over us, and before us the champaign country stretching to the plains of Meath, and the smoke of the city, and the misty sea. Southwards there were the eternal hills which grow so dear to one, yet never so intimate that they have not fresh exquisite surprises in store. We threaded the moat by paths between the furze, on the golden honey-hives of which fluttered moths like blue turquoise. The dragon-fly was there, and the lady-bird and little beetles in emerald coats of mail. And over that the lark soared in a wide field of air to hail God at His own very gates. Bitter little sloes grew on the moat, and blackberries in their season; and if you had descended into one of the many cups of the place, even long before the sun had begun to slant, you liked to shout to your companions and be answered cheerily from the human world. The moat had an uncanniness of its own; it was haunted by leaping fires that overran it and left no trace. You might see it afar, suffused by a dull glare, any dim summer night. So have I myself beheld it when I have crept through the dew on a nocturnal expedition: and though one of the commonplace suggested that it might have been the new moon rising scarlet behind the luxuriant vegetation of the moat, that was in the unimaginative next day, and not when we discussed the marvel in the scented darkness that comes between summer eve and dawn.

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Then there was the well-field, where a little stream that fed the well clattered over pebbles, made leaps so sudden down tiny inclines that we called the commotion a waterfall, and widened under a willow-tree into a pool, brown and still, where, tradition said, had once been seen a trout. For sake of this glorious memory we fished long with squirming worms and a pin, but caught not even the silliest little minnow. This small game we used to bag, by the way, at will, by simply lowering a can into the green depths of the well, where there was always a tiny silver fin a-sailing. Once we kept a pair three days in the water-jug, and finally restored them to their emerald dark. The well-field was in part marshy and ended in a rushy place, where water-cresses grew thick, and a little bridge led into the neighbour's fields. There we found yellow iris, and the purple bee orchis, and fox-gloves.

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Hard by was Nano's Field, which we affected only in the autumn, for then we gathered crab-apples, of a yellow and pink, most delightful to the eye. And also the particular variety of blackberry which ripens first, and is large and of irregular shape, but, to the common blackberry, what purple grapes are to the thin, green variety. And again, there was the front lawn, where the quicken-berry hung in drooping scarlet clusters above us, as we sat on a knoll, and a sea of gold and white washed about us in May. But the fields make me garrulous, and if I were to go on they that never tired the children might weary the grown listener. Said I not they were seldom visited? Yet their enchantment is still there for happy generations unborn. The children and the fields and the birds we have always with us. I would that for every child there might be the fields, to make long after a dream of green beauty, though the world has grown arid. Because the dream seems so sweet to me I have gossiped of it, but have not named half its delicate delights, nor some of the great ones: as the romps in the hay fields, the voyage of discovery after hens' nests, the mysteries of that double hedge that is the orchard boundary, and the hidden places in gnarled boughs, where you perched among the secrets of the birds and the leaves, and saw the crescent moon through a tender veil of enchantment while yet the orange of the sunset was in the west.

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## THE END

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Typographical errors corrected in text:

Page 133: rremember replaced with remember

The sentence on page 47 really does say:  
The mother turned round on her her dim eyes.

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\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK AN ISLE IN THE WATER \*\*\*

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