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3. A Table of Contents has been added to ease navigation.

ROSSMOYNE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"PHYLLIS," "MOLLY BAWN," "PORTIA," ETC.

"Who set this ancient quarrel new abroach?—
Speak, nephew, were you by when it began?

"Here's much to do with hate, but more with love."—

ROMEO AND JULIET.

NEW YORK AND CHICAGO
BUTLER BROTHERS

TROW'S
PRINTING AND BOOKBINDING COMPANY,
NEW YORK.

ROSSMOYNE.

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CHAPTER I.

How a Dove-cot was fluttered in Rossmoyne.

The old-fashioned clock is ticking loudly, ponderously, as though determined to betray the flight of fickle time and impress upon the happy, careless ones that the end of all things is at hand. The roses knock their fragrant buds against the window-panes, calling attention to their dainty sweetness. The pigeons coo amorously upon the sills outside, and even thrust their pretty heads into the breakfast-room, demanding plaintively their daily crumbs; but no one heeds.

A deadly silence has fallen upon this room at Moyne, albeit life is fully represented here, and two eyes, in which the light of youth is quenched, are looking anxiously into the two other eyes that have also seen the best and the sweetest of their days.

Hopelessly the golden roses scatter their petals. In vain the white and tawny birds entreat backsheesh. To no purpose does the elderly clock count out its numbers. The urn is hissing angrily, the two cups of tea so carefully prepared are growing cold. So are the crisp little hot cakes, so is the——

No! by the bye, it isn't! Honey can't. What a chance I was near giving the reviewers!

One bird, growing annoyed at the prolonged quiet, flies from the open window to the back of Miss Penelope's chair, and settles there with an indignant flutter and a suppressed but angry note. This small suggestion of a living world destroyes the spell that for the last few minutes has been connecting the brain with a dead one.

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Miss Penelope, raising her head, gives words to her thoughts.

"Poor, poor Katherine!" she says, gently smoothing out the letter that lies upon her knee. "How her happiness was wrecked and what a sad ending there has been to everything! Her children coming home to us, fatherless—motherless! Dear child! what a life hers has been! It is quite twenty years ago now, and yet it all seems to me as fresh as yesterday."

"She shouldn't have taken things so easily; she should have asserted herself at the *time*," says Miss Priscilla, whose voice is always a note sharper than her sister's.

"It requires a great deal of thought and—and a great deal of moral courage to assert one's self when a man has behaved abominably to one,—has, in fact, *jilted* one!" says Miss Penelope, bringing out the awful word with a little shudder and a shake of her gentle head, that sets two pale lavender ribbons on her cap swaying mildly to and fro.

"Why was she so fatally silent about everything, except the one bare fact of his refusal, at the last moment, to marry her, without assigning any cause for his base desertion? Why didn't she open her whole heart to me? I wasn't afraid of the man!" says Miss Priscilla, with such terrible energy and such a warlike front as might well have daunted "*the man*," or indeed any man, could he have seen her. "She should have unburdened her poor bruised spirit to me, who—if my mother was not hers, and if I was many years her senior—had at least a sister's love for her."

"A true love," says Miss Penelope, with another sigh.

"Instead of which," regretfully, "she hid all her sorrows in her own bosom, and no doubt wept and pined for the miscreant in secret."

"Poor soul!" says Miss Penelope, profoundly affected by this dismal picture. Tears born of tenderness spring to her eyes. "Do you remember, Priscilla, how she refused to show his letter, wishing, I suppose, even *then* to spare him?"

"I forget nothing!" with some acerbity. "Often, when saying my prayers, I have wished I could forget him, but I can't, so I have to go on being uncharitable and in sin,—if indeed sin it be to harden one's heart against a bad man."

"Do you remember, too, my dear Priscilla, how she refused to go to church the Sunday after she received his cold-blooded missive telling her he wished his engagement at an end? I often wonder in what language he could have couched such a scandalous desire; but she tore the letter up. [Pg 9] Dear! dear! it might have happened to-day, it is all so clear to me."

"Too clear," says Miss Priscilla.

"I recollect, too," says Miss Penelope, leaning her elbows on the table, pushing her untasted tea from her, and warming to the dismal memory, "how she would not come down to dinner on that eventful evening, though we had the red-currant tart she was so fond of, and how I took some up myself and knocked at her door and entreated her to open to me and to eat some of it. There was whipped cream on it; and she was very fond of cream, too."

"And she refused to open the door?" asks Miss Priscilla, with the satisfied air of one who has often heard the thrilling recital before, yet was never tired of it.

"Absolutely! so I laid the plate on a little table outside her door. Some hours afterwards, going up to bed, I saw the plate was gone and her door slightly ajar. Stealing into her room on tiptoe, I saw she was sleeping peacefully, and that she had eaten the red-currant tart. I felt so happy then. Poor dear child! how fond she was of that tart."

"She liked everything that had sugar in it," says Miss Priscilla, mournfully.

"It was only natural. 'Sweets to the sweet,'" says Miss Penelope, letting one little white jewelled hand fall slowly, sadly upon the other.

There is a lengthened pause.

Presently, stooping slightly towards her sister, Miss Penelope says in a mysterious whisper,—

"I wonder, my dear Priscilla, *why* she married James Beresford a month afterwards."

"Who can read the human heart? Perhaps it was pride drove her into that marriage,—a desire to show George Desmond how lightly she treated his desertion of her. And James was a handsome young fellow, whereas George was——"

"Ugly," says Miss Penelope, with quite an amazing amount of vicious satisfaction for her.

"Strikingly so," says Miss Priscilla, acquiescing most agreeably. "But then the Desmond estates mean half the county; and we *used* to think he was the soul of honor."

"It was our father's expressed desire upon his deathbed that Katherine should marry him."

"Yes, yes; a desire to be held sacred. And Katherine gave her promise to our dying parent. Nothing," says Miss Priscilla, in a solemn tone, "should induce any one to break such an oath. I [Pg 10] have often said so to the dear child. But she appeared not only willing, but anxious, to marry George Desmond. *His* was the traitorous mind."

"I daresay he has had his own punishment," says Miss Penelope, mildly.

"I hope so," says Miss Priscilla, sternly. Then, with a return to sadness, "Twenty years ago it is, and now she has been a twelvemonth dead and in her quiet grave."

"Oh, *don't*, my dear Priscilla," says Miss Penelope, in a broken voice, burying her face in her pocket-handkerchief.

"Ah! well, well, we had better look to the future; the past has no charms for us," says Miss Priscilla, with a ghastly attempt at cheerfulness. "Let me see," referring through a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles to the letter in her hand: "That the dear children have landed we know, and—h'm—yes, this very—yes, plainly, *very* respectable person, the captain, writes to say they will be with us to-morrow."

"*To-morrow!* and that was written yesterday," says Miss Penelope, putting down her handkerchief and starting once more into life. "Why, at that rate, my dear Priscilla, they will be here *to-day*!"

"Bless me! you don't mean it!" exclaims Miss Priscilla, again applying her glasses to the letter. "Monday, and this is Tuesday: yes, sure enough you are right. What a head you have, my dear Penelope!"

"Oh, not at all," says Miss Penelope, flushing with pleasure at this tribute to her intellect.

"To-day,—in a few hours. Now, what is to be done about the beds?"

"But surely they are aired?"

"Aired?—yes. They have been aired every day regularly for the past two months, ever since I first heard the children were likely to come to us. But still I am uncertain about them. I know they will want hot jars; and then the rooms, they will want flowers and many things—and——"

"Can't I help you?" demands Miss Penelope, eagerly.

"My dear girl, not at all," says Miss Priscilla, with a calmly superior air, arising from the fact that she is quite eighteen months her senior. "You can assist me with your valuable counsel, but I would not have you disturb yourself for worlds. You must be cool and collected, and hold yourself in readiness to receive them when they come. They will be shy, no doubt, coming here all the way from Palestine, and it must be your part to make them feel quite at home." [Pg 11]

This to Miss Penelope, who is afraid of strangers in any guise, appears such a fearful mission that she pales, and says, tremblingly,—

"But you too will be present at our first meeting? I must indeed *beg* you to be present, my dear Priscilla."

"Of course, of course," says Miss Priscilla, encouragingly. Then, doubtfully, "I hope the boy won't take a dislike to us."

"I wonder how we shall get on with children," says Miss Penelope. She is evidently growing extremely nervous. "It seems so strange they should be coming here to the old house."

"Monica cannot be a child now. She must be at least eighteen," says Miss Priscilla, thoughtfully. "It was in 1863 that——"

"1864, I think," interrupts Miss Penelope.

"1863," persists Miss Priscilla.

"You may be right, my dear," says Miss Penelope, mildly but firmly, "you often are,—but I know it was in '64 that——"

"What?" asks Miss Priscilla, sharply.

"The Desmond jilted our Katherine."

"You are wrong, Penelope, utterly wrong. It was in '63."

"I am nearly always wrong," says Miss Penelope, meekly, yet with a latent sense of suppressed power. "But I cannot forget that in the year George Desmond behaved so shamefully to our sweet Katherine, Madam O'Connor's cow had two calves, and *that*," triumphantly, "was in '64."

"You are right—quite right," says Miss Priscilla, vanquished, but not cast down. "So it was. What a memory you have, my dear Penelope!"

"Nothing when compared with *yours*," says Miss Penelope, smiling.

At this moment the door opens and an old man enters the room. He is clad in the garb of a servant, though such wonderful habiliments as those in which he has arrayed himself would be difficult to purchase nowadays: whether there are more wrinkles in his forehead or in his trousers is a nice question that could not readily be decided at a moment's notice.

He is quite ten years older than either of his mistresses; and, indeed, both he and his garments belong to a by-gone generation. His knees are bent, so is his back; his face is like a Ribston pippin, his coat is a marvel both in cut and in texture, but his linen is irreproachable, and what hair nature has still left him is most carefully brushed. There is, too, in his small gray Irish eyes a

mischievous twinkle, and a fund of honest good humor that goes far to defy the ravages of time. [Pg 12] In spite of his seventy years and his quaint attire, he still at times can hold his own with many a younger man.

"Well, Timothy," says Miss Priscilla, looking up as he approaches the table, "we have had news of Miss Katherine's—I mean Mrs. Beresford's—children."

"Rest her sowl!" says Timothy, in a reverential tone, alluding to that part of the late Mrs. Beresford.

"It seems they have landed and will be with us to-day."

"The day, miss?" growing brisk at this unexpected announcement.

"Yes, they have reached England in safety, and are now in Dublin. What a long, long journey it has been for them," with another dreamy glance at the letter, "all the way from Palestine!"

"An' so it has, miss, poor little crathurs!" says Timothy, who knows as much about the whereabouts of Palestine as he does about the man in the moon.

"You mustn't think they are very young, Timothy," says Miss Penelope, hastily. "Miss Priscilla and I have been talking it over, and we believe Miss Beresford must be now seventeen, Master Terence sixteen, and Miss Kate fourteen."

"And so of course they must be, miss. Thrue for ye, ma'am. Dear, dear, though only to think now; it seems only the other day the dear young lady was married to Mister Beresford. But you aren't eating a bit, miss," anxiously; "you haven't tasted a morsel, ma'am. What can I get ye now?"

"Nothing, Timothy. The fact is——"

"There's an iligant ham downstairs, ma'am," says the old man, now really concerned for the mistresses, who still always appear to him as "the young ladies:" "let me bring it up to you."

"No, thank you, Timothy: we are just a little upset by this sudden news. We cannot help wondering how the old house will be with children in it, after all these years of calm and quiet."

"Sure an' a grand change it will be for us all, miss; 'twill indeed, ma'am," says Timothy, cheerfully, though his mind misgives him. "There's nothing like children, when all's told: sure's there's music in every sound of their footsteps."

"I hope they will be good," says Miss Penelope, with a doubtful sigh.

"Faix, what else would they be, miss?" says the old man, with assumed reproach. "'Tis well I mind of poor Miss Katherine herself,—the soft tongue she had in her head, an' never a cross word out [Pg 13] of her, save to Nelly Doolin—an' she was the divil herself, savin' your presence, miss, and enough to provoke all the saints—glory be——"

"I trust they will be happy here," goes on Miss Penelope, still wistful.

"An' why not, miss? Sure the counthry is the finest place at all for the young; and where's a finer counthry than ould Ireland?"

"Much can't be said for it of late, Timothy," says Miss Priscilla, sadly: "all it can boast of now is rebellion, sedition, and bloodshed."

"Sure every one must have a kick up sometimes, miss," says Timothy, with youthful lightness; "an', afther all, isn't the ould place only doin' what she can for herself, more power to her?"

"Ryan," says Miss Priscilla, sternly, addressing her butler by his surname,—a thing that is never done except in dire cases,—and fixing upon him an icy glance beneath which he quails, "I regret you should so far forget yourself as to utter such treasonable sentiments in our presence. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"So I am miss. I humbly ask yer pardon, ma'am," says Mr. Ryan, promptly. "But all the different opinions one hears addles the brain. 'Twas only last night the Murphys had a meeting, and they do say, miss," lowering his voice confidentially, "that the Squire down there," pointing apparently through the breakfast-room wall, "is in a bad way with the League boys."

"The Desmond?"

"Yes, miss. He's been evictin' again, ma'am, an' there's queer talk about him. But," with a relapse into former thought, "if he's a bad landlord, what can he expect?"

"No, no, Timothy. He is not a bad landlord," says Miss Priscilla, hastily, though this allowance of grace to her enemy causes her a bitter pang. "He has been most patient for years. That I *know*."

"Well, maybe so, miss," says Ryan, deferentially, but with a reservation in his manner that speaks volumes. "It isn't for the likes of me ma'am, to contradict the likes of you. But did ye hear, miss, that Misther Desmond's nephew has come to stay with him?"

"At Coole?"

"At the Castle. Yes, miss. Faix 'twas meself was surprised to hear it. But there he is, safe enough, [Pg 14] an' another gentleman with him; an' they do say that the old masther is as proud as Punch of him.

But his blood's bad, I'll no doubt."

"No doubt," says Priscilla, severely.

Miss Penelope sighs.

CHAPTER II.

How two Old Maids are made acquainted with a very Young One.

Already we have reached the afternoon. In these warm June days, when all the earth is languorous and glad with its own beauty, time slips from us unannounced, and the minutes from morn to eventide, and from the gloaming till nightfall, melt into one another, until all seem one sweet, lengthened hour.

Just now the hot sun is pouring down upon garden and gravelled walks at Moyne; except the hum of the industrious bees, not a sound can be heard; even the streamlet at the end of the long lawn is running sleepily, making sweet music as it goes, indeed, but so drowsily, so heavily, that it hardly reaches the ear; and so, too, with the lap-lapping of the waves upon the shore below, as the tide comes and goes.

Not a breath of air comes to disturb the languid grandeur of the huge elms that stand staring up to heaven just opposite the hall door. The crows swinging in their branches up above are all subdued; hardly have they energy enough to flap their great, broad wings.

Little stationary clouds lie like flecks of silver upon the pale-blue sky; far far away, in the woods of Coole, a cuckoo may be heard at long and yet longer intervals,—last remnant of a vanished spring; but all the other birds have succumbed to the power of the great god of light, and are wrapped in silence.

Certain stray little sunbeams, half wild with glee, rushing hither and thither through the roses, discover Miss Penelope Blake sitting in the drawing-room at Moyne. She is dressed in her very best lavender silk, that would stand alone, and be glad to do it if it was let, but unabashed by her splendor Apollo's saucy babies dance down upon her, and, seizing on her knitting-needles, play hide and seek among them, until the poor lady's eyes are fairly dazzled. [Pg 15]

Fortunately, at this instant Miss Priscilla, entering the room, draws down the blind and restores order: after which she seats herself almost directly opposite her sister.

The Misses Blake are not pretty old ladies at all. I don't want to deceive you in this matter. They are, in fact, quite ugly old ladies. Their noses are all wrong, their cheeks are as wrinkled as Timothy's forehead, and their mouths out of all drawing.

Miss Priscilla's eyes are brown,—a deep startling brown, that seems to look you through and through and compels the truth. Her hair is brown, too, and soft, and silky, and pretty, though thickly sprinkled with gray. She has a great deal of this hair, and is secretly very proud of it.

Miss Penelope's eyes are pale blue,—with very little blue,—and but for her long lashes (sole remnants of goodlier days) would be oppressive. Her hair is pale, too, and sandy, and is braided back from her forehead in severe lines.

There is a pensive air about Miss Penelope that might suggest to the casual observer an early and disastrous love-affair. But all such imaginings on his part would be vain. No winged cupid ever hid in Miss Penelope's ear, or played bo-peep in her virgin bosom, or nestled in her sandy locks: she is free from all taint of such wild frivolisms.

"All is ready now," says Miss Priscilla,—who is the Martha at Moyne, while we may regard Miss Penelope as the Mary. "The rooms are prepared, nothing is wanting, and the flowers smell so sweet. I have sent the carriage to meet them, though I know the train cannot be here for quite an hour yet; but I think it wise always to be in time."

"There is nothing like it," says Miss Penelope, placidly.

"Now I shall rest here with you a little while," goes on the elder maiden, complacently, "and think of all that is likely to happen."

"Really," says Miss Penelope, lowering her work and glancing restlessly at her sister, "I feel more nervous than I can say, when I think of their coming. What on earth should we do, dear Priscilla, if they took a dislike to us?"

"I have thought of that myself," says Miss Priscilla, in an awe-struck tone. "We are not attractive, Penelope: beyond a few—a *very* few—insignificant touches," with an inward glance at her fine hair, "we are absolutely outside the pale of beauty. I wonder if Monica will be like her mother, or if——" [Pg 16]

Here something happens that puts a final stop to all conversation. The door is opened, quickly, impetuously; there is a sound as of many footsteps on the threshold without.

The old ladies start in their seats, and sit upright, trembling excessively. What can have

happened? Has the sedate Ryan come to loggerheads with Mrs. Reilly the cook? (a state of things often threatened); and are they now standing on the mat meditating further bloodshed?

A moment surcharged with thrilling suspense goes by, and then, not Ryan or the cook, but a much more perplexing vision comes slowly into the room.

It is a very radiant vision, though it is clothed in mourning garments, full of grace and beauty. Very shy, with parted lips, and brilliant frightened eyes, but perfect as an opening flower.

Is it a child or a woman? is the first question that strikes Miss Penelope. As for Miss Priscilla, she is too surprised for thought of any kind, too lost in admiration of the little, gracious uncertain, figure, with its deep-blue eyes glancing up at her with a half-terrified yet trusting expression, to give way to speech of any kind.

She is slight, and slim as a hazel wand. Her hair is nut-brown, with a red gold tinge running through it. Her nose is adorable, if slightly tilted; her mouth is a red, red rose, sad but sweet, and full of purpose. Her eyes are large and expressive, but touched, like her lips, with a suspicion of melancholy that renders them only a degree more sweet and earnest.

There is a spirituality about her, a calm, a peace that shines out of these dark Irish eyes, and rests upon her perfect lips, as it were a lingering breath of the heaven from whence she came.

She stands now, hesitating a little, with her hands loosely clasped,—brown little hands, but beautifully shaped. Indeed, all her skin owes more of its coloring to Phœbus Apollo than nature intended. She draws her breath somewhat quickly, and then, as though anxious to get through the troublous task assigned her, says, nervously, in a low, sweet voice,—

"I am Monica."

As she says this, she glances entreatingly from one old lady to the other, with some trouble in her great eyes, and some tears. Then all at once her lips tremble to a smile, and a soft light breaks upon her face.

"*You* are Aunt Priscilla," she says, turning to Miss Blake; "I know you by your dark eyes, and by your *pretty* hair!"

At the sound of her voice the two old ladies wake from their abstraction. [Pg 17]

"Yes, yes, it is your aunt Priscilla," says Miss Penelope, eagerly, with a sudden pleased smile. Had the compliment been made to herself she could not possibly have appeared more delighted, and certainly would not have betrayed her satisfaction so openly. "Her hair," she says, "was always beautiful."

As for Miss Priscilla, she is smiling too, but in a shamefaced fashion, and is blushing a warm pretty crimson, such as a girl of seventeen might be guilty of, listening to a first word of love.

She takes Monica's right hand in hers and pats it softly; and Miss Penelope takes her left; and then the two old ladies stoop forward, and, one after the other, kiss the pale, girlish cheek, and with the kiss take her at once and forever into their very hearts.

"But surely, dear child, you did not come alone?" says Miss Priscilla, presently, calling to remembrance the fact that there ought to be two other Beresfords somewhere.

"No; Terence and Katherine are with me."

"But where, my dear?"

"Well, I *think* they are standing on the mat, just outside the door," says Monica, blushing and laughing; and then she says, rather louder, "Terry and Kit, you may come in now. It is all right."

As to what was evidently supposed not to be "all right" up to this, the Misses Blake have no time to decide upon before a fresh nephew and niece present themselves to their view. They come in quite gayly,—reassured, no doubt, by Monica's tone: Terence, a tall slim lad of about sixteen, and a little girl somewhat like Monica, but more restless in features, and even a degree more pallid.

"My dear children, why didn't you come in before?" said Miss Priscilla, aghast at the inhospitable thought that they had been shivering with needless nervousness in the hall for the last five minutes.

"They said they wouldn't come in until I paved the way for them," says Monica, with a slight shrug of her shoulders that is a trick of hers. "They always put everything upon my shoulders: a little shabby of them *I* call it."

"I am afraid you must have pictured us as ogres," says Miss Priscilla, which idea strikes the old ladies as such a delicious flight of fancy that they laugh outright, and look at each other with intense enjoyment of their little joke.

"Well, of course we couldn't tell what you would be like," says Monica, gravely. "You might have [Pg 18] been people likely to impress one with awe; but, as *it is*——This is Terry," laying her hand upon her brother's arm; "and this is Kit. She is really Katherine, you know, but no one ever calls her by so long a name. She isn't worth it."

At this the three Beresfords laugh among themselves, as children will, at time-worn fun, knowing

no fatigue; after which Katherine and Terence are embraced and made much of by their new-found relatives, and freely commented upon.

But ever and anon the eyes of both old ladies wander thoughtfully, admiringly, to where the lissome Monica stands, like a pale, pensive lily.

"But how have you managed to be here so soon?" asks Miss Priscilla, when the impromptu luncheon, improvised by the startled Timothy, has come to an end. The children were all hungry, and have eaten a great deal, and have talked more. Indeed, though Miss Priscilla has been dying to ask this question for a long time, it has been impossible for her to do so, as there has not been so much as a comma in the conversation for the last hour.

The Beresfords are like so many clocks wound up, and bound to go for a certain time whether they like it or not; and, apparently, they do like it. Now they have run down a little, Terence being exhausted after his last laughing attack, and Kit wrapped in contemplation of an old-fashioned hair brooch that is fastening an equally old-fashioned piece of priceless lace that adorns Miss Penelope's throat.

"Well, I can't think how they do it!" she says, lost in admiration of a little slim hair lady bending over a miniature hair urn in the most lachrymose attitude conceivable. "But they have put her eye in wrongly: she looks as if she is dying with laughter."

Here Miss Priscilla edges in her question, as to how they have contrived to be at Moyne at so early an hour.

"We came by the wrong train," says Terry. "We generally do. Ever since we left the South of France—where we were staying with the Bohuns, you know, on our way here—we have been missing our trains right and left, and turning up at all sorts of unexpected places. Haven't we, Kit?"

"*You* have," says Kit, with suspicious emphasis. "You have such a pretty trick of rushing into the first train you see, without ever asking any one where it is going. No wonder we always turned up at the wrong end." [Pg 19]

"*You've* a pretty trick of putting everything down on other people's shoulders," says Terence, with open disgust. "Whose fault was it we were always so late at the stations that we hadn't time to make inquiries, I'd like to know? Could you," with fine irony, "tell us?"

"Certainly; it was nurse," replies Kit, with dignity.

"Dear me! and where is your nurse now?" asks Miss Priscilla, anxiously. The query is a fortunate one, in that it turns the conversation into a different channel, and checks the eloquence of Kit and Terry, who are plainly on the brink of an open war.

"When last *I* saw her," says Terence, "she was sitting on the top of our biggest box, with everything else strewn around her, and her feet resting on two brown-paper parcels.—I wonder," says Mr. Beresford, addressing Monica, "what on earth she had in those brown paper parcels. She has been hugging them night and day ever since she left Jerusalem."

"Dynamite," suggested Monica, lightly; whereupon the two Misses Blake turn pale.

"At that rate, Aunt Priscilla, we needn't trouble about her," says Terence, pleasantly, "as she *must* be blown up by this. None of those clock-work affairs could be arranged to go on much longer. Poor thing! when in the flesh she wasn't half bad. I forgive her everything,—even her undying hatred to myself."

"If she is in fragments, so are our things," says Kit. "I think she *needn't* have elected to sit on them at the supreme moment."

"You don't really think," says Miss Penelope, in a somewhat troubled tone, remembering how an innocent baker in Rossmoyne had had some of the explosive matter in question thrown into his kitchen the night before last,—"you don't really think that these parcels you speak of contain infernal machines?—Yes, that is what they call them, my dear Priscilla," turning to her sister, as though anxious to apologize for having used a word calculated to lead the mind to the lower regions.

By this time both Kit and Terence are convulsed with delight at the sensation they have created, and would probably have gone on to declare the innocent Mrs. Mitchell an advanced Nihilist of the most dangerous type, but for Monica's coming to the rescue and explaining matters satisfactorily.

"Still, I cannot understand how you got up here so quickly," says Miss Penelope. "You know Moyne—home I hope you will call it for the future, my dears—" with a little fond pat on Monica's hand, "is quite three miles from the station." [Pg 20]

"We should have thought nothing of that," says Terence, "but for Kit; she has had a fever, you know," pointing to the child's closely-cropped, dark little head; "so we said we would just stroll on a little and see what the country was like."

"And lovely it is," puts in Kit, enthusiastically. "We got up on a high hill, and saw the sea lying like a great quiet lake beneath us. There was scarcely a ripple on it, and only a soft sound like a sob." Her eyes, that are almost too big for her small face, glow brilliantly.

"And then there came by a man with a cart filled with hay, and he nodded to us and said, 'Good-morning, sir;' and so I nodded back, and said, 'How d'ye do?' to him and asked him was it far to Moyne House. 'A good step,' he said; 'three miles at the very least.'"

"He didn't; he said *laste*," says Kit, who is plainly in a litigious mood.

"At that," says Monica, breaking in eagerly, feeling, no doubt, she has been left too long out in the cold, and that it is time her voice were heard, "I suppose I looked rather forlorn, because he said, quite nicely 'Maybe ye'd not be too proud, miss, to get into me cart, an I'll dhrive the lot of ye up to the House, where as luck has it, I'm goin' meself.'" She mimicks the soft Southern brogue very prettily.

"So up we got," says Kit, gayly, "and away we went in the nice sweet hay, jog trot, jog trot, and *so* comfortable."

The Misses Blake by this time are filled with dismay. In Rossmoyne, where families are few and far between, and indecent scandal unknown, the smallest trifles are seized upon with avidity and manufactured into mountains. "A good appearance," Miss Penelope was taught at school, "is the first step in life," and here have these children been making *their* appearance for the first time in a common hay-cart.

What will Madam O'Connor say? Madam O'Connor's father having always laid claim to being a direct descendant of one of the old kings of Munster, Madam's veins of course are filled with blood royal, and as such are to be held in reverence. What *won't* this terrible old woman say, when she hears of the Beresfords' escapade?

The Misses Blake sit shivering, blinking their eyelids, and afraid to say anything.

"We got on splendidly," Terence is saying, "and might indeed have finished our journey respectably, but for Monica. *She* laid our reputation in the dust." [Pg 21]

Monica turns upon him an appealing glance from her large soft eyes that would have melted any heart but that of a brother's.

"Aunt Priscilla," says the adamantine youth, "what is the name of the house with a big gate, about a half a mile from this?"

"Coole Castle," replies she, stiffly, the very fact of having to mention the residence of the detested Desmond making her heart beat violently. But Terry is a person blind to speaking glances and deaf to worded hints. In effect, Terry and tact are two; so he goes on, unheeding his aunt's evident disrelish for the subject,—

"Well, just as we got to Coole, I saw a fellow standing inside the entrance-gate, smoking a cigar. I fancied he looked amused, but would have thought nothing of that, only I heard him laugh aloud, and saw he was staring over my head—I was driving—to where Monica and Kit were, on the top of the hay. It occurred to me then to see what the girls were doing, so I stood up on the shaft, and looked, and——"

Here he pauses, as though slightly overcome.

"What, my dear?" asks Miss Priscilla, anxiously.

"There was Monica lying in an æsthetic attitude,—*very* æsthetic,—with her chin in her hands, and her eyes on the horse's ears, and her thoughts I presume in heaven, or wherever young ladies keep them, and with her heels——"

"It isn't *truth*!—it *isn't*!" interrupts Monica, blushing furiously, and speaking with much indignation. "I don't believe a single word of it!"

"And with her heels——"

"*Terence!*"

"In mid-air. She was kicking them up and down with delight," says Terence, fairly bubbling over with joy at the recollection. "It was the most humiliating sight for a modest brother. I shall never forgive her for it. Besides, the strange young man was——"

"If you say another word," says Monica, white with wrath and tears in her eyes, "I shall never speak to you again, or help you out of any trouble."

This awful threat has the desired effect of reducing Mr. Beresford to subjection. He goes down before the foe, and truckles to her meanly.

"You needn't take it so much to heart," he says soothingly: "there wasn't much in it, after all; and your shoes are very pretty, and so are your feet." [Pg 22]

The compliment works wonders; Monica quite brightens up again, but the two old ladies are hopelessly scandalized.

"I feel assured, Terence," says Miss Priscilla, with much dignity, "that under *no* circumstances could a niece of mine show too much of her——her——"

Here Miss Priscilla blushes, and breaks down.

"Legs?" suggests Terry, politely.

"But who was the strange young man?" asks Miss Penelope, curiously.

"Our friend of the hay-cart said his name was Desmond, and that he was nephew to the master of the house behind the big gates," returns Kit, fluently.

"Desmond!" says Miss Priscilla, greatly agitated. "Let me never hear you mention that name again! It has been our bane! Forget you have ever been so unfortunate as to encounter this young man; and if ill luck should ever drive him across your path again, remember you do not—you never *can*—know him."

"But I'm certain he will know Monica if he sees her again," says Kit. "He stared at her as if she had seven heads."

"No wonder, considering her equivocal position. And as to knowing Monica, I'm not certain of that, of course, but I'm utterly positive he could swear to her *shoes* in a crowd," says Terence, with unholy delight. "He was enchanted with them, and with the clocks on her stockings: I think he was taking the pattern of them."

"He was *not*," says Monica, almost weeping. "He couldn't see them. I was too high up."

"What will you bet he doesn't know the color of them?" asks her tormentor, with a fresh burst of appreciation of the undignified scene. "When I see him again I'll ask him."

"Terence," says Miss Priscilla, growing very pale, "you must never see him again, or, at all events, you must never speak to him. Understand, once for all, that intimacy between us and the inhabitants of Coole is impossible. This feud I hint at touches you even more closely than it touches us, but you cannot feel it more than we do,—perhaps not as much. The honor of our family has suffered at the hands of the Master of Coole. He is the enemy of our house!"

"Priscilla!" murmurs Miss Penelope, in a low and trembling tone.

"Do not try to check me, Penelope. I *will* speak," says Miss Priscilla, sternly. "This man, years ago, offered one near and dear to us an indignity not to be lightly borne. The world is wide," turning to the astonished children, "you can make friends where you choose; but I would have you recollect that *never* can a Beresford and a Desmond have aught in common." [Pg 23]

"But what have the Desmonds done to us, Aunt Priscilla?" asks Monica, a good deal awed by the old lady's solemnity.

"Some other time you shall know all," says Miss Priscilla in the low tone one might adopt if speaking of the last appalling murder.

"Yes, some other time," echoes Miss Penelope, gently.

CHAPTER III.

How Monica studies the landscape.

"Is it thrue, ma'am, what I hear, that ye'll be wantin' a maid for Miss Monica?" asks Mrs. Reilly, the cook at Moyne, dropping a respectful courtesy just inside the drawing-room door. "Ryan let dhrop a word to me about it, so I made so bould, ma'am, as to come upstairs an' tell ye I think I know a girl as will come in handy to ye."

"And who is she, Reilly?" asks Miss Priscilla anxiously.

"She's a very good girl, ma'am, an' smart, an' nate, an' I think ye'll like her," replies cook, who, like all Irish people, finds a difficulty in giving a direct answer to a direct question. Perhaps, too, there is a little wiliness in her determination not to name the new servant's parentage just at present.

"I daresay; I place great reliance upon your opinion, Reilly. But who is she? Does she come from the village, or from one of the farms? I should prefer the farms."

"She's as tidy as she can be," says Mrs. Reilly, amiably but still evasively, "an' a bit of a scholard into the bargain, an' a very civil tongue in her head. She's seventeen all out, ma'am, and never yet gave her mother a saucy word."

"That is as it should be," says Miss Priscilla, commendingly. "You feel a great interest in this girl, I can see. You know her well?" [Pg 24]

"Yes, miss. She is me uncle's wife's sisther's child, an' as good a girl as ever stepped in shoe leather."

"She is then?" asks Miss Priscilla, faintly, puzzled by this startling relationship.

"She's that girl of the Cantys', ma'am, and as likely a colleen as ever ye met, though I say it as shouldn't, she being kin-like," says Mrs. Reilly, boldly, seeing her time is come.

"What! that pretty, blue-eyed child that called to see you yesterday? She *is* from the village, then?" with manifest distaste.

"An' what's the matther wid the village, ma'am?" By this time Mrs. Reilly has her arms akimbo, and has an evident thirst for knowledge full upon her.

"But I fear she is flighty and wild, and not at all domesticated in any way."

"An' who has the face to say that, ma'am? Give me the names of her dethractors," says Mrs. Reilly, in an awful tone, that seemed to demand the blood of the "dethractors."

"I feel sure, Reilly," says Miss Priscilla, slowly, "that you are not aware of the position your arms have taken. It is most unbecoming." Mrs. Reilly's arms dropped to her sides. "And as for this girl you speak of, I hear she is, as I say, very flighty."

"Don't believe a word of it, ma'am," says cook, with virtuous indignation. "Just because she holds up her head a bit, an' likes a ribbon or two, there's no holdin' the gossips down below," indicating the village by a backward jerk of her thumb. "She's as dacent a little sowl as you'd wish to see, an' has as nate a foot as there is in the county. The Cantys has all a character for purty feet."

"Pretty feet are all very well in their way," says Miss Priscilla, nodding her head. "But can she sew? and is she quiet and tractable, and——"

"Divil a thing she can't do, ma'am, axin' yer pardon," says Mrs. Reilly, rather losing herself in the excitement of the moment. "Just thry her, ma'am, an' if ye don't like her, an' if Miss Monica finds even one fault in her, just send her back to her mother. I can't say fairer nor that."

"No, indeed. Very well, Reilly, let her come up to me to-morrow; and see that her inside clothes are all right, and let her know she must *never* be out after dark." [Pg 25]

"Yes, ma'am," says the triumphant Reilly, beating a hasty retreat.

Half an hour afterwards she encounters Monica upon the avenue.

"Why, where are you going, Mrs. Reilly?" asks Monica, seeing that cook is got up in all her war-paint, regardless of expense.

"To mass first, miss," says Mrs. Reilly.

"Where's that?" asks Monica, with foreign ignorance.

"Law! to the chapel, miss," says Reilly, with an amused smile.

"But it isn't Sunday?"

"No, miss. It's a saint's day—may they be good to us!" crossing herself. "It's different with you, miss, you see; but we poor folks, we must say our prayers when we can, or the Virgin will dhrop us out of her mind."

"Is your chapel pretty?" asks Monica, who has now been a week in the country, and through very weariness feels a mad desire to talk to somebody or anybody.

"Faix, it's lovely, miss, since Father Jerry took it in hand! There's the finest pictures ye ever saw on the walls, an' an altar it 'ud do ye good to look at."

"Would it? Then I'll go some day to see it," says Monica, smiling, not knowing that her aunts would as soon let her enter a pandemonium as a Roman Catholic chapel.

Dear old ladies! frightened by shadows, they have been bred in the belief that the Evil One dwells beneath the shade of the Romish Church, and will therefore surely die in it.

"Do, then, agra!" said Mrs. Reilly, who has, of course, like all the other servants, gone down before Monica: "it's proud we'd be to see ye there."

There is no thought of conversion in the woman's mind, you must remember,—merely a hospitable desire to let her know she will be welcome anywhere.

"By the same token, Miss Monica," says she, "there's something I was near forgettin' to tell ye."

"Yes!" says Monica.

"Ye're goin' to have me uncle's wife's niece for yer own maid, miss."

"Am I? I'm glad of that," says Monica, with a native courtesy. "Is she"—with some hesitation and a faint blush—"is she pretty, Reilly?"

"She's the purtiest girl ye ever set eyes on," says Mrs. Reilly, with enthusiasm. [Pg 26]

"I'm glad of *that*; I can't bear ugly people," says Monica.

"Faix, then, there's a bad time before ye wid the ould ladies," mutters Mrs. Reilly, *sotto voce*,

gathering up her cloak and stepping onwards. She is a remarkably handsome woman herself, and so may safely deplore the want of beauty in her betters.

Monica, turning aside, steps on a high bank and looks down towards the village. Through the trees she can see the spire of the old cathedral rising heavenwards. Though Rossmoyne is but a village, it still can boast its cathedral, an ancient edifice, uncouth and unlovely, but yet one of the oldest places of worship in Ireland.

Most of my readers would no doubt laugh it to scorn, but we who belong to it reverence it, and point out with pride to passers by the few quaint marks and tokens that link it to a bygone age.

There is a nave, broad and deep, comprising more than a third of the whole building, with its old broken stone pavement, and high up, carven upon one of its walls the head of St. Faughnan, its patron saint,—a hideous saint, indeed, if he resembled that ancient carving. How often have I gazed upon his unlovely visage, and wondered in my childish fashion why the grace that comes from so divine an origin had not the power to render his servant's face more beautiful!

In these later years they have improved (?) and modernized the old structure. A stone pulpit, huge and clumsy, erected by subscription to the memory of some elderly inhabitant, stands like a misshapen blot before the altar rails; a window, too broad for its length, and generally out of proportion, throws too much light upon the dinginess within; the general character of the ugly old place has lost something, but assuredly gained nothing, by these innovations. It is hard to put "a piece of new cloth on an old garment" successfully.

The village itself stands upon a high hill; the ocean lies at its feet. From Moyne House one can see the shimmer of the great Atlantic as it dances beneath the sunbeams or lashes itself into furious foam under the touch of the north wind. The coastguard station, too, stands out, brilliant in its whitewash, a gleaming spot upon the landscape.

To the left of the station lies Ounahincha,—a long, deep line of sea-beach that would make its fortune as a bathing place under happier auspices and in some more appreciated clime.

Monica, looking down from her height, takes in all the beauties of the landscape that surround her, and lets the music of the melancholy ocean sink into her very soul. [Pg 27]

Then she lets her eyes wander to the right, and rest with pardonable curiosity upon Coole Castle, where dwells the ogre of her house. Above Coole, and about two miles farther on, lies Aghyohillbeg, the residence of Madam O'Connor, that terrible descendant of one of Ireland's kings; whilst below, nestling among its firs and beeches, is Kilmore, where the Halfords—a merry tangle of boys and girls—may be seen at all hours.

Then there is the vicarage, where the rector lives with his family, which is large; and nearer to the village, the house that holds the curate and his family, which, of course, is larger. Besides which, Monica can just see from her vantage-ground the wooded slopes of Durrusbeg that have lately called young Ronayne master,—a distant cousin having died most unexpectedly and left him all his property.

Six months ago, Ulic Ronayne was spoken of by anxious matrons as a wild lad, with nothing to recommend him save his handsome face and some naughty stories attached to his name. Now he is pronounced charming, and the naughty stories, which indeed never had any foundation, are discovered to have been disgraceful fabrications. Marriageable daughters are kinder to him than words can say, and are allowed by the most cautious mothers to dance with him as often as they choose, and even to sit unlimited hours with him in secluded corners of conservatories unrebuked.

Truly, O Plutus! thou art a god indeed. Thou hast outlived thy greater brethren. Thy shrine is honored as of old!

After a last lingering glance at the distant ocean and the swelling woods that now in Merry June are making their grandest show, Monica jumps down from her bank again and goes slowly—singing as she goes—towards the river that runs at the end of Moyne.

Down by its banks Moyne actually touches the hated lands of Cooles, a slight boundary fence being all that divides one place from the other. The river rushes eagerly past both, on its way to the sea, murmuring merrily on its happy voyage, as though mocking at human weals and woes and petty quarrels.

Through the waving meadows, over the little brook, past the stile, Monica makes her way, plucking here and there the scarlet poppies, and the blue cornflowers and daisies, "those pearled Arcturi of the earth, the constellated flower that never sets." [Pg 28]

The sun is tinting all things with its yellow haze, and is burning to brightest gold the reddish tinge in the girl's hair as she moves with dallying steps through the green fields. She is dressed in a white gown, decked with ribbons of sombre tint, and wears upon her head a huge poky bonnet, from which her face peeps out, half earnest, half coquettish, wholly pure.

Her hands are bare and shapely, but a little brown; some old-fashioned rings glisten on them. She has the tail of her gown thrown negligently over her arm, and with her happy lips parted in song, and her eyes serene as early dawn, she looks like that fair thing of Chaucer's, whose

"Berthe was of the womb of morning dew,
And her conception of the joyous prime."

And now the sparkling river comes in sight. Near its brink an old boat-house may be seen fast crumbling to decay; and on the river itself lies, swaying to and fro, a small punt in the very last stages of decline. It is a very terrible little boat, quite at death's door, and might have had those lines of Dante's painted upon it without libel:

"Abandon hope, all ye who enter here."

But Monica, in happy ignorance of rotting timbers, thinks only of the joy she felt last evening when the discovery of this demoralized treasure was made. In the mouldering boat-house she had found it, and so had claimed it for her own.

She had told no one of her secret, not even Kit, who is, as a rule, her prime minister, her confidante, and her shadow. She has, indeed, had great difficulty in escaping from "her shadow" just now, but after much diplomatic toil had managed it. To find herself upon the calm and gentle river, to dream there her own sweet thoughts beneath the kindly shade of the pollard willows, to glide with the stream and bask in the sunlight *all alone*, has been her desire since yester-eve.

To-morrow, if to-day proves successful and her rowing does not fail her, of which she has had some practice during the last two years of her life, she will tell Kit and Terry all about it, and let them share her pleasure. But to-day is her own.

The boat is connected with the shore by a rope tied round the stump of a tree by most unskilful hands. Flinging her flowers into the punt, she strives diligently to undo the knot that she herself had made the night before, but strives in vain. The hard rope wounds her tender hands and vexes her gentle soul. [Pg 29]

She is still struggling with it, and already a little pained frown has made a wrinkle on her smooth brow, when another boat shoots from under the willows and gains the little landing-place, with its pebbly beach, that belongs equally to Coole Castle and to Moyne.

This new boat is a tremendous improvement on our heroine's. It is the smartest little affair possible, and as safe as a church,—safer, indeed, as times go now. Not that there is anything very elaborate about it, but it is freshly painted, and there are cushions in it, and all over it a suppressed air of luxury.

Besides the cushions, there is something else in it, too,—a young man of about six and twenty, who steps lightly on to the bank, though it is a miracle he doesn't lose his footing and come ignominiously to the ground, so bent is his gaze on the gracious little figure at the other side of the boundary-fence struggling with the refractory rope.

It doesn't take any time to cross the boundary.

"Will you allow me to do that for you?" says the strange young man, raising his hat politely, and taking the rope out of Monica's hand without waiting for permission.

CHAPTER IV.

How Monica makes a most important discovery and, changing suddenly from "lively to severe," is reprehensibly cruel to a most unoffending young man.

"You are very kind," says Monica slowly, feeling not so much embarrassment as surprise at this sudden advent.

Then the young man looses the rope, and, having done so, casts a cursory glance at the boat to which it is attached. As he does so, he lifts his brows.

"Surely you are not dreaming of going on the river in *that*!" he says, indicating the wretched punt by a contemptuous wave of his hand.

"Yes. Why not?" returns she. [Pg 30]

"There isn't a sound bit of timber in her. What *can* your people be thinking of, to let you trust yourself in such a miserable affair?"

"My people have nothing to do with it," says Monica, somewhat grandly. "I am *my own mistress*."

She has picked up her flowers again out of the despised punt, and now stands before him with her hands filled with the June blossoms, blue, and white, and red. They show bravely against the pallor of her gown, and seem, indeed, to harmonize altogether with her excessive fairness, for her lips are as red as her poppies, and her cornflowers as blue as her eyes, and her skin puts her drooping daisies all to shame.

"As you *are* your own mistress," says the young man, with a suspicion of a smile, as he takes in the baby sweetness of her mouth, and each detail of her slight girlish figure, that bespeaks the child rather than the woman, "I entreat you to have mercy upon *yourself*."

"But what is the matter with it?" asks Monica, peering into the boat. "It *looks* all right; I can't see a hole in it."

"It's nothing *but* holes, in my opinion," says the strange young man, peering in his turn. "It's a regular *coffin*. You will be committing nothing less than suicide if you put your foot in it."

"Dear me," says Monica, blankly, feeling impressed in spite of herself, "I do think I am the most unfortunate person alive. Do you know," lifting her eyes to his, "I didn't sleep a wink last night, thinking of this row on the river to-day, and now it comes to nothing! That is just like my luck always. I was so bent on it; I wanted to get round that corner over there," pointing to it, "to see what was at the other side, and now I can't do it." It seems to the young man looking at her, as though her glance is reproachful, and as if she connects him, innocent as he is, with her disappointment.

"There is no reason why you shouldn't," he is beginning, anxiously, when she contradicts him.

"After all," she says, doubtfully, bending over to look into the clear bed of the river, "I don't believe, if things came to the worst, and I *did* get swamped, I should be drowned."

"Certainly not, if you could swim, or if there was any one watching over your welfare from the banks that could."

"Well, I can't," confesses Monica, with a sigh; "and unless *you*," with an irrepressible laugh that shows all her white and even teeth, "will promise to run along the banks of the river all the afternoon to watch over me, I don't think there is much chance of my escaping death." [Pg 31]

"I shouldn't mind in the least being on guard in such a cause," says the stranger, politely, with the same carefully suppressed smile upon his lips (which are very handsome) as had moved them a while ago. "Command me if you will; but I would have you remember that, even though I should come to the rescue, it would not save you an unpleasant ducking, and—and your pretty gown," with a glance that is almost affectionate at the white Indian cotton, "would be completely ruined."

"Even that dire idea doesn't daunt me," says Monica, gayly: "you forgot that the more limp I am the more æsthetic I shall look. Well," with a sudden relapse into melancholy, "I suppose I must give it up, and not go round the corner to-day."

"But *why* not?" exclaims he, eagerly. "My boat is at your service. *Do* take it. I have quite done with it, I have indeed, and it is lighter than it looks."

"Too heavy for me, I am afraid," says Monica with a sigh.

"Is it? Then," with desperate boldness, "let *me* row you."

"Oh, *no*!" returns she, blushing warmly. "You forget," with a swift glance at him, "you are quite a stranger to me."

Yet he is not quite such a stranger as she thinks. She is not such a stranger to him at least, because her face, seen for a minute about a week a go, has haunted him persistently ever since.

"As we live in the same neighborhood, we cannot long continue strangers," he says, gently; "and, in the mean time, why lose this lovely afternoon, and that corner you were speaking of? The view of the sea, when you get round it, is really worth seeing."

"Yes, yes, I daresay," reluctantly turning to leave him. "I shall see it some day."

"Look here," says the young man, very earnestly, following her as she moves. "If you will come with me you will see it *now*. I will only be your oarsman; I won't say a word to you unless you wish it; I won't even *look* at you. Think of me as a common boatman you have hired by the hour; or, better still, don't think of me at all. With a little care you might bring yourself to imagine I wasn't there." [Pg 32]

"But if we met any one?" says Miss Beresford, visibly relenting.

"Impossible! There is never a soul on this stream save myself. I have been here now every day for ten days, and never yet came upon even the ghost of anything human."

"Very well," says Monica, though still with palpable hesitation. "Now, remember, you have pledged yourself not to speak to me, or to look at me." At this he fixes on her so prolonged a gaze that one may readily understand he means it to be a last one for some time.

Then he turns aside, and, having brought his boat to her side of the fence, holds out to her his hand. As he does this he keeps his eyes bent upon the ground, as though determined to let her know his penance has already begun.

"I am not in the boat yet," says Monica, with a quaint little smile, laying her palm on his. Whereupon he looks at her again; and then, as their eyes meet, they both laugh joyously, as youth will when it meets youth.

Lightly she steps into his boat, and slowly, lazily, he rows her down the little river,—flower-clad on either bank,—letting the boat drift almost at its own sweet will.

The willows, drooping towards the water's edge, woo them as they pass; the foolish weeds would hold them in embrace; the broad flag-flowers would fain entwine them. But they, though loving

them, go by them, thinking their own thoughts, and wondering vaguely at the beauty of the

> "Starry river-buds among the sedge,
> And floating water-lilies broad and bright,
> *****
> And bulrushes, and reeds of such deep green
> As soothes the dazzled eye with sober sheen."

So far silence has been scrupulously kept. Not a word has been spoken since they left the bank, not a look exchanged. Monica is letting her little slender fingers trail through the water and the flat leaves of the lilies. He, with his coat off, is pretending to row, but in reality is letting his body grow subservient to his mind. He has even adhered honorably to his promise not to look at her, and is still mentally ambitious about being true to his word in this respect, when an exclamation from her puts an end to all things.

"Oh! look at *that* lily!" she says, excitedly. "Was there ever such a beauty? If you will row a little more to the right, I am sure I shall be able to get it." [Pg 33]

"Don't stir. I'll get it," returns he, grateful to the lily for this break in their programme; and presently the floating prize is secured, and he lays it, wet and dripping, in her outstretched hands.

"After all, you see, you broke your promise," she says, a moment later, most ungratefully, glancing up at him coquettishly from under her long lashes.

"But who made me do it?" asks he, reproachfully, whereupon she laughs and reddens.

"I never confess," she says, shaking her pretty head; "and after all—do you know?—I am rather glad you spoke to me, because, though I like being quite by myself at times, still I *hate* silence when any one is with me."

"So do I," says her companion, with the utmost cheerfulness.

"I think," leaning towards him with a friendly smile, "I cannot do better than begin our acquaintance by telling you my name. It is Monica Beresford."

"Monica," lingering over it lovingly; "a beautiful name, I think. I think, too, it suits you. Mine is not to be compared to yours; but, such as it is, I give it you!"

He throws a card into her lap.

"I hope it isn't John Smith," says Monica, smiling and picking up the card. But, as she reads what is printed thereon, the smile fades, and an expression of utter dismay overspreads her face.

"'Desmond'—Oh! *not* Desmond!" she says, imploringly, her lips growing quite pale.

"Yes, it *is* Desmond," says the young man, half amused, half puzzled. "You really think it ugly, then! Do you know I rather fancy my surname, although my Chris——"

"You are not—you cannot be *the* Desmond," interrupts she, hastily.

"No; that's my uncle," says the young man, innocently.

"Oh! then you acknowledge the crime?" in deep distress.

"I didn't know that an old Irish title must necessarily be connected with guilt," says her companion, fairly puzzled.

"Eh?" says Monica, puzzled in her turn. "I don't understand you: I only want to know if you are one of the *particular* Desmonds?"

"I suppose not," he replies, now openly amused, "because I regret to say we have never yet done anything worthy of note, or likely to distinguish us from all the other Desmonds, whose name is legion." [Pg 34]

"If you are going to tell me you live at Coole," says Miss Beresford, in a tone that is almost tragic, "I warn you it will be the last straw, and that I shan't be able to bear it."

"I am not going to tell you anything," protests he.

"But you must," declares she, illogically. "I may as well hear the worst at once. Go on," heroically; "tell me the truth. *Do* you live there?"

"I'm awfully afraid I do," says Mr. Desmond, feeling somehow, without knowing why, distinctly ashamed of his name and residence.

"I knew it! I *felt* it!" says Monica, with the calmness of despair. "Take me back to the bank at once,—this very instant, please. Oh, what a *row* I should get into if they only knew!"

Very justly offended at the turn affairs have taken, Mr. Desmond rows her in silence to the landing-place, in silence gives her his hand to alight, in silence makes his boat safe, without so much as a glance at her, although he *knows* she is standing a little way from him, irresolute, remorseful, and uncertain.

He might, perhaps, have maintained this dignified indifference to the end, but that, unfortunately

lifting his eyes, he catches sight of her in this repentant attitude, with her head bent down, and her slim fingers toying nervously with the lilies of his own gathering.

This picture flings dignity to the winds. Going up to her, he says, in a would-be careless but unmistakably offended voice, "May I ask what I have done, that 'they,' whoever they are, should consider you had disgraced yourself by being with me for half an hour?"

"*You* have done nothing," says Monica, faintly. "It was your uncle."

"My *uncle!*—George Desmond! Why, what on earth can *he* have done?" demands he, bewildered.

"I don't know." Feeling this is indeed a lame answer to a most natural question, she goes on hurriedly, "It all happened twenty years ago, and——"

"But what happened?" asks he, with pardonable impatience.

"Something dreadfully wicked," says Monica, solemnly. "Something really very, *very* bad, because [Pg 35]
Aunt Priscilla can't hear you spoken of with common patience."

"*Me!*"

"Not so much you, perhaps, as your name. She hates the very sound of it. There isn't a doubt about *that*; because, though I have not heard the exact story yet, I know both my aunts grow actually faint with horror when your uncle's name is mentioned."

"Good gracious!" says the horrified nephew of this apparently disreputable old man. He is staring at Monica, but in reality he does not even see her. Before his mind's eye is a picture of a stout old gentleman, irascible, but kindly, with a countenance innocent of guile. Yet how can he doubt this girl's story? Twenty years ago, as it seems, George Desmond had done something too bad to be discussed. After all, how impossible it is to trust to appearances! As a rule, the most seemingly harmless people are those who are guilty of the vilest misdemeanors. And, yet, what on earth *could* George have done twenty years ago? Visions of forgery, murder, homicide, rise up before him, but, try as he will, he cannot connect Mr. Desmond's face with any of them.

"You don't exactly know yourself what the crime is with which he is charged?" he asks her, with growing diffidence.

"No. But I shall find out, and tell——But that will be impossible!"—with a glance full of liveliest regret. "I *cannot* tell you, because after to-day I shall never see or speak to you again."

"That is the most insane nonsense I ever heard in my life," says Mr. Desmond.

The girl shakes her head sadly.

"If you won't speak to me I shall speak to you, whether you like it or not," says Desmond, with decision.

"That will be out of your power, as you will never see me."

"Do you mean to tell me I may not call at Moyne?"

"Certainly I do. They wouldn't hear of it. They wouldn't, in fact, receive you."

"But why must they visit my uncle's sins upon my shoulders? I have heard of a father's sins being entailed upon his heir, but never an uncle's."

"It is your name," says Monica. Then she laughs a little, in spite of herself, and quotes, in a low tone, "Oh! Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?"

But he takes no heed of this frivolous quotation. [Pg 36]

"You mean me to understand, then, that I am never to speak to you again?"

"I do, indeed."

"What! Do you know we are to be close neighbors for the future, you and I? This is to be your home. Coole is to be mine. At the most, only a mile of road lies between us, and *here* not quite a yard. And yet you calmly tell me I am from this day forth to be only a common stranger to you."

"You look as if you were angry with *me*," says Monica, with sudden tears in her eyes at his injustice. "It isn't my fault; I haven't done anything wicked. Blame your uncle for it all."

"The whole thing is simply absurd," says the young man, taking now the superior tone that is meant to crush the situation by holding it up to ridicule. "You forget, perhaps, that we shall *have* to meet sometimes. I suppose the people down here give balls occasionally, and tennis-parties, and that; and when I meet you at them, is it your wish that I shall pretend never to have seen you before,—never to have known you?"

"Yes," says Monica, with as much hesitation as lets him know how she hates saying it. "When next you meet me, you are to look right over my head, and pass on!"

"I couldn't do it," returns he, gazing at her steadily. "I couldn't indeed. In fact, I feel it is just the last thing in the world I *could* do."

"But you must," says Monica, imperiously, terrified to death as she conjures up before her Aunt

Priscilla's face as it will surely be if this Philistine dares to address her: "I tell you my aunts would never forgive me if they knew I had interchanged even one syllable with you. From this moment you must forget me. There will really be no difficulty about it, as our acquaintance is but of an hour's growth. You have seen me for the first time to-day, and a chance meeting such as this is easily driven from the mind."

"That is your opinion," says the young man, moodily. "It is not mine. I dare say *you* will find it very easy to forget. I shan't! And this isn't the first time I have seen you, either. It seems to me as if years have rolled by since last I looked upon your face. I was standing at the gate of Coole, and saw you pass by, the day of your arrival in Rossmoyne. So, you see, we are—in spite of you—almost old friends."

A bombshell flung at her feet could hardly have produced a greater sensation than this apparently harmless speech. All at once there rushes back upon her the recollection of that fatal day when she lay upon a cart-load of hay and (according to Terence) kicked up her heels in the exuberance of her joy. Oh, horror! she grows crimson from her soft throat to her forehead! even her little ears do not escape the tint, but turn a warm and guilty pink. [Pg 37]

Never until this unlucky instant did it occur to her that this strange young man must be the detested one who had stood in the gateway and laughed at her undignified position and taken the clocks of her stockings into careful remembrance.

The one absorbing thought that he was nephew to Aunt Priscilla's bugbear has swallowed up all others; but now, as he himself reveals this other truth to her, she feels that her cup is indeed full.

Deeper and deeper grows the crimson tint that dyes her pale, shy face, until her cheeks are all aflame. Something like anger, too, is rendering her sweet eyes brilliant beyond their wont. Delicately but haughtily she gathers up the train of her white gown and casts one expressive glance upon the way she came. This glance says much. Somehow it tells him as distinctly as though she said it aloud that she is sorry she ever came down to this river, and that her sorrow arises from the fact that it was here she encountered him.

While he is still sore perplexed by her sudden change of demeanor, she turns away from him. Then, pausing, she turns again, and bestows upon him so indignant a look as completely finishes this ill used young man.

"I object to hasty friendships," she says, icily. "And," pausing as if to make the effect greater, "if I were *you*, I think I should seek some better employment than standing *idling all day long* at your uncle's gate."

With this parting shaft, and before he can recover from his consternation, she goes swiftly away from him, up through the meadows, home.

CHAPTER V.

How Monica is put in possession of a dreadful secret—And how Kit protests against the injustice of the world.

"An invitation from Madam O'Connor," says Miss Priscilla in a pleased tone, glancing at them all, over the top of her spectacles. She has the card in her hand, and slowly reads aloud the information printed upon it, to the effect that Madam O'Connor will be at home on Friday the 15th, from four to six o'clock, etc. [Pg 38]

"I am very glad she has asked Terence and Monica," says Miss Penelope. "Excessively attentive I call it."

"Will you go, Aunt Priscilla?" asks Monica, in a sneaky sort of tone. Her young soul hankers after the world, and will not be subdued. Upon Miss Priscilla's "yes" or "no" she waits with an anxiety that surprises even herself.

"Certainly, my dear," says Miss Blake, drawing herself up. "I shall feel it my duty to take you to all such places as will enable you to mix with people in your own rank of life. I am not one of those who think it well for young girls to lead the life of nuns. No, indeed!"

"I quite agree with you, my dear Priscilla," says Miss Penelope, who is an echo of her elder sister. "Yes, we will rouse ourselves, and once more seek the world."

"But I would not have you make yourselves unhappy," says Monica, falteringly.

"Nay, my dear, it will be a pleasure, for *your* sake."

Not for worlds, even to themselves, would these two old ladies acknowledge that they are right glad of the chance that has come to them of introducing so beautiful a niece to the gay world around them, and of mingling, even in a subdued and decorous fashion, with the amusements that for the last five years they have (most unwillingly, be it said, but on the score of age) declined.

"I wonder who will be there," says Monica, in a fresher tone, striving vainly to drown the hope

that is taking possession of her, a hope that connects itself with a certain blue-eyed, dark-haired young man, last seen in boating flannels.

"Everybody," says Miss Priscilla,—"the entire country. Madam O'Connor may not be—is not—there may be certain points about her—that"—floundering hopelessly—"I mean"—with a rush—"there are a few who object to her *manner* but her birth is undeniable, and she has a large fortune; you must know, my dear, her father was a direct descendant of King O'Toole, and her husband the head of one of the oldest families in Ireland."

"Is that the old woman who called here the day before yesterday?" asked Terence, irreverently. They are all sitting in the drawing-room, Terence being rather on the balcony perhaps.

"Yes—I regret you were not in to receive her. I should have liked you to make her acquaintance, Monica, before going to Aghyohillbeg." [Pg 39]

"Oh I saw her," says Terence, contemptuously, "she's got an eye like a lance, and a man's figure. She drove herself, and held the reins like this," throwing himself into position.

"If you are going out, Terence, you may as well go at once," says Miss Priscilla, with dignity, pretending neither to hear nor see him. Whereupon Terence gladly departs.

"Go on, auntie," says Monica, slipping down on a footstool close to Aunt Penelope, and leaning both her arms across the old lady's knee. "Who else will be there?"

"Yes, tell her everything, Priscilla," says Miss Penelope, smoothing the girl's hair softly, and feeling a strange thrill of pleasure in her heart as she notices the little confident gesture with which the girl nestles close to her.

"Well, there will be her own guests, of course, I mean those staying with her, for she always has her house full," says Miss Priscilla, after a slight pause, being still somewhat ruffled by Terry's remarks. "The Fitzgeralds will be there, of course. Bella is considered a very handsome girl, but I don't think you will like her much."

"No, no, she is not at all our Monica's style," says Miss Penelope, stroking the pretty cheek near her with her mittened hand. "Yet she has a fine skin."

"Ay, and a fine temper under it, or I'm a Dutchman," says Miss Priscilla. "And she is more peculiar than handsome; but men admire her, so *we* say nothing."

"Is she tall?" asks Monica, anxiously, who is a little thing herself, and looks even smaller than she really is because of her slender, girlish figure. She wonders in a vague, uncomfortable fashion whether—whether most men like tall women best.

"Tall? yes, and large in proportion; and as for her *manners*," says Miss Priscilla, in her severest tone, "in my opinion they are simply unbearable. Modesty in my days was a virtue, nowadays it is as *naught*. Bella Fitzgerald is never content unless she has every man in the room at her side, and goodness alone knows what it is she says to them. The way she sets her cap at that poor boy Ronayne, just because he has fallen in for that property, is quite revolting."

"And a mere lad, too," says Miss Penelope.

Monica draws a breath of relief. Perhaps if Miss Fitzgerald likes Mr. Ronayne she will not care to practise her fascinations upon——any other man. [Pg 40]

"How old is she?" she asks, feeling deeply interested in the conversation.

"She *says* she is twenty-four," says Miss Priscilla, with an eloquent sniff. "There is nothing easier to say than that. I *won't* be uncharitable, my dear Penelope,—you needn't look at me like that,—but this I must say, she looks every hour of eight and twenty."

"Her mother ought to know," says Miss Penelope.

"She ought, indeed," grimly. "But, as from the way she dresses we may reasonably conclude she thinks *herself* nineteen, I suppose she has lost her memory on all points."

"Her father, Otho Fitzgerald, was the same," says Miss Penelope, reflectively. "He never could bear the idea of age. He was one who saw nothing honorable in it. Gray hairs with him were a crime."

"So he used to dye them," says Miss Priscilla, maliciously; "and when he got warm the dye used to melt, and (unknown to him) run all down his cheek."

"Oh, Priscilla, how you remember things? Dear, dear, I think I see him now," says Miss Penelope. And here the two old ladies, overcome by this comical recollection, laugh until the tears run down their faces. Monica joins in from sheer sympathy; but Kit, who is sitting in the embrasure of a distant window and who had been strangely silent ever since the invitation came from Aghyohillbeg, maintains a stern gravity.

"Poor man," says Miss Penelope, wiping her eyes, "I shall never forget the night your sweet mother, my dear Monica, most unintentionally offended him about the diamond—you recollect, Priscilla? Tell Monica of it."

"He always wore a huge diamond ring upon his little finger," says Miss Priscilla, addressing

Monica, "of which he was very proud. He was at this time about fifty-three, but used to pose as a man of thirty-nine. One evening showing the ring to your mother, then quite a girl, he said to her, in his stilted way, 'This jewel has been in our family for fifty years.' 'Ah! did you buy it, Mr. Fitzgerald?' asks your mother, in her sweet innocent way. Ha, ha, ha!" laughs Miss Priscilla, "you should have seen his face. It was a picture! and just when he was trying to make himself agreeable to your poor mother, and acting as if he was a youthful beau of twenty-five, or at least as young as the best of us."

"That was so like mother," says Monica, in a low tone. "She always knew where to *touch* people."

"Oh, no, my dear, not at all like her," says Miss Penelope, hastily. "She didn't *mean* it, you must understand; she was the very soul of sweetness, and would not willingly affront any one for the world." [Pg 41]

For just an instant Monica lifts her eyes and gazes earnestly at her aunt; but the old face is so earnest and sincere that with a faint sigh she lowers her eyes again, and makes no further remark.

"After that he married his cousin's wife, a widow with one child, this girl, Bella," says Miss Priscilla, still full of reminiscences, as old people will be. "A most unpleasant person I thought her, though she was considered quite a belle in those days."

"She always appeared to me such a silly woman," says Miss Penelope.

"She is worse than that now," says Miss Priscilla, who seems specially hard on the Fitzgeralds. "She is a shocking old woman, with a nose like a flower-pot. I won't say she drinks, my dear Penelope, because I know you would object to it; but I *hear* she does, and certainly her nose is her betrayer."

"Do you remember," says Miss Penelope, "how anxious she once was to marry George Desmond?" This she says in a very low tone.

"Yes, I remember." The bare mention of her enemy's name has sent a flush of crimson into Miss Priscilla's cheeks. "But he never bestowed a thought upon *her*."

"Oh, no, never," says Miss Penelope, after which both the Misses Blake grow silent and seem to be slowly sinking into the land of revery.

But Monica, having heard the "enemy's name" mentioned, becomes filled with a determination to sift the mystery connected with him, now, to the end.

"Aunt Priscilla," she says, softly, looking at her with grave eyes across Miss Penelope's knees, "tell me, now, why Mr. Desmond is our enemy."

"Oh, not *now*," says Miss Penelope, nervously.

"Yes, now, please," says Monica, with ever-increasing gravity.

"It may all be said in a few words, Monica," says Miss Priscilla, slowly. "And what I have to say affects you, my dear, even more than us."

"*Me?*"

"Yes, in that it affects your mother. Twenty years ago George Desmond was her affianced husband. Twenty years ago, wilfully and without cause, he deliberately broke with her his plighted troth." [Pg 42]

"He threw her over?" exclaims Monica, aghast at this revelation.

"Well, I never heard be used actual violence to her, my dear," says Miss Penelope, in a distressed tone; "but he certainly broke off his engagement with her, and behaved as no man of honor could possibly behave."

"And mother must have been quite beautiful at that time, must she not?" says Monica, rising to her knees in her excitement, and staring with widely-opened eyes of purest amazement from one aunt to the other.

"'Beautiful as the blushing morn,'" says Miss Priscilla, quoting from some ancient birthday-book. "But, you see, even her beauty was powerless to save her from insult. From what we could learn, he absolutely refused to fulfil his marriage-contract with her. He was false to the oath he had sworn over our father's dying bed."

Nothing can exceed the scorn and solemnity of Miss Priscilla's manner as she says all this.

"And what did mother do?" asks Monica, curiously.

"What *could* she do, poor child? I have no doubt it went nigh to breaking her heart."

"Her heart?" says Monica.

"She suffered acutely. That we could see, or rather we had to guess it, as for days she kept her own chamber and would see no one, going out only when it was quite dusk for a solitary ramble. Ah! when sorrow afflicts the soul, there is no balm so great as solitude. Your poor mother took the whole affair dreadfully to heart."

"You mean that she really *fretted*?" asks Monica, still in the same curious way, with her eyes fixed on her aunt. There is, indeed, so much unstudied surprise in her whole manner as might have produced a corresponding amount in the Misses Blake, had they noticed it.

"Yes, my dear, of course. Dear, dear, dear! what a sad thing it all was! Well, now you understand all that it is needful you should, Monica," says Miss Penelope, with a glance at her sister, who really seems quite overcome. "So we will say no more about it. Only you can see for yourself how impossible it is for any of our blood to be on friendly terms with a Desmond."

"They may not all be like *that* Mr. Desmond," says Monica, timidly, coloring to her brow. [Pg 43]

"Yes, yes. Like father, like son; you know the old adage; and a nephew is as close a relation almost. We can know no one at Coole."

"I would almost rather see you dead than intimate with one of the name," says Miss Priscilla, with sudden harshness.

"I don't think we told Monica about the other guests at Aghyohillbeg," says Miss Penelope, hastily, with the kindly intention of changing the conversation. "A very pretty young woman came there about a week before your arrival, child, and is to remain, I believe, for some time. She is a widow, and young, and—by the bye, I wonder if she can be any relation to your friends in the South of France."

"Why?"

"Her name is Bohun, and——"

"Not *Olga* Bohun?" says Monica, springing to her feet. "A widow, you say, and young. Oh! auntie, if she only *might* be Olga!"

"Well, certainly she has a heathenish—I mean, a Russian—name like that," says Miss Priscilla. "She is a very little woman, with merry eyes, and she laughs always, and she has the prettiest, the most courteous manners. Quite a relief I found her, after the inanities of Bella Fitzgerald."

"She is even smaller than I am. Yes, and her eyes do laugh!" says Monica, delight making her cheeks warm. "She is the prettiest thing. Ah! how happy I shall be if I may see her sometimes!"

"You shall see her just as often as ever you and she wish," say the two old maids in a breath, glad in the thought that they can make her home at Moyne happy to her.

"I hope *you* like her," says Monica, glancing from one to the other of them.

"Yes. I thought her quite fascinating," says Miss Penelope. "Some people say she is rather—rather *fast*, I believe is the word they use nowadays," getting the word out with difficulty, as though afraid it may go off and do somebody an injury. "But for my part I don't believe a word of it. She is quite natural, and most pleasing in manner, *especially* to those who are older than herself. A great charm in these times, my dear, when age is despised."

Plainly, the little widow at Aghyohillbeg has been playing off her sweetest graces upon the two Misses Blake.

"I dare say Monica will like young Ronayne," says Miss Priscilla. "He is quite nice, that lad. But I hope, Monica, that, even if circumstances should throw you together, you will take no notice of [Pg 44] young Mr. Desmond. I myself would not exchange a word with him if a queen's diadem were offered me as a bribe."

"You might speak to him without knowing him," says Monica, blushing again that nervous crimson of a while ago.

"Impossible, my dear. Instinct, sharpened by hatred, would tell me when one of the race was near me."

"Well, as it is your first party here, dear child, I hope you will enjoy it," says Miss Penelope, quickly, as though again anxious to throw oil on the waters by changing the conversation. "It is a charming place, and its mistress, if a little rough, is at least kindly."

At this moment Kit, emerging from the curtains that have hidden her for the past hour, comes slowly to the front. Her face, her very attitude, is martial. She is plainly in battle-array. Pausing before Miss Priscilla, she directs her first fire upon her.

"Am I not asked at all?" she says, in a terrible tone, that contrasts painfully with the ominous silence she has maintained ever since the invitation was brought by Mrs. O'Connor's groom.

"My dear child, you must remember you are only fourteen," says Miss Priscilla, who is sincerely sorry the child has not been included in the invitation, and, in fact, thinks it rather unkind she has been left out.

"I *know* that, thank you," says the youngest Miss Beresford, uncompromisingly, fixing her aunt with a stony glare. "I know my birthday as well as most people. And so, just because I am a child, I am to be slighted, am I? I call it unfair! I call it beastly *mean*, that every one here is to be invited out to enjoy themselves except *me*."

"Young people are seldom asked to grown-up parties," says Miss Priscilla, in her best conciliatory

manner. "When you are as old as Monica, of course you will go everywhere. In the meantime you are only a child."

"I am old enough to conduct myself properly, at all events," says Kit, unmoved. "I suppose at *fourteen*"—as if this is an age replete with wisdom—"I am not likely to do anything *very* extraordinary, or make myself unpleasant, or be in anybody's way."

"That is not the question, at all: it is merely one of age," says Miss Priscilla.

"Is it? And yet people say a great deal about childhood being the happiest time of one's life," says Kit, almost choking with scornful rage. "I should just like to see the fellow who first said that. [Pg 45] Maybe I wouldn't enlighten him, and tell him what a hypocrite he was. Whoever said it, it is a decided untruth, and I know I wish to goodness I was grown up, because then," with withering emphasis, "I should not be trampled upon and insulted!"

This is dreadful. The two old ladies, unaccustomed in their quiet lives to tornadoes and volcanoes of any kind, are almost speechless with fright.

"Dearest," says Monica, going up to her, "how *can* you look at it in such a light?"

"It's all very well for you," says the indignant Kit: "*you're* going, you know. I'm to stay at home, like that wretched Cinderella!"

"Katherine, I am sure you are quite unaware of the injustice of your remarks," says Miss Priscilla, at last finding her voice. She is bent on delivering a calm rebuke; but inwardly (as any one can see) she is quaking. "And I have frequently told you before that the expression 'I wish to goodness,' which you used just now, is anything but ladylike. It is not nice; it is not proper."

"I don't care what is proper or improper, when I am treated as I now am," says the rebel, with flashing eyes and undaunted front.

"There is really *nothing* to complain of," says Miss Priscilla, earnestly, seeing censure has no effect. "Madam O'Connor would not willingly offend any one; she is a very kind woman, and——"

"She is a regular old wretch!" says the youngest Miss Beresford, with considerable spirit.

"My *dear* Katherine!"

"And it's my belief she has done it *on purpose*!" with increasing rage.

"Katherine, I must insist——"

"You may insist as you like, but I'll be even with her yet," persists Kit, after which, being quite overcome with wrath, she breaks down, and bursts into a violent fit of weeping.

"My dear child, don't do that," says Miss Penelope, rising precipitately, and going over to the weeping fury. "Priscilla," in a trembling tone, "I fear it is selfish. I think, my dear, I shall stay at home, too, the day you all go to Madam O'Connor's."

This kills the storm at once.

"No, no, indeed, Aunt Penny, you shan't." Kit cries, subdued, but still in tears. She is overcome [Pg 46] with remorse, and blames herself cruelly in that her ill temper should have led to this proposal of self-sacrifice. To give in to Kit is the surest and quickest method of gaining your own point. She throws her arms, as she speaks, around Miss Penelope's neck, and nearly strangles that dear old lady in her remorseful agitation, to say nothing of the deadly havoc she makes of her frills and laces.

"But indeed, my Kitten, it will be no privation to me to stay at home with you, and we will be quite happy together, and we will have our tea out in the orchard," says Miss Penelope, soothing her with sweet words; while Miss Priscilla, who is thoroughly frightened by the sobbing, pats the refractory child on the back, with a view to allaying all fear of convulsions.

"You shan't stay at home, Aunt Penny,—you shan't indeed," cries the inconsistent Kitten. "I like being alone, I *love* it; if you don't go to that place with the long name, and enjoy yourself very much, I shall be miserable all my life, though I love you very, very, *very* much for wishing to keep me from being lonely. Tell her I mean it, Monica."

"Yes, I am sure she means it," says Monica, earnestly, whereupon peace is once more restored to the breasts of the terrified aunts.

CHAPTER VI.

How Monica goes to Aghyohillbeg, and meets there an old friend and a very new one.

Time flies, and no man can reach his hand to stay it. A very good thing, too, thinks Monica, as she stands before her looking-glass putting the last pretty touches to her white toilet.

It is Friday. Madam O'Connor's garden-party lies before her, and, probably, other things. Here

she blushes at herself, as she sees that pretty soul in the glass, though, indeed, she has no cause to do so; but possibly the vague thought of those "other things" has something to do with it, and perhaps it is for their sake too that she places with such care the heavy, blood-colored rose beneath her chin.

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This is the only suspicion of color about her. Her gown is white; her hat is white; long white silk gloves run up her rounded arms as though bent on joining her sleeves far above the elbow. A white Surat sash is tied round her dainty waist. She is looking "as fair as the moon, as lovely as a rose," and altogether distinctly dangerous.

Perhaps she half recognizes this fact, because she smiles at her own reflection, and—vain little girl that she is—stoops forward and kisses herself in the happy glass that holds her even for so brief a minute; after which she summons her maid from her dressing-room beyond.

"Canty," she says, as the "uncle's wife's sister's child" enters, "I am dressed now; and——"

"Shure, so you are, miss; and lovely ye look, more power to ye."

"Make my room very tidy," says Monica, giving her her directions before starting. "And, Canty, I shall want my blue dress for dinner. You can put it out."

"Yes, miss," whereupon Monica prepares to leave the room; but the new maid stops her.

"If ye please, Miss Monica," she says, hesitating, and applying her apron to her lips.

"Yes, Canty?"

"I'd be very thankful to ye, miss, if ye wouldn't call me that."

"Call you what?"

"Canty, miss."

"But," astonished, "isn't it your name?"

"No, miss; me name is Bridget."

"But surely Canty is your name, too?"

"Well, it's me father's name, miss, no doubt; but faix I feel just like a boy when ye call me by it, an' ye wouldn't like me to feel like a boy, miss, would ye?" says the village beauty casting an anxious glance at Monica from her dark Irish eyes, and blushing deeply.

"Certainly not," says Monica, laughing a little. "Very well, Bridget; I shall try to forget you ever had a surname."

"Thank ye, miss," says Bridget, with a sigh of profound relief.

Then Monica runs downstairs, where she finds her aunts in the drawing-room, dressed in their very best silk gowns, waiting for the carriage to come round. There is a little delay, which wasted time the two old ladies spend in endeavoring to drill Terence into shape. Something of this sort is going on as Monica enters.

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"When I introduce you to Madam O'Connor or Lady Rossmoyne, my dear boy, be sure you make a very low bow. Nothing distinguishes a gentleman so much from the common herd as the manner of his salute. Now make me a bow, that I may judge of your style." Thus Miss Priscilla.

"I couldn't make one to order like that," says Terence; yet he sulkily complies, making a very short, stiff, and uncompromising nod that makes both aunts lift their hands in dismay.

"Oh, no, my dear!—that won't do *at all*! Most ungraceful, and totally devoid of the dignity that should inspire it. Now look at me. It should be something like *this*," making him a reverence that might well have created admiration in the court of Queen Anne.

"Ah, yes! that is something like what it should be," chimes in Miss Penelope, paying a tribute to the talent of her sister. "Priscilla has caught the true tone. I wish, Terence, we could see you more like your dear grandfather; *he* was a man to bow."

Terence, calling to mind the portrait of his "dear grandfather," as represented in the elaborate gilt frame in the dining-room, in a court suit and a periwig, and with an abominable simper, most devoutly thanks his gods that he is *not* like unto him. He is, indeed (feeling goaded to the last degree), about to break into unseemly language, when, fortunately, the arrival of the ancient equipage that has done duty at Moyne as state carriage for generations is announced.

The coachman, who is considerably older than Timothy, draws up the old horses before the door with a careful manner that impresses the beholder with the belief that he thinks they would run away in a minute if he relaxed a muscle on the reins; and a small boy who acts as footman and looks decidedly depressed, lets down the rickety steps.

Miss Priscilla Blake then enters the carriage. She is followed with much ceremony by Miss Penelope. After which Monica, who is impressed by the proceedings, and Terence, who is consumed with secret mirth, step in and seat themselves. Then the coachman says, "Gee up!" in exactly the tone he has employed for forty years; and the gloomy boy settling down beside him, they are all presently on the fair road to Aghyohillbeg.

The drive is a very pleasant one, though filled with injunctions of the most obsolete from the Misses Blake as to their behavior, etc. The fact is, that the two old maids are so puffed out with [Pg 49] pride at the thought that they will presently introduce to the county the handsome lad and beautiful girl opposite them that they have grown fidgety and over-anxious about the niceties of their presentation.

"Surely," say the Misses Blake to themselves and to each other, "not half so pretty a pair could be produced by any family in the south!"

Which is saying a great deal, as in the south of Ireland a pretty face is more the rule than the exception.

Over the dusty road they go, calmly, carefully, the old horses being unaccustomed to fast ways of any sort; slowly, with much care they pick their aged steps, never stumbling, never swerving, but as certainly never giving way to frivolous haste.

Then, all at once, as it seems to Monica, the hillside seems to break in twain, and a great iron gate appears, into which they turn to drive in their solemn fashion down a dark avenue shaded by swaying elms.

It is a perfect place, old as the hills that surround it, and wild in its loveliness. To right and left great trees, gnarled and moss-grown, and dipping tangles of blackberry and fern; patches of sunlight, amidst the gloom, that rests lovingly upon a glowing wilderness of late bluebells, and, beyond all these broad glimpses of the glorious, restless ocean, as it sleeps in its bay below.

Gazing at all this natural beauty, Monica's soft eyes and heart expand, and,—

> "Joy rises in her like a summer morn."

And then she sees an old house, low, broad, picturesque, with balconies and terraces, and beyond the house slanting lawns, and at one side tennis-courts, where many gayly-clad figures are moving to and fro. There is a sound of subdued laughter and the perfume of many flowers, and a general air of gayety; it is as though to-day care has utterly forgotten this one favored corner of the earth.

Then they all descend from the time honored chariot, and cross the lawn to where they can see their hostess standing, tall and erect and handsome, in spite of her sixty years.

"Your niece?" says Madam O'Connor, staring hard at Monica's pure little face, the girl looking straight back at her with a certain amount of curiosity in her eyes.—"Well, I wish you no greater fortune than your face, my dear," says the old Irishwoman. "It ought to be a rich one, I'm [Pg 50] thinking. You're like your mother, too; but your eyes are honester than hers. You must know I knew Kitty Blake very well at one time."

"I have heard my mother speak of you," says Monica.

"Ay—so? Yet I fear there wasn't much love lost between us."

Then she turns a little aside to greet some one else, and Monica lets her eyes roam round the grounds. Suddenly she starts, and says out loud,—

"Ah! there is Olga?"

"You know Mrs. Bohun, then?" says her hostess, attracted by her exclamation and her pretty vivacious expression.

"So very, very well," says Monica. She has flushed warmly, and her eyes are brilliant. "I want to speak to her; I want to go to her, *please*."

"Bless me! what a shame to waste that lovely blush on a mere woman!" says Madam O'Connor, with a merry laugh. "Here, Fred," turning to a young man standing close to her with a very discontented expression, "I am going to give you a mission after your own heart. You are to take Miss Beresford over there, to where Mrs. Bohun is dealing death to all those boys.—This is Lord Rossmoyne, Miss Beresford: he will see you safely over your rubicon."

"Oh, thank you!" says Monica, gratefully smiling at her.

"Tut, child! thank me when I have done something for you. It is Fred's turn to thank me now," says Madam O'Connor, with a merry twinkle in her gray eyes.

She is a large woman close on sixty, with an eagle eye and a hawk's nose. As Monica leaves her she continues her gossip with the half dozen young men round her, who are all laughing at some joke. Presently she herself is laughing louder than any of them (being partial to boys and their "fun," as she calls it). Bestowing now a smart blow with her fan upon the youngest and probably therefore most flippant of her attendants, she stalks away from them across the lawn, to where two ladies are sitting together.

One is elderly, but most ridiculously dressed in juvenile attire, that might have well suited the daughter sitting beside her. This latter is a tall girl, and large in every way, with curious eyes and a rather harsh voice; she is laughing now at some remark made by a man lounging at the back of her chair, and the laugh is both affected and discordant. [Pg 51]

"Have you seen that girl of Kitty Beresford's, Edith?" asks Madam O'Connor of the elder lady.

"That little washed-out-looking girl who came with those two old Miss Blakes?" asks the youthful old woman, with a profoundly juvenile lisp.

"Faith, I don't know about her being washed out," says Madam O'Connor, bluntly. "I think she is the prettiest creature I've seen this many a day."

"You are so impulsive, my dear Theresa!" says her friend, with a simper: "all your geese are swans."

"And other people's swans my geese, I suppose," says Madam, with a glance at the tall girl, which somehow brings the conversation to a full stop.

Meantime, Monica is crossing the soft turf, with the moody man called Rossmoyne beside her. She can see her goal in the distance, and finds comfort in the thought that soon she must be there, as she cannot bring herself to be agreeable to her new acquaintance; and certainly he is feeling no desire just at present to be agreeable to her or to anybody.

As Monica comes nearer to her friend, she gazes anxiously at her, as though to see if time has worked a change in her.

She is quite a little woman about five and twenty, but looking at least four years younger than that. Her eyes are large, dark, and mischievous. Her hair is so fair as to be almost silvery; naturally wavy, it is cut upon the forehead in the prevailing fashion, but not curled. Her mouth is small, mutinous, and full of laughter; her nose distinctly retroussé. Altogether she is distractingly pretty, and, what goes for more nowadays, very peculiar in style, and out of the common.

She is exquisitely dressed in a costume that suggests Paris. She is a harmony in black and white, as Lord Rossmoyne told her an hour ago, when he was *not* wearing his discontented expression. Seated beside her is a tall pallid woman with a cold face, but very velvety eyes and a smile rare but handsome. Every now and then this smile betrays itself, as her companion says anything that chances to amuse her. She is a Mrs. Herrick, a cousin of Olga Bohun's, and is now on a visit with her at Aghyohillbeg.

There are several men grouped round Mrs. Bohun, all in various standing positions. One man is lying at her feet. He is a tall slight young fellow, of about twenty-three, with a lean face, dark hair, and beautiful teeth. He has, too, beautiful eyes, and a most lovable expression, half boyish, but intensely earnest and very sensitive. [Pg 52]

Just now he appears happy and careless, and altogether as if he and the world are friends indeed, and that he is filled with the belief that every one likes him; and, in truth, he is right in so believing, for every one does like him, and a great many are fond of him, and some love him.

He is looking up at Mrs. Bohun, and is talking rapidly, as Monica and Lord Rossmoyne come up behind them.

"What! another bit of scandal?" exclaims Mrs. Bohun, lifting her brows in pleased anticipation. "The air seemed full of it. An hour ago I heard of the dire discomfiture of two of my dearest friends, and just now I listened to a legend of Belgravia that was distinctly *fifi* and had a good deal to do with a marchioness. It is really quite too much happiness for *one* day."

"My tale does not emanate from such an aristocratic region as Belgravia," says Ulic Ronayne, the man at her feet: "it is, I blush to say, from the city."

"Ah!" in a regretful tone; "then it will of course be decenter. Don't trouble to expend color on it, as I daresay there isn't a blush in the whole of it. Well," resignedly, "go on."

In the usual quick manner habitual to him, and with the slight but eloquent amount of gesture common to Irish people, Ronayne tells his news, which is received with low laughter by those around.

"I've heard better stories," says Mrs. Bohun, discontentedly; "and it isn't a bit like what Lord Tommy would do. It is more in Rossmoyne's line. I don't think I believe it. And the roundabout way in which you told it reminds one of a three-volume novel: the first leads up to the point, the third winds up the point, the second *is* the point. I confess I like the second volume best. When I grow funny over my friends I'm *all* second."

"Then don't be funny about me, please," says Ronayne, lazily.

"*Are* you my friend?" asks she, glancing at him. Lifting his eyes to hers, he pauses, and then says slowly, the smile dying from his face,—

"Well, perhaps *not*."

Then he lowers his eyes again, and goes back to his idle occupation of decorating with daisies some of the fantastic loops upon her gown.

At this moment Lord Rossmoyne, coming forward, says, sullenly, "May I hear the story that just now reminded you of me? But first——" He pauses, and glances at Monica. Mrs. Bohun, following his glance, rises hurriedly from her seat, and going up to the girl, embraces her warmly. [Pg 53]

"Ah! my *pretty* Monica! my little saint!" she cries, in her sweet, gay voice, "what happy breeze has blown you hither?"

"I am living here,—at Moyne,—with my aunts," in a happy, breathless way. "Some days ago they described you to me, and I knew it must be you. I was right. And to-day I have found you."

"I'm always found out, as a rule," says Mrs. Bohun, with a light laugh. "That is my standing grievance. You know Hermia, don't you?" indicating the tall, cold-looking woman near her, who so far unbends as to take Monica's hand kindly and bestow upon her one of her handsome smiles. "She has come here to look after me and see that I don't get into a scrape or make myself unhappy."

"Could you be unhappy?" says Rossmoyne, from behind her chair, in so disagreeable a tone that every one looks at him. "Decidedly," thinks Monica to herself, "he has either neuralgia or an execrable temper."

"Miserably so," says the pretty widow, airily. "Though, after all," reflectively, "I believe I have even a greater talent for making others so. That, however, is my misfortune, not my fault. I was 'born so,' like that poor man with the twisted neck."

"Well, this is not one of your miserably unhappy hours, at all events," says Hermia Herrick. "You have been in magnificent spirits ever since you came to Aghyohillbeg."

"You've learned it?" says Olga, staring at her with pretended surprise. "The name, I mean. Well, you *are* clever. It takes most people four long weeks. Oh, yes, I am blissfully happy here. I *ought* to be. It would be the grossest ingratitude if I were otherwise, as all the men have been good enough to fall in love with me, and that, of course, is the principal thing."

At this the young man at her feet smiles openly and presses his face unperceived against her gown; but Rossmoyne throws up his head and glances with a coldly displeased expression into the vague distance.

"Have you been here long?" asks Monica, turning to her friend.

"*Very* long," pettishly. Something—perhaps Rossmoyne—has annoyed the capricious beauty. [Pg 54]

"Only a fortnight," says Mrs. Herrick, briefly. "You *must* know that."

"I don't judge time by days and weeks; it *seems* long," says Mrs. Bohun, "years,—an eternity almost!"

A sudden gloom appears to have fallen upon the group. Rossmoyne's dark face grows darker still; the smile fades from Ronayne's face, a shadow falls athwart his eyes.

"I think I like the country," says Monica, suddenly. "It is so calm, so quiet, and there are moments when the very beauty of it brings tears to my eyes."

"I love it too," says Ronayne, quickly, addressing her pointedly in a friendly tone, although no introduction has been gone through between them. "I wonder how any one who has once tasted the sweetness of it can ever again long for the heat and turmoil of the town."

"Yes, for a time it is charming, all-sufficing," says Mrs. Bohun, "but for what a *little* time! Perhaps,—I am not sure,—but *perhaps* I should like to live for three months of every year in the country. After that, I know I should begin to pine again for the smoke and smuts of my town."

"If you are already wearied, I wonder you stay here," says Lord Rossmoyne, sullenly.

"And I wonder what has happened to-day to your usually so charming temper," returns she, laughingly uplifting her face to his, and letting her eyes rest on him with almost insolent inquiry.

"Desmond says good temper is a mere matter of digestion," says some one at this moment. Monica starts more at the name mentioned than at the exceedingly worn-out words uttered. She glances at the speaker, and sees he is a very ugly young man, with a nice face, and a remarkably dismal expression. He is looking at Rossmoyne. "Sit down, dear boy," he says, *sotto voce* and very sadly. "There's too much of you; you should never stand. You appear to so much better advantage when doubled in two. It don't *sound* well, does it? but——"

"But really, when you come to think of it," Mrs. Bohun is saying, feelingly, "there is very little in the country."

"There is at least the fascinating tulip and lily," says the sad man who mentioned Desmond's name. "Don't put yourself beyond the pale of art by saying you had forgotten those æsthetic flowers,—blossoms, I mean. Don't you yearn when you think of them? *I* do."

"So glad you are awake at last, Owen!" says Mrs. Bohun.

"That silly craze about tulips," says Mrs. Herrick, contemptuously, "I have always treated it with scorn. Why could not the art idiots have chosen some better flower for their lunatic ravings? What can *any* one see in a tulip?" [Pg 55]

"Sometimes earwigs," says the man called Owen.

"Nonsense! I don't believe even earwigs would care for it. Foolish, gaudy thing, uplifting its lanky neck as though to outdo its fellows! There is really nothing in it."

"Like the country," says Owen, meekly, "according to Mrs. Bohun."

"And like Bella Fitzgerald," says that graceless person, with a little grimace.

"My *dear* Olga," says Mrs. Herrick, glancing quickly to right and left. "Do you never *think*?"

"As seldom as ever I can. But why be nervous, Hermia? If any one were to compare *me* with a tulip, I should die of—no, not chagrin—*joy*, I mean, of course. Monica, what are you saying to Owen?"

"I don't think I know who Owen is," says Monica, with a glance at the gentleman in question, that is half shy, half friendly.

"That argues yourself unknown," says Olga. "He is Master Owen Kelly, of Kelly's Grove, county Antrim, and the bright and shining light of the junior bar. They all swear by him in Dublin,—all, that is except the judges, and they swear *at* him."

Monica looks at Master Owen Kelly in a faintly puzzled fashion.

"It is all quite true," says that young man, modestly, in a reassuring tone.

"Now tell us what you were saying to each other," says Olga.

"It was nothing," returns Monica. "We were only talking about this Egyptian war. But I don't really," nervously, "understand anything about it."

"You needn't blush for your ignorance on that score," says Mr. Kelly. "You're in the general swim: nobody knows."

"It is the most senseless proceeding altogether," says Hermia Herrick, in her decided way. "Gladstone's wars are toys. He has had three of them now, dear little fellow, to amuse himself with, and he ought to be proud of his victories."

"According to Erasmus, war is the 'malady of princes,'" says Lord Rossmoyne, sententiously.

"Rossmoyne isn't well," says Mr. Kelly, softly. "He is calling the wood-cutter a prince. It reminds one of Hans Andersen's fairy-tale: all hewers of wood and drawers of water were blood-royal then." [Pg 56]

"Yet Gladstone has intellect," says Mrs. Herrick, in oh, *such* a tone: would that the master of Hewarden could have heard her!

"Some!" said Mr. Kelly. "He is indeed 'a thing apart.' I know nothing like him. 'Once, in the flight of ages past, there lived a *man*.' In ages to come they will say that of our modern immortal William. They will probably add that no *real* man has ever lived since."

"How silly you can be at times!" says Olga.

"It isn't mine; it's Montgomery's nonsense," says Mr. Kelly, sadly. "Blame him, not me."

"I don't want to blame any one," says Olga, with a skillfully-suppressed yawn; "but, taking your view of the case, I think it will be an awful age when there *doesn't* live a man."

"Your 'occupation will be o'er,' indeed," says Rossmoyne, with an accentuated bitterness, "when that time comes."

("He must be very much in love with her," thinks Monica, with a touch of inspiration, "he is so excessively rude to her!")

"Lord Rossmoyne," says Mrs. Bohun, turning to him with ineffable sweetness, "will you do something for me?"

The transition from coldness to tender appeal is too much for Rossmoyne: his face brightens.

"You know there is nothing I would not do for you," he says, gravely but eagerly.

"Then," promptly, "please take that ugly frown off your forehead and put it in your pocket; or—no, throw it away altogether; if you kept it near you, you might be tempted to put it on again."

"I did not know I was frowning."

"You were," sweetly. "You are all right again now, and so shall be rewarded. You can't think how unbecoming frowns are, and how much better you look when you are all 'sweetness and light' as now for example. Come," rising, "you shall take me for a nice long walk through these delightful old gardens."

As she moves she sees the daisies still clinging to her gown that Ulic Ronayne has been amusing himself with during the past half-hour. More than this, she sees, too, the imploring gaze of his dark eyes upturned to hers.

"Silly boy!" she says, stooping to shake away the daisies with her hand; but her words have a double meaning. Involuntarily, unseen by all the others—except Monica—his hand closes upon hers. [Pg 57]

"Do not go with him," he says, with deep entreaty.

"I must—now."

"Then let me come too?"

"No." Then she raises herself, and says, gayly, "You shall stay and make love to Miss Beresford—Monica, I have desired Mr. Ronayne to stay here and amuse you."

She moves across the lawn with Rossmoyne beside her. Mrs. Herrick and Mr. Kelly are strolling lazily in another direction. Monica and Ulic are alone.

"Is there anything I can take you to see?" asks he, gently.

"No, thank you. I am quite happy here."

Then, noticing the extreme sadness on his beautiful face, she says, slowly, "But you are not, I am afraid."

"I *should* be, with so fair a companion." He smiles as he says this, but his smile is without mirth, and she does not return it. Suddenly leaning forward, she says to him, very tenderly,—

"You love Olga, do you not?"

She never afterwards thinks of this speech without blushing deeply and wondering why she said it. It was an impulse too strong to be conquered, and it overpowers her. His face changes, and he colors perceptibly; he hesitates too, and regards her inquiringly. Something, perhaps, in her expression reassures him, because presently he says, bravely,—

"Yes, I do. I love her with all my heart and soul; as I never have loved, as I never shall love again. *This* thought is my happiness: my sorrow lies in the fear that she will never love *me*. Forgive my saying all this to you: she told me to amuse you," with a faint smile, "and I have woefully neglected her commands."

"You must forgive me," says Monica. "I should not have asked you the question."

"Do not be sorry for that: it has done me good, I think. I am glad I have said it *out loud* to somebody at last. It is odd though,—isn't it?—I should have made my confession to you, of all people, whom I never saw until ten minutes ago!"

Then Monica remembers that this is the second young man she has found herself on friendly terms with since her arrival at Moyne, without the smallest introduction having been gone through on any side. It all sounds rather dreamy, and certainly very irregular.

"Ah! there is Madam O'Connor beckoning to me," says Ronayne, rising lazily to his feet. "I [Pg 58] suppose she wants me for a moment. Will you mind my leaving you for a little, or will you come with me? I shan't be any time."

"I shall stay here," says Monica. "There, go: she seems quite in a hurry. Come back when you can."

He runs across the grass to his hostess; and Monica, leaning back in her chair, gives herself up to thought. Everything is strange, and she is feeling a little lonely, a little *distraite*, and (but this she will not allow even to herself) distinctly disappointed. She is trying very hard to prevent her mind from dwelling upon a certain face that should be naught to her, when she suddenly becomes conscious of the fact that some one has come to a standstill close beside her chair. She turns.

CHAPTER VII.

How Monica listens to strange words and suffers herself to be led away.—How Cupid plants a shaft in Mars, and how Miss Priscilla finds herself face to face with the enemy.

"You see I failed," says Brian Desmond.

A quick warm blush has dyed Monica's cheeks crimson.

"Ah! it is you," she said. "I thought you had not come."

This betrays the fact that she has been thinking of him, but he is far too wise a young man in his own generation to take count of it.

"Yes, I came. Three days ago I thought I should have been in London now, and then I heard *you* were to be here to-day."

"In what have you failed?" asks she, abruptly, alluding to his opening sentence.

"Can't you guess? Have you forgotten the last cruel injunction you laid upon me? 'When next we meet,' you said, 'you are to look straight over my head and pass on.' Will you believe that twice to-day I obeyed that mandate? The third time was the charm: it conquered me; I broke my sword in two and came to you."

"I wish you hadn't," says Monica, sincerely, if impolitely. "I wish you would go away now, and promise me never to speak to me again. You *know* I am afraid of you," looking nervously around. [Pg 59]

"I don't, indeed; I can't conceive such a situation. You do me a great injustice, I think. I verily believe if I tried my very hardest I couldn't instil terror into the smallest child in the village."

"You know what I mean. Of course," scornfully, "I should never be afraid of a *man*: it is Aunt Priscilla I am afraid of. And see, see *there*!" in an agony, "she is standing quite close to us, talking to somebody."

"If that is your aunt Priscilla, she is safe for an hour at least. The old lady with her is Lady Rossmoyne, and she never lets any one (unfortunate enough to get into her clutches) go free under a generous sixty minutes. She is great on manures, and stock, and turnips, and so forth. And your aunt, I hear, is a kindred spirit."

"But then there is Aunt Penelope," says Monica, timidly.

"She, too, is arranged. Half an hour ago I met her so deep in a disgraceful flirtation with the vicar that I felt it my duty to look the other way. Depend upon it, she is not thinking of you."

"But some one may tell them I have been talking to you."

"I always thought I had a proper amount of pride until I met you," says Mr. Desmond. "You have dispelled the belief of years. 'Is thy servant a dog,' that you should be ostracized for speaking to him? Never mind; I submit even to that thought if it gives me five minutes more of your society. But listen to me. No one can tell tales of us, because we are both strangers in the land. No one knows me from Adam, and just as few know you from—let us say *Eve*, for euphony's sake."

She laughs. Encouraged by her merriment to believe that at least she bears him no ill will, Brian says, hurriedly,—

"Come with me to the rose-garden. It is stupid sitting here alone, and the garden is beyond praise. Do come."

"Why?" lifting her heavy lashes.

"For one thing, we shall be free from observation, and you know you dislike being seen with me. For another——" He pauses.

"Well?" rather nervously.

"It is just this, that I *must* speak to you," says the young man, his gay manner changing to one of extreme earnestness. "You were unkind to me that day we parted. I want you to tell me why. I understand quite that I have no right to demand even the smallest favor of you, yet I do entreat you to come with me." [Pg 60]

For another moment she hesitates, then—

"Yes, I will come with you," she says, raising her soft eyes to his. In her whole manner, voice, and bearing there is something so sweet and childish and trusting as to render Desmond her slave upon the spot.

The path to the rose-garden leads away from Miss Priscilla, so they avoid detection as they go.

But they are singularly silent and grave; when the garden is reached they pass between the rows of growing blossoms mute, if rich in thought. At last, when silence is becoming too eloquent to be borne, her companion turns to her.

"It wasn't *true* what you said to me that last day, was it?" he asks, with far more anxiety than the occasion seems to demand. "Not *really*, I mean. You said it for fun, perhaps—or——It has been with me ever since. I can't forget it. You said you disliked sudden friendships, and the way you said it made me think you disliked *me*. Tell me I thought wrong."

"Quite wrong," in a low tone. She is plucking a rose to pieces, and keeps her eyes downcast. "When I said that, I was angry about something."

"About something I *said*?"

"No. Nothing you said."

"Something I did, then?" growing more and more anxious.

"Ye-es."

"What was it?"

"It doesn't matter now; not in the least now; and I can not tell you, *indeed*."

"But I wish very much you would. Perhaps, being in wretched ignorance, I shall be so unhappy as to do it again some day, and so make you hate me a second time."

"I didn't *hate* you."

"No? Yet there was a look in your eyes I wouldn't like to see there again. Do tell me, lest I once more fall into error."

"Oh, no," coloring deeply, as though at some unpleasant recollection. "That would be impossible. It could never happen again. I shall take care of that. I shall never as long as I live get into a—

that is—I mean—I——Really I have forgiven it all now, so let us forget it too."

Though still greatly mystified, Mr. Desmond wisely forbears to press the point, something in her pretty distressed face and heightened color forbidding him.

"Very good," he says, pleasantly. "But there is another thing I have not forgotten. Have you ever [Pg 61] cleared up that mystery about my uncle and your aunts?"

"Oh! *that*. It cannot be cleared, I am afraid it is too muddy a tale for any help; but I have at least found out all about it."

"Would it be indiscreet if I said I would give anything to be as wise as you on this subject? In other words, will you divulge the secret?"

"It is a story that doesn't redound to the honor and glory of *your* house," says Miss Beresford, stepping back from him with a gay little laugh, and glancing at him mischievously from under her big "Patience" hat. "If I were you I should shrink from hearing it."

"I decline to shrink," with unparalleled bravery. "I prefer to rush upon my fate. Life has no longer any flavor for me until I hear what the old reprobate at Coole has done."

"Well, if you *will* insist upon the sorry tale, 'tis this. Once there lived a wicked knight, who wooed a maiden fair. But when that her heart was all his own, his love grew cold, and, turning from her, he refused to fulfil his plighted troth and lead her to the hymeneal altar. In fact, he loved and he rode away, leaving her as dismally disconsolate as the original maid forlorn."

"Alas for the golden age of chivalrie!" says Mr. Desmond.

"Alas, indeed! That wicked knight was your uncle; the maid forlorn my mother!"

"You have been giving me a summary of a fairytale, haven't you?" asks he, in an unbelieving tone.

"No, indeed; it is all quite true. From what I have heard, your uncle must have treated my mother very badly. Now, aren't you thoroughly ashamed of yourself and your family?"

"One swallow makes no summer," says Mr. Desmond, hardily. "Because my uncle refused to succor a distressed damosel is no reason why I should so far forget myself. Besides, the whole thing seems incredible. Report says, and," with an expressive glance at her, "I can well believe it, your mother was the most beautiful woman of her time in all the countryside; while my uncle, bless him, is one of the very ugliest men I ever met in my life. He might take a prize in that line. Just fancy the Beast refusing to wed with Beauty!"

"To be ugly, so far as a *man* is concerned, is nothing," says Monica with a knowledge beyond her years. "Many singularly plain men have been much beloved. Though"—with an unconscious study [Pg 62] of her companion's features, who is decidedly well favored—"I confess I should myself prefer a man whose nose was straight, and whose eyes were—had no inclination to look round the corner, I mean."

"A straight nose is to be preferred, of course," says Mr. Desmond, absently stroking his own, which is all that can be desired. "But I never since I was born heard such an extraordinary story as yours. I give you my word,"—earnestly,—"my uncle is just the sort of man who, if *any* girl, no matter how hideous, were to walk up to him and say, 'I consent to marry you,' ought to be devoutly grateful to her. Why, talking of noses, you should just see his: it's—it's *anyhow*," with growing excitement. "It's all up hill and down dale. I never before or since saw such a nose; and I'd back his mouth to *beat that*!"

"He must be a very distinguished-looking person," says Miss Beresford, demurely.

"I know very little about him, of course, having been always so much abroad; but he *looks* like a man who could be painfully faithful to an attachment of that kind."

"He was not faithful to her, at all events. I daresay he fell in love with some other girl about that time, and slighted my mother for her."

"Well," says Mr. Desmond, drawing a deep breath, "he *is* 'a grand man!'"

"I think he must be a very *horrid* old man," replies Monica, severely.

"You have proofs of his iniquity, of course," says Brian, presently, who evidently finds a difficulty in believing in his uncle's guilt.

"Yes. He wrote her a letter, stating in distinct terms that"—and here she alters her voice until it is highly suggestive of Miss Blake's fine contralto—"'he deemed it expedient for both parties that the present engagement existing between them should be annulled.' Those are Aunt Priscilla's words; what he really meant, I suppose, was that he was tired of her."

"Your mother, I should imagine, was hardly a woman to be tired of readily."

"That is a matter of opinion. We—that is, Terry and Kit and I—thought her a very tiresome woman indeed," says Miss Beresford, calmly. She does not look at him as she makes this startling [Pg 63] speech, but looks beyond him into, possibly, a past where the "tiresome woman" held a part.

Brian Desmond, gazing at her pale, pure, spiritual face, sustains a faint shock, as the meaning of

her words reaches him. Is she heartless, emotionless? Could not even a mother's love touch her and wake her into life and feeling?

"You weren't very fond of your mother, then?" he asks, gently. The bare memory of his own mother is adored by him.

"Fond?" says Monica, as though the idea is a new one to her. "Fond? Yes, I suppose so; but we were all much fonder of my father. Not that either he or mamma took very much notice of us."

"Were they so much wrapt up in each other, then?"

"No, certainly not," quickly. Then with an amount of bitterness in her tone that contrasts strangely with its usual softness, "I wonder why I called my mother 'mamma' to you just now. I never dared do so to *her*. Once when she was going away somewhere I threw my arms around her and called her by that pet name; but she put me from her, and told me I was not to make a noise like a sheep."

She seems more annoyed than distressed as she says this. Desmond is silent. Perhaps his silence frightens her, because she turns to him with a rather pale, nervous face.

"I suppose I should not say such things as these to you," she says, unsteadily. "I forgot, it did not occur to me, that we are only strangers."

"Say what you will to me," says Desmond, slowly, "and be sure of this, that what you *do* say will be heard by you and me alone."

"I believe you," she answers, with a little sigh.

"And, besides, we are not altogether strangers," he goes on, lightly; "that day on the river is a link between us, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes, the river," she says, smiling.

"*Our* river. I have brought myself to believe it is our joint property: no one else seems to know anything about it."

"I have never been near it since," says Monica.

"I *know that*," returns he, meaningly.

"How?" is almost framed upon her lips; but a single glance at him renders her dumb. Something in his expression suggests the possibility that he has spent pretty nearly all his time since last they met, and *certainly* all his afternoons, upon that shady river just below the pollard willows, in [Pg 64] the vain hope of seeing her arrive.

She blushes deeply, and then, in spite of herself, laughs out loud, a low but ringing laugh, full of music and mischief.

This most uncalled-for burst of merriment has the effect of making Mr. Desmond preternaturally grave.

"May I ask what you are laughing at?" he says, with painful politeness; whereupon Miss Beresford checks her mirth abruptly, and has the grace to blush again even harder than before. Her confusion is, indeed, the prettiest thing possible.

"I don't know," she says, in an evasive tone.

"People generally *do* know what they are laughing at," contends he, seriously.

"Well, *I* don't," returns she, with great spirit.

"Of course not, if you *say* so; but," with suppressed wrath, "I don't myself think there is anything provocative of mirth in the thought of a fellow wasting hour after hour upon a lonely stream in the insane but honest hope of seeing somebody who *wouldn't* come. Of course in your eyes the fellow was a fool to do it; but—but if I were the girl I wouldn't laugh at him for it."

Silence.

Monica's eyes are bent upon the ground; her face is averted; but there is something about her attitude that compels Mr. Desmond to believe she is sorry for her untimely laughter; and thinking this breeds hatred towards himself for having caused this sorrow and makes him accuse himself of basest ill temper.

"I beg your pardon!" he says, in a contrite tone; "I shouldn't have spoken to you like that. I lost my temper most absurdly and must apologize to you for it now. It was ridiculous of me to suppose you would ever come again to the river; but one hopes against hope. Yet, as Feltham tells us, 'he that hopes too much shall deceive himself at last:' that was my fate, you see. And you never once thought of coming, did you? You were quite right."

"No, I was quite wrong; but—but—*you* are quite wrong too in *one* way," still with her eyes downturned.

"By what right did I expect you? I was a presumptuous fool and got just what I deserved."

"You were not a fool," exclaims she, quickly; and then, with a little impulsive gesture, she draws

herself up and looks him fair in the eyes. "If I had known you were there," she says, bravely, though evidently frightened at her own temerity, "I—I—am almost sure *I* should have been there too!" [Pg 65]

"No! would you really?" says Desmond, eagerly.

Then follows a rather prolonged silence. Not an awkward one, but certainly a silence fraught with danger to both. There is no greater friend to Cupid than an unsought silence such as this. At last it is broken.

"What lovely roses there are in this garden!" says Desmond, pointing to a bush of glowing beauty near him.

"Are there not?" She has taken off a long white glove, so that one hand and arm are bare. The hand is particularly small and finely shaped, the nails on it are a picture in themselves; the arm is slight and childish, but rounded and very fair.

Breaking a rose from the tree indicated, she examines it lovingly, and then, lifting it to his face, as though desirous of sympathy, says,—

"Is it not sweet?"

"It is indeed!" He is staring at her. Very gently he takes the little hand that holds the flower and keeps it in his own. He detains it so lightly that she might withdraw it if she pleases, but she does not. Perhaps she doesn't please, or perhaps she sees nothing remarkable in his action. At all events, she, who is so prone to blush on all occasions, does not change color now, but chatters to him gayly, in an unconcerned manner, about the scented blossoms round her, and afterwards about the people yonder, behind the tall flowering shrubs that surround the tennis-ground.

And still her little slender fingers lie passively in his. Glancing at them, he strokes them lightly with his other hand, and counts her rings.

"Four—five," he says; "quite a burden for such a little hand to carry."

"I like them," says Monica: "brooches and earrings and bracelets I don't care for, but rings I love. I never really feel dressed until they are on. To slip them on my fingers is the last thing I do every morning before running downstairs. At least nearly the last."

"And what is the last?"

"I say my prayers," says Monica, smiling. "That is what every one does, isn't it?"

"I don't know," says Mr. Desmond, not looking at her. It seems to him a long, long time now since last he said *his* prayers. And then he suddenly decides within himself that he will say them to-morrow morning, "the last thing before going downstairs;" he cannot have quite forgotten *yet*. [Pg 66]

He is examining her rings as he thinks all this, and now a little pale turquoise thing attracts his notice.

"Who gave you that?" he asks, suddenly. It is to a jealous eye rather a lovable little ring.

"Papa, when I was fourteen," says Monica. "It is very pretty, isn't it? I have felt quite grown up ever since he gave me that."

"Monica," says Brian Desmond suddenly, tightening his hold on her hand, "had you ever a lover before?"

"Before?"

"Yes," slowly, and as if determined to make his meaning clear, and yet, too, with a certain surprise at his own question. "Had you?"

"Before?" as if bewildered, she repeats the word again. "Why, I never had a lover *at all*!"

"Do not say that again," says Brian, moving a step nearer to her and growing pale: "I am your lover now—and *forever*!"

"Oh! no, *no,*" says Monica, shrinking from him. "Do not say that."

"I won't, if you forbid me, but," quietly, "I am, and shall be, all the same. I think my very soul—belongs to you."

A crunching of gravel, a sound of coming footsteps, the murmur of approaching voices.

Monica, pallid as an early snowdrop, looks up to see her Aunt Priscilla coming towards her, accompanied by a young man, a very tall and very stout young man, with a rather drilled air.

"Ah! here is Aunt Priscilla," says Monica, breathlessly. "Who is that with her?"

"Ryde, one of the marines stationed at Clonbree," says Mr. Desmond, cursing the marine most honestly in his heart of hearts. Clonbree is a small town about seven miles from Rossmoyne, where a company of marines has been sent to quell the Land League disturbances.

Miss Priscilla is looking quite pleased with herself, and greets Monica with a fond smile.

"I knew I should find you here," she says; "flowers have such a fascination for you. You will let me introduce you to Mr. Ryde, dear child!"

And then the introduction is gone through, and Monica says something unworthy of note to this big young man, who is staring at her in a more earnest manner than is strictly within the rules of etiquette. Somehow, too, she presently discovers she has fallen into line with her new friend, and is moving towards the lawn again with Aunt Priscilla following in her train with *Mr. Desmond*. [Pg 67]

Quaking inwardly, Monica at first cannot take her mind off the twain behind her, and all the consequences that must ensue if Miss Priscilla once discovers a Desmond is being addressed by her with common civility.

She is, therefore, but poor company for the tall marine, who seems, however, quite satisfied with the portion allotted him and maunders on inanely about the surroundings generally. When the weather and the landscape have been exhausted, it must be confessed, however, that he comes to a standstill.

Miss Priscilla, pleased with her day and the satisfactory knowledge that every one has been raving about Monica, is making herself specially agreeable to her companion, who, nothing loath, draws her out and grows almost sycophantic in his attentions. She becomes genial with him, not knowing who he is, while he becomes even more than genial with her, knowing right well who she is. Indeed, so merrily does he make the time fly that Miss Priscilla is fain to confess to herself that seldom has she passed so pleasant a five minutes.

In the meantime, Monica, strolling on in front with Mr. Ryde, is feeling both nervous and depressed. This chance meeting between her aunt and Mr. Desmond, and the memory of all the strange exciting things the latter has said to her, renders her mute and unequal to conversation, and her present companion is not one likely to enchain her attention by any brilliant flashes of intellect.

He is, in truth, a very ordinary young man, of the heavy, stupid type too often met with to require either introduction or description. He had arrived in Queenstown about a fortnight before, with nothing much to guide his conduct in a strange country beyond the belief that Hibernia, as he elects to call it, is like Africa, a "land benighted," fit only to furnish food for jests. He has a fatal idea that he himself can supply these jests at times, and that, in fact, there are moments when he can be irresistibly funny over the Paddies: like many others devoid of brain, and without the power to create wholesome converse, he mistakes impertinence for wit, and of late has become rude at the expense of Ireland whenever he found anybody kind enough, or (as in Monica's case now) obliged, to listen to him.

Just now, there being a distinct and rather embarrassing pause, he says amiably,—

"Awfully jolly gown you've got on!" [Pg 68]

"So glad you like it!" says Monica, absently.

"Got it from town, I suppose?"

"From Dublin—yes."

"Oh! by Jove, you call Dublin town, do you?" says Mr. Ryde, with a heavy laugh that suggests danger of choking, he being slightly plethoric by nature.

"Yes: what do you call it?" says Monica, regarding him steadily. She has hardly looked at him till now, and tells herself instantly that young men with fat faces are not in *her* line.

"Always thought it was a village, or something of that sort, you know," replies he, with a continuation of the suicidal merriment.

Monica stares, and her color rises, ever so little, but unmistakably.

"You ought to read something, papers and articles on Ireland, now and then," she says, deep but suspicious pity for him in her tone. "Considering what education costs nowadays, it is shameful the way yours has been neglected. Your college, or wherever you were, ought to be ashamed of itself. Why, I don't believe you know what a capital means."

"A capital?—in writing, do you mean?" asks he, puzzled.

"N—o; I wasn't thinking of that. You can write, I suppose," with malicious hesitation that betrays doubt. "I was speaking of the capitals of Europe. Dublin is one of them."

Unable to grasp the fact that she is mildly snubbing him, Mr. Ryde smiles gayly, and says, "Oh, really?" with an amused air that incenses her still more highly. "Was there ever," she asks herself, angrily, "so hateful a man, or so long a gravel walk!"

Having racked his brain to find something further wherewith to beguile the monotony of the way, and finding it barren, Mr. Ryde falls back upon the original subject.

"I like a white gown on a woman better than any," he says. "And so they really *can* make gowns in Ireland? I've been awfully disappointed, do you know?—reg'lar sold. I came over here in the full hope of seeing everybody going about in goatskins and with beads round their necks—and—er—that."

"And why are you disappointed?" asks Monica, mildly, with a provoking want of appreciation of this brilliant sally. "Are you fond of goatskins and beads? Do *you* wear them when 'your foot is on your native heath'?"

"Eh?—Oh, you don't understand," says this dense young man, fatally bent on explanation. "I meant to imply that the general belief with us over there"—pointing to the horizon, which would have led him to America rather than to England—"is that everybody here is half savage—d'ye see—eh?" [Pg 69]

"Oh, yes, it's quite plain," says Miss Beresford, her eyes immovably fixed on the horizon. "'Over *there*' must be a most enlightened spot."

"So of course I thought the goatskins, etc., would be the order of the day," goes on Mr. Ryde, with another chuckle.

"You do think sometimes, then?" says Monica, innocently.

"I have been thinking of *you* ever since I first saw you this afternoon," returns he, promptly, if unwisely.

There is an almost imperceptible pause, and then—

"Don't trouble yourself to do that again," says Monica *very* sweetly, but with a telltale flash in her blue eyes; "I am sure it must fatigue you dreadfully. Remember what a warm day it is. Another thing: don't for the future, please, say rude things about Ireland, because I don't like that *either*."

The "*either*" is the cruellest cut of all: it distinctly forbids him even to think of her.

"I am afraid I have been unlucky enough to offend you," says young Mars, stiffly, awaking at last to a sense of the situation, and glancing down uneasily at the demure little figure marching beside him with her pretty head erect. "I didn't mean it, I assure you. What I said was said in fun."

"Are you always like that when you are funny?" asks she, looking straight before her. "Then I think, if I were you, I wouldn't do it."

Then she is a little ashamed of her severity, and, changing her tone, makes herself so charming to him that he quite recovers his spirits before they come up with all the others on the lawn.

Yet perhaps her smiles have wrought him more harm than her frowns.

Madam O'Connor, going up to Miss Priscilla, engages her in some discussion, so that presently Monica finds Brian beside her again.

"You will let me see you again soon," he says, in a low tone, seeing Ryde is talking to Miss Fitzgerald.

"But how can I?"

"You can if you will. Meet me somewhere, as I may not call; bring your brother, your sister, *any one*, with you; only meet me." [Pg 70]

"If I did that, how could I look at Aunt Priscilla afterwards?" says Monica, growing greatly distressed. "It would be shameful; I should feel like a traitor. I feel like it already."

"Then do nothing. Take a passive part, if you will, and leave all to me," says Desmond, with a sudden determination in his eyes. "I would not have you vexed or made unhappy in any way. But that I shall see you again—and *soon*—be sure."

"But——"

"I will listen to no 'buts:' it is too late for them. Though all the world, though even you yourself, should forbid me your presence, I should still contrive to meet you."

Here somebody addresses him, and he is obliged to turn and smile, and put off his face the touch of earnest passion that has just illumined it; while Monica stands silent, spellbound, trying to understand it all.

"Is it thus that all my countrymen make love?" she asks herself, bewildered. At the very second meeting (she always, even to herself, ignores that ignominious first) to declare in this masterful manner that he *must* and *will* see her again!

It is rapid, rather violent wooing; but I do not think the girl altogether dislikes it. She is a little frightened, perhaps, and uncertain, but there is a sense of power about him that fascinates her and tells her vaguely that faith and trust in him will never be misplaced. She feels strangely nervous, yet she lifts her eyes to his, and gazes at him long and bravely, and then the very faintest glimmer of a smile, that is surely full of friendliness and confidence, if nothing more, lights up her eyes and plays around her pensive mouth. A moment, and the smile has vanished, but the remembrance of it lives with him forever.

Yes, the wooing is rapid, and she is not won; but "she likes me," thinks Desmond, with a touch of rapture he has never known before. "Certainly, she *likes* me; and—there are always time and hope."

"My dear Monica, it grows late," says Miss Priscilla at this moment. "Say good-by to Madame O'Connor, and let us go."

"Oh, not a bit of it, now," says Madam O'Connor, hospitably in her rich, broad brogue, inherited in all its purity, no doubt, from her kingly ancestor. "You mustn't take her away yet: sure the day is young. Mr. Ryde, why don't you get Miss Beresford to play a game with you? In my time, a young fellow like you wouldn't wait to be told to make himself agreeable to a pretty girl. There, go now, do! Have you brought your own racket with you?" [Pg 71]

"I left it at home," says Mr. Ryde. "Fact is," affectedly, "I didn't think tennis was known over here. Didn't fancy you had a court in the land."

This speech fires the blood of the O'Toole's last descendant.

Madam O'Connor uprears a haughty crest, and fixes the luckless lieutenant with an eagle eye, beneath which he quails.

"There is no doubt we lack much," she says, taking his measure with lofty scorn; "but we have at least our *manners*."

With this she turns her back upon him, and commences a most affable discussion with Miss Penelope, leaving her victim speechless with fright.

"Have a brandy-and-soda, Ryde?" says Mr. Kelly, who is always everywhere, regarding the wretched marine through his eyeglass with a gaze of ineffable sadness. "Nothing like it, after an engagement of this sort."

"I thought Ireland was the land for jokes," says the injured Ryde, indignantly,—"stock in trade sort of thing over here; and yet when I give 'em one of mine they turn upon me as if I was the worst in the world. I don't believe any one understands 'em over here."

"You see, your jokes are too fine for us," says Mr. Kelly, mournfully. "We miss the point of them."

"You are all the most uncomfortable people I ever met," says the wrathful marine.

"We are, we are," acquiesces Kelly. "We are really a very stupid people. Anything, delicate or refined is lost upon us, or is met in an unfriendly spirit. I give you my word, I have known a fellow's head smashed for less than half what you said to Madam O'Connor just now. Prejudice runs high in this land. You have, perhaps," in a friendly tone, "heard of a shillelagh?"

"No, I haven't," sulkily.

"No? *really*? It is quite an institution here. It's a sort of a big stick, a very unpleasant stick, and is used freely upon the smallest difference of opinion. You'll meet them round every corner when you get more used to us: you'd like to see them, wouldn't you?"

"No, I shouldn't," still more sulkily.

"Oh, but you ought, you know. If you are going to live for any time in the country, you should study its institutions. The best way to see *this* one is to make cutting remarks about Ireland in a loud voice when two or three of the peasants are near you. They don't like cutting remarks, they are so stupid, and jokes such as yours annoy them fearfully. Still, you mustn't mind that; you must smother your natural kindliness of disposition and annoy them, if you want to see the shillelagh." [Pg 72]

"I said nothing to annoy Mrs. O'Connor, at any rate," says Mr. Ryde. "She needn't have taken a simple word or two like that."

"You see, we are all so terribly thin-skinned," says Mr. Kelly, regretfully, "I quite blush for my country-people. Of course there are noble exceptions to every rule. I am the noble exception here. I don't feel in the least annoyed with you. Now do try some brandy, my dear fellow: it will do you all the good in the world."

"I don't know this moment whether *you* are laughing at me or not," says the marine, eying him doubtfully.

"I *never* laugh," says Mr. Kelly, reproachfully. "I thought *even you* could see that. Well, will you have that B. and S.?"

But Mars is huffed, and declines to accept consolation in any shape. He strolls away with an injured air to where his brother officer, Captain Cobbett, is standing near the hall door, and pours his griefs into his ears. Captain Cobbett being a very spare little man, with a half starved appearance and a dismal expression, it is doubtful whether poor Ryde receives from him the amount of sympathy required.

"Well," says Madam O'Connor, turning round as she sees him disappear, and addressing the three or four people round her generally, "'pon me conscience, that's the silliest young man I ever met in my life!" When disturbed, elated, or distressed, Madam O'Connor always says, "'Pon me conscience!"

"Don't be hard upon him," says Mr. Kelly, kindly. "Though very mad, he is *quite* harmless!"

"He plays tennis very well," says Miss Fitzgerald, the tall girl. "So nice, isn't it? to have these

ancient games reproduced!" This with the learned air of one who could say more if she would.

"*Ancient?*" says Madam O'Connor. "Faith, I thought it was a game of yesterday."

"Oh, dear, no!" says the erudite Bella, with a lenient smile. "Tennis was first brought from France to England in the reign of Charles the Second."

"There now, Miss Beresford, don't forget that," says Madam O'Connor, turning to Monica with an amused smile: "it is essential you should remember it, as it is part of one's education." After which she moves away towards some other guests, having said all she has to say to those near her. [Pg 73]

"May I see you to your carriage, Miss Blake?" says Desmond, finding she and Miss Penelope are bent on going; and Aunt Priscilla, who has taken quite a fancy to this strange young man, gives her gracious permission that he shall accompany them to the fossilized chariot awaiting them.

"Who is he, my dear Priscilla?" asks Miss Penelope, in a stage whisper, as they go.

"Don't know, my dear, but a vastly agreeable young man, very superior to those of his own age of the present day. He is marvellously polite, and has, I think, quite a superior air."

"Quite," says Penelope, "and a very sweet expression besides,—so open, so ingenuous. I wish *all* were like him." This with a sigh, Terence having proved himself open to suspicion with regard to plain dealing during the past few days.

Now, it so happens that at this instant they turn a corner leading from the shrubbery walk on to the gravel sweep before the hall door; as they turn this corner, so does some one else, only *he* is coming from the gravel sweep to the walk, so that consequently he is face to face with the Misses Blake without any hope of retreat.

The walk is narrow at the entrance to it, and as the newcomer essays to pass hurriedly by Miss Priscilla he finds himself fatally entangled with her, she having gone to the right as he went to the left, and afterwards having gone to the left as he went to the right, and so on.

Finally a passage is cleared, and the stranger—who is an amazingly ugly old man, with a rather benign though choleric countenance—speeds past the Misses Blake like a flash of lightning, and with a haste creditable to his years, but suggestive rather of fear than elasticity.

"My uncle?" says Brian Desmond, in an awestruck tone, to Monica, who literally goes down before the terrible annunciation, and trembles visibly.

It is a rencontre fraught with mortal horror to the Misses Blake. For years they have not so much as looked upon their enemy's face, and now their skirts have actually brushed him as he passed.

"Come, come quickly, Monica," says Miss Penelope, on this occasion being the one to take the initiative. "Do not linger, child. Do you not see? It was *our enemy* that passed by." [Pg 74]

If she had said "it was the arch fiend," her voice could not have been more tragic.

"I am coming, Aunt Penny," says Monica, nervously.

Now, it is at this inauspicious moment that Mr. Kelly (who, as I have said before, is always everywhere) chooses to rush up to Brian Desmond and address him in a loud tone.

"My dear boy, you are not going yet, are you?" he says reproachfully. "I say, Desmond, you can't, you know, because Miss Fitzgerald says you promised to play in the next match with her."

The fatal name had been uttered clearly and distinctly. As though petrified the two old ladies, stand quite still and stare at Brian; then Miss Priscilla, with a stately movement, gets between him and Monica, and, in tones that tremble perceptibly, says to him,—

"I thank you for the courtesy already received sir; but we will no longer trouble you for your escort: we prefer to seek our carriage *alone*."

She sweeps him a terribly stiff little salute, and sails off, still trembling and very pale, Miss Penelope, scarcely less pale, following in her wake.

Desmond has barely time to grasp Monica's hand, and whisper, "Remember," in as mysterious a tone as the hapless Stuart, when she too is swept away, and carried from his sight.

Not until the gates of Aghyohillbeg are well behind them do the Misses Blake sufficiently recover themselves for speech. Terence, who has been a silent witness of the whole transaction, creating a diversion by making some remark about the day generally, breaks the spell that binds them. His remark is passed over in silence, but still the spell is broken.

"Whoever introduced you to that young man," begins Miss Priscilla, solemnly, "did a wrong thing. Let us hope it was done in ignorance."

At this Monica shivers inwardly and turns cold, as she remembers that no introduction has ever been gone through between her and "that young man." What if her Aunt Priscilla persists, and asks the name of the offending medium? Fortunately, Miss Blake loses sight of this idea, being so much engrossed with a greater.

"For the future you must forget you ever spoke to this Mr. Desmond," she says, her face very

stern. "Happily he is an utter stranger to you, so there will be no difficulty about it. You will remember this, Monica?" [Pg 75]

"Yes, I will remember," says the girl, slowly, and with a visible effort.

Then Moyne is reached in solemn silence so far as the Misses Blake are concerned; in solemn silence, too, the two old ladies mount the oaken staircase that leads to their rooms. Outside, on the corridor, they pause and contemplate each other for a moment earnestly.

"He—he is very good-looking," says Miss Penelope at last, as though compelled to make the admission even against her will.

"He is abominably handsome," says Miss Priscilla fiercely: after which she darts into her room and closes the door with a subdued bang behind her.

CHAPTER VIII.

How Brian, having instituted inquiries, condemns his Uncle secretly—How Terry throws light upon a dark subject, and how, for the third time, Love "finds out his way."

It is the evening of the next day, and dinner at Coole has just come to an end. Mr. Kelly, who has been Brian's guest for the last fortnight, and who is to remain as long as suits him or as long after the grouse-shooting in August as he wills, has taken himself into the garden to smoke a cigar. This he does at a hint from Brian.

Now, finding himself alone with his uncle, Brian says, in the casual tone of one making an indifferent remark,—

"By the bye, I can see you are not on good terms with those old ladies at Moyne."

As he speaks he helps himself leisurely to some strawberries, and so refrains from looking at his uncle.

"No," says The Desmond, shortly.

"Some old quarrel I have been given to understand."

"I should prefer not speaking about it," says the squire.

"Twinges of conscience even at this remote period," thinks Brian, and is rather tickled at the idea, as he lifts his head to regard his uncle in a new light,—that is, as a regular Don Juan.

"Well, of course, I dare say I should not have mentioned the subject," he says, apologetically; "but I had no idea it was a sore point. It was not so much bad taste on my part as ignorance. I beg your pardon!" [Pg 76]

"It was a very unhappy affair altogether," says Don Juan.

"Very unfortunate indeed, from what I have heard."

"*More* than unfortunate!—right down disgraceful!" says the squire, with such unlooked-for energy as raises astonishment in the breast of his nephew. ("By Jove, one would think the old chap had only now awakened to a sense of his misconduct," he thinks, irreverently.)

"Oh, well," he says, leniently, "hardly *that*, you know."

"*Quite* that," emphatically.

"It has been often done before: yours is not a solitary case."

"Solitary or not, there were elements about it inexcusable," says the old squire, beating his hand upon the table as though to emphasize his words.

"I wouldn't take it so much to heart if I were you," says Brian, who is really beginning to pity him.

"It has lain on my heart for twenty years. I can't take it off now," says the squire.

"You have evidently suffered," returns Brian, who is getting more and more amazed at the volcano he has roused. "Of course I can quite understand that if you were once more to find yourself in similar circumstances you would act very differently."

"I should indeed!—*very* differently. A man seldom makes a fool of himself twice in a lifetime."

("He's regretting her now," thinks Brian.)

But out loud he says,—

"You didn't show much wisdom, I daresay."

"No, none; and as for *her*,—to fling away such a love as that——" Here he pauses, and looks dreamily at the silver tankard before him.

This last speech rather annoys Brian; to gloat over the remembrance of a love that had been callously cast aside to suit the exigences of the moment, seems to the younger man a caddish sort of thing not to be endured.

("Though what the mischief any pretty girl of nineteen could have seen in *him*," he muses, gazing with ill-concealed amazement at his uncle's ugly countenance, "is more than I can fathom.")

"Perhaps it wasn't so deep a love as *you* imagine," he cannot refrain from saying *a propos* to his uncle's last remark, with a view to taking him down a peg. [Pg 77]

"It was, sir," says the Squire, sternly. "It was the love of a lifetime. People may doubt as they will, but I know *no* love has superseded it."

"Oh, he is in his dotage!" thinks Brian, disgustedly; and, rising from the table, he makes a few more trivial remarks, and then walks from the dining-room on to the balcony and so to the garden beneath.

Finding his friend Kelly in an ivied bower, lost in a cigar, and possibly, though improbably, in improving meditation, he is careful not to disturb him, but, making a successful detour, escapes his notice, and turns his face towards that part of Coole that is connected with Moyne by means of the river.

At Moyne, too, dinner has come to an end, and, tempted by the beauty of the quiet evening, the two old ladies and the children have strolled into the twilit garden.

There is a strange and sweet hush in the air—a stillness full of life—but slumberous life. The music of streams can be heard, and a distant murmur from the ocean; but the birds have got their heads beneath their wings, and the rising night-wind wooes them all in vain.

Shadows numberless are lying in misty corners; the daylight lingers yet, as though loath to quit us and sink into eternal night. It is an eve of "holiest mood," full of tranquillity and absolute calm.

> "It is that hour of quiet ecstasy,
> When every rustling wind that passes by
> The sleeping leaf makes busiest minstrelsy."

"You are silent, Priscilla," says Miss Penelope, glancing at her.

"I am thinking. Such an eve as this always recalls Katherine; and yesterday *that meeting*,—all has helped to bring the past most vividly before me."

"Ah, dear, yes," says Miss Penelope, regarding her with a furtive but tender glance. "How must *he* have felt, when he thought what grief he brought to her young life!"

"You are talking of mother?" asks Kit, suddenly, letting her large dark eyes rest on Miss Penelope's face, as though searching for latent madness there.

"Yes, my dear, of course." [Pg 78]

"He would not have dared so to treat her had her father been alive or had we been blessed with a brother," says Miss Priscilla, sternly. "He proved himself a dastard and a coward."

"Perhaps there was some mistake," says Monica, timidly, plucking a pale blossom and pretending to admire it.

"No, no. We believe he contracted an affection for some other girl, and for her sake jilted your mother. If so, retribution fit and proper followed on his perfidy, because he brought no wife later on to grace his home. Doubtless he was betrayed in his turn. That was only just."

"There seems to be reason in that conjecture," says Miss Penelope, "because he went abroad almost immediately. I saw him shortly before he left the country, and he was then quite a broken-down man. He must have taken his *own* misfortune greatly to heart."

"Served him right!" says Miss Priscilla, uncompromisingly. "He deserved no greater luck. Your mother suffered so much at his hands that she almost lost her health. I don't believe she ever got over it."

"Oh, yes, she did," says Terry, suddenly; "she got over it uncommonly well. We didn't know who Mr. Desmond was then, of course; but I know she used to make quite a joke of him."

"A joke!" says Miss Priscilla, in an awful tone.

"Yes, regular fun, you know," goes on Terence, undaunted. "One day she was telling father some old story about Mr. Desmond, a 'good thing' *she* called it, and she was laughing heartily; but he wasn't, and when she had finished, I remember, he said something to her about want of 'delicacy of feeling,' or something like that."

"I was there," says Kit, in her high treble. "He said, too, she ought to be ashamed of herself."

"Oh, that was nothing," says Mr. Beresford, airily. "Father and mother never agreed for a moment; they were always squabbling from the time they got up till they went to bed again."

The Misses Blake have turned quite pale.

"Terence how can you speak so of your sainted mother?" says Miss Penelope. "I'm sure, from her letters to us, she was a most *devoted* mother and wife, and, indeed, sacrificed her every wish and pleasure to yours."

"I never knew it cost her so much to *keep away* from us," says Terence. "If she was dying for our society, she must indeed have sacrificed herself, because she made it the business of her life to avoid us from morn to dewy eve." [Pg 79]

"Doubtless she had her duties," says Miss Penelope, in a voice of suppressed fear. What is she going to hear next? what are these dreadful children going to say?

"Perhaps she had," said Terence. "If so, they didn't agree with her, as she was always in a bad temper. She used to give it to papa right and left, until he didn't dare to call his soul his own. When I marry, I shall take very good care my wife doesn't lead me the life my mother led my father."

"*Your* wife! who'd marry *you*?" says Kit, scornfully, which interlude gives the discussion a rest for a little time. But soon they return to the charge.

"Your mother when here had an angelic temper," says Miss Penelope. Miss Priscilla all this time seems incapable of speech.

"Well, she hadn't when *there*," says Terence; and then he says a dreadful thing, as vulgar as it is dreadful, that fills his aunt's heart with dismay. "She and my father fought like cat and dog," he says; and the Misses Blake feel their cup is indeed full.

"And she never would take Monica anywhere," says Kit; "so selfish!"

It is growing *too* terrible. Is their idol to be shattered thus before their eyes?

"Monica, was your mother *unkind* to you?" says Miss Penelope, in a voice full of anguish. After all these years, is the Katherine of their affections to be dragged in the dust?

Monica hesitates. She can see the grief in her aunt's face, and cannot bear to add to it. The truth is that the late Mrs. Beresford had *not* been beloved by her children, for reasons which it will be possible to conceive, but which would be tiresome to enumerate here. Perhaps there seldom had been a more careless or disagreeable mother.

So Monica pauses, flushes, glances nervously from right to left, and then back again, and finally rests her loving, regretful eyes full upon Miss Penelope's agitated face.

Something she sees there decides her. Sinking to her knees, she flings her arms around the old lady's neck, and lays her cheek to hers.

"I will say nothing, but that I am happy *here*," she says, in a low whisper.

Miss Penelope's arms close round her. The worst has come to her; yet there is solace in this clinging embrace, and in the dewy lips that seek hers. If she has lost one idol, who can say she has not gained another, and perhaps a worthier one? [Pg 80]

Yet beyond doubt the two old ladies have sustained a severe shock: they hold down their heads, and for a long time avoid each other's eyes, as though fearing what may there be seen.

"Let us walk round the garden, Aunt Priscilla," says Monica, feeling very sorry for them. "The evening is lovely, and the roses so sweet."

"Come then," says Miss Priscilla, who is perhaps glad to escape from her own thoughts. And so they all wander to and fro in the pretty garden, bending over this flower and lingering over that in a soft, idle sort of enjoyment that belongs alone to the country.

Terence had disappeared, but, as he is not great on flowers, his presence is not indispensable, and no one takes any notice of his defection.

Presently they come upon the old gardener, who is also the old coachman, upon his bended knees beside a bed. The whole garden is scrupulously raked and scrupulously weeded till not a fault can be found. But Miss Priscilla is one of those who deem it necessary always to keep a servant up to his trumps.

Stooping over the bed, therefore, she carefully adjusts her glasses upon her nose, and proceeds to examine with much minuteness the earth beneath her. A tiny green leaf attracts her notice.

"Corney, is that a *weed*?" she asks, severely. "I certainly remember sowing some seeds in this place; but *that* has a weedy look."

"It's seeds, miss," says Corney, "Ye'd know it by the curl of it."

"I hope so, I *hope* so," says Miss Priscilla, doubtfully, "but there's a common cast about it. It reminds me of groundsel. Corney, whatever you do, don't grow careless."

"Faix, I'm too ould a hand for that, miss," says Corney. "But, to tell the truth, I think myself, now, not to desaive ye, that the leaf ye mentioned is uncommon like the groundsel. You ought to be proud of yer eyes, Miss Priscilla; they're as clear as they were twinty years ago."

Greatly mollified by this compliment, Miss Priscilla declines to scold any more, and, the groundsel forgotten, moves onward to a smooth piece of sward on which a cartload of large white stones from the seashore has been ruthlessly thrown. [Pg 81]

"What is this?" she says, indignantly, eying the stones with much disfavor. "Corney, come here! Who flung those stones down on my green grass?"

"The rector, miss. He sent his man wid a load of 'em, and 'tis there they left 'em."

"A most unwarrantable proceeding!" says Miss Priscilla, who is in her managing mood. "What did Mr. Warren mean by that?"

"Don't you think it was kind of him to draw them for our rookery, my dear Priscilla?" says Miss Penelope, suggestively.

"No, I don't," says Miss Priscilla. "To bring cartloads of nasty large stones and fling them down upon my velvet grass on which I pride myself (though *you* may think nothing of it, Penelope) is *not* kind. I must say it was anything but nice,—anything but gentlemanly."

"My dear, he is quite a gentleman, and a very good man."

"That may be. I suppose I am not so uncharitable as to be rebuked for every little word; but to go about the country destroying people's good grass, for which I paid a shilling a pound, is *not* gentlemanly. Katherine, what are you laughing at?"

"At the stones," says Kit.

"There is nothing to laugh at in a stone. Don't be silly, Katherine. I wonder, Monica, you don't make it the business of your life to instil some sense into that child. The idea of standing still to laugh at a *stone*."

"Better do that than stand still to *cry* at it," says the younger Miss Beresford, rebelliously. Providentially, the remark is unheard; and Monica, scenting battle in the breeze, says, hastily,—

"Do you remember the roses at Aghyohillbeg, auntie? Well, I don't think any of them were as fine as this," pointing to a magnificent blossom near her. It is the truth, and it pleases Miss Priscilla mightily, she having a passion for her roses. And so peace is once more restored.

"It grows chilly," says Miss Penelope, presently.

"Yes; let us all go in," says Miss Priscilla.

"Oh, not yet, auntie; it is quite lovely yet," says Monica, earnestly. She cannot go in yet, not *yet*; the evening is still young, and—and she would like *so* much to go down to the river, if only for a moment. All this she says guiltily to herself.

"Well we old women will go in at least," says Miss Penelope. "You two children can coquet with the dew for a little while; but don't stay too long, or sore throats will be the result." [Pg 82]

"Yes, yes," says Miss Priscilla, following her sister. As she passes Monica, she looks anxiously at the girl's little slight fragile figure and her slender throat and half-bared arms.

"That dress is thin. Do not stay out too long. Take care of yourself, my darling." She kisses her pretty niece, and then hurries on, as though ashamed of this show of affection.

A little troubled by the caress, Monica moves mechanically down the path that leads towards the meadows and the river, followed by Kit. By this time the latter is in full possession of all that happened yesterday,—at least so much of it as relates to Monica's acquaintance with Mr. Desmond (minus the tender passages), his uncle's encounter with her aunts, and Brian's subsequent dismissal. Indeed, so much has transpired in the telling of all this that Kit, who is a shrewd child, has come to the just conclusion that the young Mr. Desmond is in love with her Monica!

Strange to say, she is not annoyed at his presumption, but rather pleased at it,—he being the first live lover she has ever come in contact with, and therefore interesting in no small degree.

Now, as she follows her sister down the flowery pathway, her mind is full of romance, pure and sweet and great with chivalry, as a child's would be. But Monica is sad and taciturn. Her mind misgives her, conscience pricks her, her soul is disquieted within her.

What was it she had promised Aunt Priscilla yesterday? Aunt Priscilla had said, "For the future you will remember this?" and she had answered, "Yes."

But how can she forget? It was a foolish promise, for who has got a memory under control?

Of course, Aunt Priscilla had meant her to understand that she was never to speak to Mr. Desmond again, and she had given her promise in the spirit. And of course she would be obedient; she would at least so far obey that she would not be the first to speak to him, nor would she seek him—nor——But why, then, is she going to the river? Is it because the evening is so fine, or is there no lurking hope of——

And, after all, what certainty is there that—that—any one will be at the river at this hour? And even if they should be, why need she speak to him? she can be silent; but if he speaks to her,

what then? Can she refuse to answer?

Her mind is as a boat upon a troubled sea, tossed here and there; but by and by the wind goes down, and the staunch boat is righted, and turns its bow toward home. [Pg 83]

"Kit, do not let us go to the river to-night," she says, turning to face her sister in the narrow path.

"But why? It is so warm and light, and such a little way!"

"You have been often there. Let us turn down this side of the meadow, and see where it will lead to."

That it leads directly away from Coole there cannot be the least doubt; and the little martyr treading the ground she would not, feels with an additional pang of disappointment that the fulfilment of her duty does not carry with it the thrill of rapture that ought to suffuse her soul. No, not the faintest touch of satisfaction at her own heroism comes to lighten the bitter regret she is enduring as she turns her back deliberately on the river and its chances. She feels only sorrow, and the fear that *some one* will think her hard-hearted, and she could cry a little, but for Kit and shame's sake.

"Monica, who is that?" exclaims Kit, suddenly, staring over the high bank, beside which they are walking, into the field beyond. Following her glance, Monica sees a crouching figure on the other side of this bank, but lower down, stealing cautiously, noiselessly, towards them, as though bent on secret murder. A second glance betrays the fact that it is Terence, with—yes, most positively with a *gun*!

"Where on earth did he get it?" says Kit; and, unable to contain her curiosity any longer, she scrambles up the bank, and calls out, "Terry, here we are! Come here! Where did you get it?" at the top of her fresh young lungs.

As she does so, a little gray object, hitherto unseen by her, springs from among some green stuffs, and, scudding across the field into the woods of Coole beyond, is in a moment lost to view.

"Oh, *bother*!" cries Terry, literally dancing with rage; "I wouldn't *doubt* you to make that row just when I was going to fire. I wish to goodness you girls would stay at home, and not come interfering with a fellow's sport. You are always turning up at the wrong moment, and just when you're not wanted!—indeed you *ever are*!"

These elegant and complimentary remarks he hurls at their heads, as though with the wish to annihilate them. But they haven't the faintest effect: the Misses Beresford are too well accustomed to his eloquence to be dismayed by it. They treat it, indeed, as a matter of course, and so continue their inquiries uncrushed. [Pg 84]

"Terry, where *did* you get this gun?" asks Monica, as breathless with surprise as Kit. "Is it"—fearfully—"*loaded*? Oh! don't!—don't point it this way! It will surely go off and kill somebody."

Here she misses her footing and slips off the high bank, disappearing entirely from view, only to reappear again presently, flushed but uninjured.

"What a lovely gun!" says Kit, admiringly.

"Isn't it?" says Terence, forgetting his bad temper in his anxiety to exhibit his treasure. "It's a breech-loader, too; none of your old-fashioned things, mind you, but a reg'lar good one. I'll tell you who lent it to me, if you'll promise not to peach."

"We won't," says Kit, who is burning with curiosity.

"Guess, then."

"Bob Warren?" says Monica. Bob Warren is the rector's son, and is much at Moyne.

"Not likely! Pegs above *him*. Well, I'll tell you. It's that fellow that's spoons on you,"—with all a brother's perspicacity,—"the fellow who saw us on the hay-cart,"—Monica writhes inwardly,—"Desmond, you know!"

"The enemy's nephew?" asks Kit, in a thrilling tone, that bespeaks delight and a malicious expectation of breakers ahead.

"Yes. I was talking to him yesterday, early in the day, at Madam O'Connor's; and he asked me was I your brother, Monica, to which I pleaded guilty, though," with a grin, "I'd have got out of it if I could; and then he began to talk about shooting, and said I might knock over any rabbits I liked in Coole. I told him I had no gun, so he offered to lend me one. I thought it was awfully jolly of him, considering I was an utter stranger, and that; but he looks a real good sort. He sent over the gun this morning by a boy, and I have had it hidden in the stable until now. I thought I'd never get out of that beastly garden this evening."

"Oh, Terence, you shouldn't have taken the gun from him," says Monica, flushing. "Just think what Aunt Priscilla would say if she heard of it. You know how determined she is that we shall have no intercourse with the Desmonds."

"Stuff and nonsense!" says Mr. Beresford. "I never heard such a row as they are forever making about simply *nothing*. Why, it's quite a common thing to jilt a girl, nowadays. I'd do it myself in a minute." [Pg 85]

"You won't have time," says Kit, contemptuously. "She—whoever she may be—will be sure to jilt *you* first."

"Look here," says Terence, eyeing his younger sister with much disfavor; "you're getting so precious sharp, you know, that I should think there'll be a conflagration on the Liffey before long; and I should think, too, that an outraged nation would be sure to fling the cause of it into the flames. So take care."

"Terence, you ought to send that gun back *at once*," says Monica.

"Perhaps I ought, but certainly I shan't," says Terence, genially. "And if I were you," politely, "I wouldn't make an ass of myself. There is quite enough of that sort of thing going on up there," indicating, by a wave of his hand, the drawing-room at Moyne, where the Misses Blake are at present dozing.

"You shouldn't speak of them like that," says Monica; "it is very ungrateful of you, when you know how kind they are, and how fond of you."

"Well, I'm fond of them, too," says Terence, remorsefully but gloomily; "and I'd be even fonder if they would only leave me alone. But they keep such a look-out on a fellow that sometimes I feel like cutting the whole thing and making a clean bolt of it."

"If you ran away you would soon be wishing yourself back again," says Monica, scornfully. "You know you will have no money until you are twenty-one. People pretend to be discontented, at times, with their lives; but in the long run they generally acknowledge 'there is no place like home.'"

"No, thank goodness, there isn't," says Terence, with moody fervor. "I'll acknowledge it at once, without the run. To have frequent repetitions of it would be more than human nature could endure. I have known two homes already; I should think a third would be my death."

So saying, he shoulders the forbidden gun and marches off.

Monica and Kit, getting down from their elevated position, also pursue their path, which leads in a contrary direction.

"Monica," says Kit, presently, slipping her slender brown fingers through her sister's arm, "what did Terry mean just now, when he spoke about some one being 'spoons' on you? Does that mean being in love with you?" [Pg 86]

No answer.

"Is Mr. Desmond, then, in love with you?"

No answer.

"*Is* he?"

"Oh, Kit, how can I answer such a question as that?"

"In words, I suppose. *Is* he in love with you?"

"I don't know," says Monica, in a troubled tone. "If I ever had a lover before, I should *know*; but ——"

"That means he is," says the astute Kit. "And I'm sure," with a little loving squeeze of her arm, "I don't wonder at it."

"You must not say that," says Monica, earnestly. "Indeed, he said a few *things* to me, but that is nothing; and——"

"You think he *likes* you?"

"Yes," reluctantly.

"I believe he adores the very ground you walk on."

"Oh, no, indeed."

"If you say that, he *isn't* a real lover. A real one, to my mind, ought to be ready and willing to kiss the impressions your heels may make in the earth."

"That would be the act of a fool; and Mr. Desmond is not a fool."

"Ergo, not a lover. And yet I think he is *yours*. Monica," coaxingly, "did he say any pretty things to you?"

"What should he say? I only met him twice."

"You are prevaricating," gazing at her severely. "Why don't you answer me honestly?"

"I don't know what *you* call 'pretty things.'"

"Yes, you do. Did he tell you your eyes were *deep, deep* wells of love, and that your face was full of soul?"

"No, he did not," says Monica, somewhat indignantly; "*certainly* not. The idea!"

"Well, that is what Percival said to the girl *he* loved in the book I was reading yesterday," says Kit, rather cast down.

"Then I'm very glad Mr. Desmond isn't like Percival."

"I daresay he is nicer," says Kit, artfully. Then she tucks her arm into her sister's, and looks fondly in her face. "He must have said *something* to you," she says. "Darling love, why won't you tell your own Kitten all about it?"

A little smile quivers round Monica's lips. [Pg 87]

"Well, I will, then," she says. In her heart I believe she is glad to confide in somebody, and why not in Kit the sympathetic? "First, he made me feel he was delighted to meet me again. Then he asked me to go for a walk *alone* with him; then he said he was—my lover!"

"Oh!" says Kit, screwing up her small face with delight.

"And then he asked me to meet him again to-day with *you*."

"With *me*! I think that was very delicate of him." She is evidently flattered by this notice of her existence. Plainly, if not *the* rose in his estimation, she is to be treated with the respect due to the rose's sister. It is all charming! she feels wafted upwards, and incorporated, as it were, in a real love affair. Yes, she will be the guardian angel of these thwarted lovers.

"And what did you say?" she asks, with a gravity that befits the occasion.

"I refused," in a low tone.

"To meet him?"

"Yes."

"With *me*?" says this dragon of propriety.

"Yes."

"But why?"

"Because of Aunt Priscilla." And then she tells her all about Aunt Priscilla's speech in the carriage, and her reply to it.

"I never heard such a rubbishy request in my life!" says the younger Miss Beresford, disdainfully. "It is really beneath notice. And when all is told it means nothing. As *I* read it, it seems you have only promised to forget you ever spoke to Mr. Desmond: you haven't promised never to speak to him again." Thus the little Jesuit.

"That was not what Aunt Priscilla meant."

"If she meant anything, it was folly. And, after all, what is this dreadful quarrel between us and the Desmonds all about? It lives in Aunt Priscilla's brain. I'll tell you what I think, Monica. I think Aunt Priscilla was once in love with old Mr. Desmond, and mother cut her out; and now, just because she has been disappointed in her own love-affair, she wants to thwart you in yours."

"She doesn't, indeed. Any one but Mr. Desmond might show me attention, and she would be pleased. She was quite glad when Mr. Ryde—well—when he made himself agreeable to me." [Pg 88]

"From all you told me of him, he must have made himself *dis*-agreeable. I'm perfectly certain I should hate Mr. Ryde, and I'm equally sure I should like Mr. Desmond. What did he say to you, darling, when you refused to meet him even with *me*?" She lays great stress on this allusion to herself.

"He said I might do as I chose, but that he would meet me again, whether I liked it or not, and *soon*!"

"Now, that's the lover for *me*!" says Kit, enthusiastically. "No giving in, no shilly-shallying, but downright determination. He's an honest man, and we all know what an honest man is,—'the noblest work of God.' I'm certain he will keep his word, and I do hope I shall be with you when next you meet him, as I should like to make friends with him."

At this moment it occurs to Monica that she never before knew how very, *very* fond she is of Kit.

"Oh, well, I don't suppose I *can* see him again for ever so long," she says. But even as the words pass her lips she knows she does not mean them, and remembers with a little throb of pleasure that he had said he would see her again *soon*. *Soon!* why, that might mean this evening,—now,—*any* moment! Instinctively she lifts her head and looks around her, and there, just a little way off, is a young man coming quickly towards her, bareheaded and in evening dress.

"I told you how it would be," says Kit, in a nervous whisper, taking almost a bit out of poor Monica's arm in her excitement. "Oh, when I have a lover I hope he will be like *he*."

Her grammar has gone after her nerve.

Monica is silent: some color has gone from her cheeks, and her heart is beating faster. It is her

very first *affaire*, so we must forgive her: a little frightened shadow has fallen into her eyes, and altogether she looks a shade younger than usual: she is troubled in spirit, and inclined to find fault with the general management of things.

After all, she might as well have gone to the river this evening for what good her abstinence has done her: the poverty of our strength to conquer faith and the immutability of its decrees fills her with consternation and a fretful desire for freedom. Yet above and beyond all these vain imaginings is a gladness and a pride that her power is strong enough to draw her lover to her side in spite of all difficulties.

The bareheaded young man has come up to her by this time, and is holding out his hand: silently she lays her own in it, and colors treacherously as his fingers close on hers in a close, tender, and possessive fashion. [Pg 89]

"I found the river too chilly," he says, smiling, "so I came on here. Having been unsuccessful all the afternoon and morning, I *knew* I should find you *now*."

This might be hieroglyphics to others, but is certainly English to her, however she may pretend otherwise; she doesn't pretend much, to do her justice.

"This is your sister?" goes on Desmond, looking at Kit, who is regarding him with an eye that is quite a "piercer."

"Yes," says Monica. "Kit, this is Mr. Desmond."

"I know that," says this *enfant terrible*, still fixing him with a glance of calm and searching scrutiny that is well calculated to disconcert even a bolder man. Then all at once her mind seems made up, and, coming forward, she holds out her hand, and says, "How d'ye do?" to him, with a sudden, rare sweet smile that convinces him at once of her sisterhood to Monica.

"We are friends?" he says, being attracted to the child for her own grace alone, as well as for the charm of her relationship to the pale snowdrop of a girl beside her.

"Yes. If you prove true to my Monica."

"Oh, Kit!" says Monica, deeply shocked; but Kit pays no heed, her eyes being fastened gravely upon the man before her. He is quite as grave as she is.

"If our friendship depends upon that, it will be a lasting one," he says, quietly. "My whole life is at your sister's service."

Something in his tones touches Monica: slowly she lifts her eyes until they reach his.

"I wish, I *wish* you would not persist in this," she says, sadly.

"But why? To think of you is my chiefest joy. Do you forbid me to be happy?"

"No—but—"

"In the morning and the afternoon I went to the river, to look for you—in vain; after dinner I went too, still hoping against hope; and now at last that I *have* found you, you are unkind to me!" He speaks lightly, but his eyes are earnest. "Miss Katherine," he says appealingly to Kit, "of your grace, I pray you to befriend me."

"Monica would not go to the river this evening because she remembered an absurd promise she made to Aunt Priscilla, and because she feared to meet you there. It is the most absurd promise in the world: wait till you hear it." Whereupon Kit, who is in her element, proceeds to tell him all about Miss Priscilla's words to Monica, and Monica's answer, and her (Kit's) interpretation thereof. "She certainly didn't promise never to speak to you again," concludes she, with a nod Solomon might have envied. [Pg 90]

Need it be said that Mr. Desmond agrees with her on all points?

"There is no use in continuing the discussion," says Monica, turning aside a little coldly. "I should not have gone to the river, *anyway*."

This chilling remark produces a blank indescribable, and conversation languishes: Monica betrays an interest in the horizon never before developed; Mr. Desmond regards with a moody glance the ripening harvest; and Kit, looking inward, surveys her mental resources and wonders what it is her duty to do next.

> "For aught that ever I could read,
> Could ever hear by tale or history,
> The course of true love never did run smooth."

This much she knows; and to any one blessed with a vision sharp as hers it is very apparent now that there is a roughness somewhere. She knows too, through many works of fiction, that those in attendance on loving couples should at certain seasons see cause to absent themselves from their duty, and search for a supposititious handkerchief or sprain an unoffending ankle, or hunt diligently in hedgerows for undiscoverable flowers. Three paths therefore lie open to her; which to adopt is the question. To return to the house for a handkerchief would be a decidedly risky affair, calculated to lead up to stiff and damning cross-examination from the aunts, which might prove painful; to sprain an ankle might prove even painfuller; but to dive into the innocent

hedgerow for the extraction of summer flowers, what can be more effectual and reasonable? she will do it at once.

"Oh, what lovely dog-roses!" she says, effusively, in a tone that wouldn't have deceived a baby; "I really *must* get some."

"Let me get them for you," says Desmond, gloomily, which she at once decides is excessively stupid of him, and she doing all she can for him too! She tries to wither him with a glance, but he is too miserable to be lightly crushed.

"No, thank you," she says; "I prefer getting them myself. Flowers are like fruit, much more enjoyable when you pick them with your own hands." [Pg 91]

So saying, this accomplished gooseberry skips round the corner, leaving Monica and Mr. Desmond *tete-a-tete*.

That they enjoy their sudden isolation just at first is questionable: Monica discovers blots on the perfect horizon; and Mr. Desmond, after a full minute's pause, says, reproachfully,—

"You didn't *really* mean that, did you?"

"Mean what?" uncompromisingly, and without changing position.

"That even if matters had been quite—quite comfortable with us, you would not have gone to meet me at the river?"

"I don't know," in a low tone.

"*Say* you didn't mean it."

"I—suppose I didn't," even lower.

"Look at me, then," says Mr. Desmond.

Kit, in her high, sweet voice, is warbling that little, pretty thing about a "lover and his lass," in the next field. The words of her song, and its silly refrain of

> "A hey, and a ho, and a hey nonino,"

come to them across the corn and scented meadow. Monica, with her hand in his, smiles faintly.

"You hear what she sings,—'that life is but a flower:' is it wise, then, to set your heart upon——"

"You?"

"I meant, an impossibility."

"Which you are *not*. You shall not be. I don't believe in impossibilities, to begin with; and, even if it were so, I should still prefer to be unwise."

"You are defiant," she says, lightly; but her smile is still very sad.

"I have hope. 'Affection's ground is beyond time, place, and all mortality,' as we read. I shall conquer yet; yes, even *your* prejudices. In the mean time, give me fair play; do not harden your heart against me."

"I wish mine was the only hard heart you had to contend against," returns she, with a faint sigh. But this remark seems to drop so carelessly from her lips that, though elated by it, he is afraid to take any open notice of it.

"I hope your aunts were not cross to you last evening on my account?" he says, anxiously. [Pg 92]

"No. Nothing was said, more than Kit told you, except that Aunt Priscilla touched upon the point of introduction. Oh, what a fright I got then! If she had persisted in her inquiries, what *would* have become of me?"

"Couldn't you have——" began Mr. Desmond, and then stops abruptly. A glance at the face uplifted to his checks his half-uttered speech effectually, and renders him, besides, thoroughly ashamed of himself.

"If I had to confess there had been *no* introduction," goes on Monica, laughingly, "I don't know what would have been the result."

"The deluge, I suppose," returns her companion thoughtfully.

"What a pity you have an uncle at all!" says Monica, presently. "It would be all right only for him." She omits to say *what* would be all right, but the translation is simple.

"Oh, don't say that," entreats Desmond, who has a wholesome affection for the old gentleman above at Coole. "He is the kindest old fellow in the world. I think, if you knew him, you would be very fond of him; and I know he would adore *you*. In fact, he is so kind-hearted that I cannot think how all that unfortunate story about your mother ever came about. He looks to me as if he couldn't say 'Bo to a goose' where a woman was concerned and yet his manner to-night confirmed everything I heard."

"He confessed?" in a deeply interested tone.

"Well just the same thing. He seemed distressed about his own conduct in the affair, too. But his manner was odd, I thought: and he seems as much at daggers drawn with your aunts as they with him."

"That is because he is ashamed of himself. One is always hardest on those one has injured."

"But that is just it," says Mr. Desmond, in a puzzled tone. "I don't believe, honestly, he is a bit ashamed of himself. He *said* a good deal about his regret, but I could see he quite gloried in his crime. And, in fact, I couldn't discover the smallest trace of remorse about him."

"He must really be a very bad old man," says Monica, severely. "I am perfectly certain if he were *my* uncle I should not love him at all."

"Don't say that. When he *is* your uncle you will see that I am right, and that he is a very lovable old man, in spite of all his faults."

At this Monica blushes a little, and twirls her rings round her slender fingers in an excess of shyness, and finally, in spite of a stern pressure laid upon herself, gives way to mirth. [Pg 93]

"What are you laughing at now?" asks he laughing too.

"At you," casting a swift but charming glance at him from under her long lashes. "You *do* say such funny things!"

"Did you hear there is to be an afternoon dance at the Barracks next week?" asks he presently. "I was at Clonbree on Thursday, and Cobbett told me about it."

"Who is Cobbett?"

"The captain there, you know. He was at Aghyohillbeg yesterday. Didn't you see him,—a little, half-starved looking man, with a skin the color of his hair, and both gray?"

"Oh, of course—now I remember him," says Monica, this fetching description having cleared her memory. "I thought to myself how odd he and the other man, Mr. Ryde, looked together, one as big as the other was little."

"I think there is more matter than brains about Ryde," says Desmond, contemptuously. "Do you think your aunt will let you go to this dance at Clonbree?"

"Oh, no; I am *sure* not. My aunts would be certain to look upon a dance in the Barracks as something too awfully dissipated."

"For one reason I should be glad you didn't go."

"Glad?" opening her eyes.

"Yes. That fellow Ryde never took his eyes off you yesterday."

"Is *that* a crime?"

"In my eyes, *yes*."

"And you would wish me to be kept a prisoner at home just because one man looked at me?"

"I don't want any one to look at you but me!" Then he comes a little closer to her and compels her, by the very strength of his regard, to let her eyes meet his. "Do you like Ryde?" he asks, somewhat imperiously. "Monica, answer me."

It is the second time he has called her by her Christian name, and a startled expression passes over her face.

"Well, he was nice to me," she says, with a studied hesitation that belongs to the first bit of coquetry she has ever practised in her life. She has tasted the sweetness of power, and, fresh as her knowledge is she estimates the advantage of it to a nicety.

"I believe a man has only to be six feet one to have every woman in the world in love with him," says Desmond, wrathfully, who is only five feet eleven. [Pg 94]

"I am not exactly in *love* with Mr. Ryde," says Monica, sweetly, with averted face and a coy air, assumed for her companion's discomfiture; "but——"

"But *what*?"

"But, I was going to say, there is nothing remarkable in that, as I am not in love with *any one*, and hope I never shall be. I wonder where Kit can have gone to: will you get up there, Mr. Desmond, and look?" Breaking off a tiny blade of grass from the bank near her, she puts it between her pretty teeth, and slowly nibbles it with an air of utter indifference to all the world that drives Mr. Desmond nearly out of his wits.

Disdaining to take any heed of her "notice to quit," and quite determined to know the worst, he says, defiantly,—

"If you *do* go to this dance, may I consider myself engaged to you for the first waltz?" There is

quite a frown upon his face as he says this; but it hasn't the faintest effect upon Monica. She is not at all impressed, and is, in fact enjoying herself immensely.

"If I go, which is more than improbable, I shall certainly not dance with you at all," she says, calmly, "because Aunt Priscilla will be there too, and she would not hear of my doing even a mild quadrille with a Desmond."

"I see," with a melancholy assumption of composure. "All your dances, then, are to be reserved for Ryde."

"If Mr. Ryde asks me to dance, of course I shall not refuse."

"You mean to tell me"—even the poor assumption is now gone—"that you are going to give him *all* and me *none*?"

"I shall not give any one *all*: how can you talk like that? But I cannot defy Aunt Priscilla. It is very unkind of you to desire it. I suppose you think I should enjoy being tormented from morning till night all about you?"

"Certainly not. I don't want you to be tormented on any account, and, above all on mine," very stiffly. "To prevent anything of the kind, I shall not go to Cobbett's dance."

"If you choose to get into a bad temper I can't help you."

"I am *not* in a bad temper, and even if I were I have cause. But it is not temper will prevent my going to the Barracks."

"What then?"

"Why should I go there to be made miserable? *You* can go and dance with Ryde to your heart's content, but I shall spare myself the pain of seeing you. Did you say you wanted your sister? Shall I call her now? I am sure you must want to go home." [Pg 95]

"I don't," she says, unexpectedly; and then a little smile of conscious triumph wreathes her lips as she looks at him, standing moody and dejected before her. A word from her will transform him; and now, the day being all her own, she can afford to be generous. Even the very best of women can be cruel to their lovers.

"I don't," she says, "not *yet*. There is something I want to ask you first," she pauses in a tantalizing fashion, and glances from the grass she is still holding to him, and from him back to the grass again, before she speaks. "It is a question," she says then, as though reluctantly, "but you look so angry with me that I am afraid to ask it." This is the rankest hypocrisy, as he is as wax in her hands at this moment; but, though he knows it, he gives in to the sweetness of her manner, and lets his face clear.

"Ask me anything you like," he says, turning upon her now a countenance "more in sorrow than in anger."

"It isn't much," said Miss Beresford, sweetly, "only—what *is* your Christian name? I have been so *longing* to know. It is very unpleasant to be obliged to *think* of people by their surnames, is it not? so unfriendly!"

He is quite staggered by the excess of her geniality.

"My name is Brian," he says, devoutly hoping she will not think it hideous and so see cause to pass judgment upon it.

"Brian!" going nearer to him with half-shy eyes, and a little *riante* mouth that with difficulty suppresses its laughter. "How *pretty*! Brian," purposely lingering over it, "with an 'i' of course?"

"Yes."

"I'm so glad I know yours now!" says this disgraceful little coquette, with a sigh of pretended relief. "You knew mine, and that wasn't fair, you know. Besides,"—with a rapid glance that might have melted an anchorite and delivered him from the error of his ways,—"besides, I may want to call you by it *some* day, and then I should be at a loss."

Though by no means proof against so much friendliness, Mr. Desmond still continues to maintain an injured demeanor. Monica lays one little hand lightly on his arm.

"Won't you ask me to call you by it?" she says, with the prettiest reproach.

"Oh, Monica," says the young man, seizing her hand and pressing it against his heart, "you know your power; be merciful. Darling," drawing her still nearer to him, "I don't think you quite understand how it is with me; but, indeed, I love you with all my heart and soul." [Pg 96]

"But in such a little time, how can it be true?" says Monica, all her gayety turning into serious wonderment.

"'Love is a thing as any spirit free,'" quotes he, tenderly. "How shall one know when the god may come? It has nothing to do with time. I have seen you,—it little matters how often,—and now I love you. Dear heart, *try* to love me."

There is something in his manner both gentle and earnest. Impressed by it, she whispers softly,—

"I *will* try."

"And you will call me Brian?"

"Oh, no!—no, indeed!—not yet," entreats she, stepping back from him as far as he will allow her.

"Very well, not yet."

"And you will go to the Barracks for this dance?"

"I will do anything on earth you ask me. You know that too well, I fear, for my peace of mind."

"And you won't be angry with me if I don't dance with you there?"

"No. I promise that, too. Ah! here is Miss Kit coming,—and without the roses,—after all."

It is true she has no roses; she has, indeed, forgotten she even pretended to want them, and has been happy while away with her song and her own thoughts.

"I think, Monica, we ought, perhaps, to be thinking of coming home," she says, apologetically, yet with quite a motherly air. Has she not been mounting guard over and humoring these two giddy young people before her?

"Yes, I think so too;" and the goodness of Kit, and something else, strike her.

"If we are asked to this dance at Clonbree, and if we go, I should like Kit to go too," she says in a soft aside to Desmond, who says, "That is all right: I settled it with Cobbett yesterday," in the same tone; and then a little more energetically, as he sees the moments flying, he goes on, "Before you go, say one thing after me. It will be a small consolation until I see you again. Say, 'Brian, good-by.'"

"Good-by, Brian," she whispers, shyly, and then she draws her hand out of his, and, turning to the studiously inattentive Kit, passes her arm through hers.

"Good-by, Mr. Desmond! I trust we may soon meet again," says the younger Miss Beresford, with rather a grand air, smiling upon him patronizingly. [Pg 97]

"I hope so too," says Desmond, gravely, "and that next time you will graciously accord me a little more of your society."

Quite pleased with this delicate protest against her lengthened absence, Kit bows politely, and she and Monica take their homeward way.

Once Monica turns, to wave him a friendly adieu, and he can see again her soft, bare arms, her pretty baby-neck in her white dinner-gown, and her lovely, earnest eyes. Then she is gone, and her passing seems to him "like the ceasing of exquisite music," and nothing is left to him but the wailing of the rising night-wind, and the memory of a perfect girl-face that he knows will haunt him till he dies.

CHAPTER IX.

How Terry is put in the Dock—And how the two Misses Blake baffle expectation, and show themselves in their true colors.

Monica and Kit reach the house in breathless haste. It is far later than they imagined when lingering in happy dalliance in the flower-crowned field below, and yet not really late for a sultry summer evening. But the Misses Blake are fearful of colds, and expect all the household to be in at stated hours; and the Misses Beresford are fearful of scoldings, carrying, as they do, guilty hearts within their bosoms.

"Conscience makes cowards of us all;" and the late secret interview with Brian Desmond has lowered the tone of their courage to such an extent that they scarcely dare to breathe as they creep into their aunts' presence.

The lamps are lighting in the drawing-room as they enter, though the windows are open, and *Dies pater*, the all-great, is still victorious over *Nox*. The Misses Blake both start and look up as they come in, and show general symptoms of relief which is not reciprocated by the culprits. Mrs. Mitchell, the nurse, who has followed almost on their heels, stands in the doorway, with bayonets fixed, so to speak, seeing there is every chance of an engagement. It may be as well to remark here that Mitchell has not "got on" with the Misses Blake, having rooted opinions of her own not to be lightly laid aside. The Misses Blake's opinions have also a home in very deep soil, so that the "give-and-take" principle is not in force between them and the foreign nurse, as they term Jane Mitchell, though she was bred and born on Devonshire soil. [Pg 98]

"Mitchell," say the Misses Blake in confidence to each other, "is not altogether what one would desire in a servant assigned to the care of children. She is not *nice* in many ways; there is far too much of the fine lady about her," etc.

"H'elderly ladies as 'asn't been to the h'altar," says Mrs. Mitchell in confidence to cook, "can't be

supposed to know what is right and proper for motherless lambs." And so the war rages.

Just now Mrs. Mitchell is plainly on the defensive, and eyes her baby—as she still calls Kit (having nursed her)—with all the air of one prepared to rush in and rescue her by bodily force, should the worst come to the worst.

"My dear Monica, what a late hour to be abroad!" says Miss Priscilla, reproachfully. "The dew falling, too, which is most unwholesome. For you, Kit, a mere child, it is really destruction. Nurse, as you are *there*," regarding the bony Mitchell with distrust and disfavor, "I think it as well to let you know I do not think this is a proper time for Miss Katherine to be in the open air. It is far too late."

"It isn't late, miss. It is only nine o'clock."

"Nine o'clock! What is the woman thinking about? Nine! why, that means night?"

"Not at this time of the year, miss."

"At *any* time of year. With all the experience you *say* you have had, I wonder you do not consider it a most injurious hour for a child of Miss Katherine's age to be out of doors."

"I don't hold with making a child puny, miss. Coddling up, and that sort, only leads to consumptions and assmas, in my humble opingion."

"I must request that for the future you will show deference to *our* opinion, nurse; which is directly opposed to yours," says Miss Priscilla, straightening herself.

"I suppose I can manage my own young lady, miss," says Mitchell, undaunted, and now, indeed, thoroughly braced for conflict.

"I have grave doubts about that, Mitchell, and at least you should not answer me in this wise." [Pg 99]

"If I brought my young lady safely all the way from Jerusalem, miss, I suppose I can take care of her 'ere."

"Her ear?" questions Miss Priscilla, not meaning to be rude at all.

"She means *here*," says Miss Penelope, in a stage whisper.

"Oh!" says Miss Priscilla, rather shocked at her mistake, which has been accepted by Mitchell as a deliberate insult. "Katherine, go upstairs with Mitchell, and change your shoes and stockings; they *must* be damp."

"I don't consider Mitchell at all a nice person," says Miss Priscilla, when the door had closed upon that veteran; "but still I hope I did not offend her with that last thoughtless slip of mine. But really, over here in Ireland, we are not accustomed to the extraordinary language in which Mitchell indulges at times. She seems to me to be saving up her aspirates for a hypothetical dearth of that article in the future."

Miss Priscilla is so pleased with this long word that she quite recovers her temper.

"Certainly, from Jerusalem *is* a long way to bring a child," says Miss Penelope, thoughtfully; and, indeed, this journey from Palestine has been, and probably always will be, Mrs. Mitchell's trump card when disputing with the mistresses of Moyne.

Miss Priscilla has walked to the window, and is now gazing in thoughtful fashion over the fast darkening landscape. Perhaps her mind is travelling that long journey to Palestine, perhaps it is still occupied with the inimical Mitchell; be that as it may, she keeps her senses well about her, and a keen eye behind her spectacles, because presently she says aloud, in a tone calculated to attract attention,—

"*What* is that in the meadow, creeping along beneath the ha-ha, Katherine?"—Kit has returned with dry shoes and stockings;—"come here, your eyes are sharper than mine!" which is a distinct libel upon her own orbs.

"Where?" says Kit, recognizing the crouching form of Terry with a pang of terror. Is she to be compelled to inform upon her own brother? Perish the thought!

"Over *there*," says Miss Priscilla, in an awful tone, pointing to where the luckless Terence is crawling home in the fond belief that he is defying all detection; whereupon Kit, with much presence of mind, looks scrutinizingly in just the opposite direction. "It is somebody carrying a gun. Good gracious! it is remarkably like Terence!" [Pg 100]

At this Monica starts perceptibly, and lets the book she is holding fall heavily to the ground.

"Perhaps it is a poacher," says Kit, brightly, her general reading being deeply imbued with those characters.

"Perhaps," says Miss Priscilla, grimly. "Yet I feel sure it is your brother!" Then she throws wide the sash, and calls aloud to the culprit,—

"Terence! Terence, come here!"

At this, Mr. Beresford loses his presence of mind, and stands bolt upright, gun in hand: the words

have come to him distinctly across the soft green grass, and fallen upon his ears with dismal distinctness. Throwing up the sponge, he shoulders the offending weapon and marches upon the foe with head erect and banners flying. Even if death is before him (meaning the confiscation of the gun), he vows to himself he will still die game.

"Really, it *is* Terence," says Miss Penelope, as he approaches; "but where *can* he have got the gun?"

"I *know*!" says Miss Priscilla, whereupon Monica feels positively faint.

Feeling she is growing very pale, she rises hurriedly from her seat, and, going to the lower window, so stands that her face cannot be seen.

If Terence is cross-examined, will he tell a lie about the obtaining of the gun? And if he does *not*, what will happen? what dreadful things will not be said and done by Aunt Priscilla? Her breath comes quickly, and with horror she finds herself devoutly hoping that Terence on this occasion *will* tell a lie.

By this time Terence has mounted the balcony, and is standing in a somewhat defiant attitude before his inquisitors.

"Where have you been, Terence?" began Miss Priscilla.

"Shooting, aunt."

"And where did you get the gun, Terence?"

Silence.

"You certainly had no gun yesterday, and none this morning, as far as I can judge. Now we want the truth from you, Terence, but we do not wish to coerce you. Take time, and give us an answer your heart can approve."

Such an answer is evidently difficult to be procured at a moment's notice, because Terence is still dumb.

"I am afraid your nature is not wholly free from deceit, Terence," says Miss Priscilla, sadly. "This [Pg 101] hesitation on your part speaks volumes; and such unnecessary deceit, too. Neither your aunt Penelope nor I have any objection to your borrowing a gun if you find such a dangerous weapon needful to your happiness. But why not confide in us?"

"Is it possible she would not be really angry if she knew?" thinks Monica, breathlessly. I regret to say that both Kit and Terence take another view of Miss Blake's speech, and believe it an artful dodge to extract confession.

"I—" says Terence, to gain time, and because speech of some kind at this moment is absolutely necessary—"I didn't think——"

"Of *course* you didn't think, Terence, or you would not have recorded your poor aunts, in your secret thoughts, as hard-hearted and ungenerous. If you had told us openly that Mitson, the coast-guard, had lent you a gun (as I strongly suspect, and indeed felt sure from the first moment was the case), we should not have been at all angry, only naturally anxious that you should use an instrument of death with caution. But you have no confidence in us, Terence."

Intense relief fills the breasts of the three Beresfords. Remorse that the trusting nature of the old ladies should be so abused touches Monica keenly, but of the other two I must again declare with grief that they feel nothing but a sense of delivery from peril, and no contrition at all for their past suspicions.

"I thought you might be angry, aunt," says Terence. He is looking very dirty indeed, and his hands are grimy, and altogether even Monica cannot bring herself to feel proud of him. There is, too, a covert desire for laughter about him that exasperates her terribly.

"Not angry, my dear; only nervous. I hope you know how to load, and that. I remember a cousin of ours blowing off his first finger and thumb with a powder-horn."

"This is a breech-loader, auntie," says Monica, softly.

"Eh? One of those new-fangled things I have read of. Oh, well, my dear boy, I daresay there is more need for circumspection. Let me look at it. Ah! very handsome, indeed! I had no idea coast-guards were so well supplied; and yet I cling to the old guns that your grandfather used to use."

"Did you shoot anything?" asks Miss Penelope, who has grown quite interested, and regards Terence with a glance of pride. [Pg 102]

"Only one thrush," says Terence, drawing the dilapidated corpse from his pocket, "and a sparrow, and one rabbit I fired at and wounded mortally, I know, but it got away into its hole and I lost it."

"Rabbits!" says Miss Priscilla. "Am I to understand—nay, I hope I am *not* to understand—that you crossed the stile into Coole?"

"There are plenty of rabbits in our own wood," says Terence; "more than I could shoot. I am glad you don't object to my having the gun, auntie."

"I don't, my dear; but I wish you had been more ingenuous with us. Why now, Terence, *why* do you steal along a field with your back bent as though desirous of avoiding our observation, and with your gun *under* your coat, as if there was a policeman or a bailiff after you?"

"I was only trying to steal upon a crow, aunt."

"Well, that *may be*, my dear, but there are ways of doing things. And why put your gun *under* your coat? I can't think such a fraudulent proceeding necessary even with a crow. Now look here, Terence," illustrating his walk and surreptitious manner of concealing his gun beneath his coat, "*does* this look nice?"

"If I do it like *you*, auntie, it looks *very* nice," says Terence, innocently, but with a malevolent intention.

"What a pity you missed the rabbit, Terry!" says Monica, hurriedly.

"Oh, he is dead *now*, I'm certain; but I should have liked to bring him home. His leg was broken, and I chased him right through the rushes down below in the furze brake at Coole."

Sensation!

It is too late to redeem his error. "Murder wol out, that see we day by day," says Chaucer, and now, indeed, all the fat is in the fire. The two old ladies draw back from him and turn mute eyes of grief upon each other, while Kit and Monica stare with heavy reproach upon their guilty brother.

The guilty brother returns their glance with interest, and then Miss Priscilla speaks.

"So you went into Coole, after all," she says. "Oh, Terence!"

"I couldn't help it," says Terence, wrathfully. "I wasn't going to let the rabbit go for the sake of a mere whim."

"*A mere whim!*" Words fail me to convey Miss Priscilla's indignation. "Are you destitute of heart, [Pg 103]
boy, that you talk thus lightly of a family insult? Oh! shame, shame!"

"I'm very sorry if I have made you unhappy," says Terence, who is really a very good boy and fond. "I didn't mean it, *indeed*."

But Miss Priscilla appears quite broken-hearted.

"To dream of bringing a rabbit of Coole into this house!" she says, with quite a catch in her voice that brings Miss Penelope into prominent play.

"If, when you came to the stile that leads into Moyne," she says, "you had said to yourself, 'My good aunt, who loves me so dearly, would not wish me to enter this forbidden land,' you would, I *hope*, have paused, and come back here. But you did not. You went recklessly on, and trod upon ground where your foot is *unwelcome*."

"Dear Aunt Penelope, do not talk like that," says Monica, entreatingly, slipping her arm around her.

"And this to his poor old aunts who love him so fondly!" says Miss Penelope, in so dismal a voice that the two Misses Blake break into sobs.

"It wouldn't seem so bad if he hadn't equivocated about it," says Miss Priscilla, presently. "But he purposely led us to believe that he had not set his foot on that detested land."

"He has indeed been much to blame," says Miss Penelope. "Terence, what was it it said about *lying* in the Bible this morning? I am afraid your chapter to-day—that awful chapter about Ananias and Sapphira—did you little good."

A growl from Terence.

"He will be more careful for the future, auntie," says Monica, interpreting the growl after her own gentle fashion. "And now you will forgive him, won't you? After all, any one, even *you*, might forget about forbidden lands, if you were racing after a rabbit."

The idea of the Misses Blake racing through rushes and gorse after a rabbit strikes Kit as so comical that she forgets everything, and laughs aloud. And then the Misses Blake, who are not altogether without a sense of fun, catching "the humor of it," laugh too, and, drying their eyes, give Terence to understand that he is forgiven.

Just at this moment the door is opened, and Timothy enters, bearing not only an air of mystery with him, but a large envelope.

"Why, what is this at this time of night?" says Miss Priscilla, who is plainly under the impression that, once the lamps are lighted, it is verging on midnight. She takes the envelope from Timothy, [Pg 104]
and gazes at the huge regimental crest upon it with a judicial expression.

"A sojer brought it, miss. Yes, indeed, ma'am. A-hossback he come, all the way from the Barracks at Clonbree."

Redcoats at Rossmoyne are a novelty, and are regarded by the peasantry with mixed feelings of

admiration and contempt. I think the contempt is stronger with Timothy than the admiration.

"From the Barracks?" says Miss Priscilla, slowly, turning and twisting the letter between her fingers, while Monica's heart beats rapidly. It is, it *must* be the invitation; and what will be the result of it?

"Yes, indeed, miss. I asked him what brought him at this hour, ma'am; but he took me mighty short wid his answer, so I give up me questions."

Never having been able during fifty years to make up his mind whether his mistresses should be addressed as maidens or matrons, Timothy has compromised matters by putting a "miss" and a "ma'am" into every sentence he dedicates to them.

"Ah, an invitation from Captain Cobbett for Friday next—um—um—four to seven—um—um. All of us invited, even Kit," says Miss Priscilla, in a decidedly lively tone.

"Me! am I asked?" cries Kit, excitedly.

"Yes, indeed, you are specially mentioned. Very nice and attentive, I must say, of those young men, particularly when we have not shown them any kindness *as yet*. I thought that Mr. Ryde a very superior young fellow, with none of the discourteous antipathy to *age* that disfigures the manners of the youth of the present day. Penelope, my dear, perhaps you had better indite the answer to this. Yours is the pen of a ready writer."

"Very well," says Miss Penelope, rising slowly—Oh! *so* slowly! thinks Monica—and going towards the davenport.

"Is the soldier outside, Timothy?" asks Miss Priscilla.

"Yes, miss. He said he wanted a bit of writing from ye for the captain."

"It is a long ride. Take him downstairs, Timothy, and give him some beer, while Miss Penelope prepares a reply."

"Begging your pardon, miss, and with due respect to ye, ma'am, but he's that stiff in his manners, an' tight in his clothes, I doubt if he'd condescend to enter the kitchen."

"Timothy," says Miss Priscilla, with much displeasure, "you have been having hot words with this stranger. What is it all about?" [Pg 105]

"There's times, miss, as we all knows, when a worm will turn, and though I'm not a worm, ma'am, no more am I a coward, an' a red coat don't cover more flesh than a black; an' I'm an ould man, Miss Priscilla, to be called a buffer!"

It is apparent to every one that Timothy is nearly in tears.

"A buffer?" repeats Miss Priscilla, with dignity blended with disgust: she treats the word cautiously, as one might something noxious. "What is a buffer?"

Nobody enlightens her: though perhaps Terence might, were he not busily engaged trying to suppress his laughter behind a huge Japanese fan.

"Perhaps, Timothy," says Miss Priscilla, gravely, "as we all seem in ignorance about the real meaning of this extraordinary word, you are wrong in condemning it as an insult. It *may* be—er—a term of *endearment*."

At this Terence chokes, then coughs solemnly, and finally, lowering the fan, shows himself preternaturally grave, as a set-off against all suspicions.

"I wouldn't pin my faith to that, miss, if I was you," says Ryan, respectfully, but with a touch of the fine irony which is bred and born with his class in Ireland.

"Well, but as we cannot explain this word, Timothy, and you cannot, perhaps the best thing for you to do will be to go to the originator of it and ask *him* what he meant by it," says Miss Penelope, with quite astonishing perspicacity for *her*.

"Shure I did that same, miss. 'Twas the first thing I said to him, ma'am. 'What do ye mane, ye spalpeen, ye thief o' the world,' says I, 'by miscalling a dacent man out of his name like that?' says I. I gave him all that, miss, and a dale more, though I've forgotten it be now, for the Ryans was always famous for the gift o' the gab!"

"If you said all that to the poor marine, I think you gave him considerably more than you got," says Miss Penelope, "and so you may cry peace. Go down now, Timothy, and make it up with him over your beer."

Timothy, though still grumbling in an undertone death and destruction upon the hated Sassenach, retires duteously, closing the door behind him.

"Now, Penelope," says Miss Priscilla, with an air of relief, glancing at the pens and ink, at which Monica's heart fails her. She has no doubt whatever about the answer being a refusal, but a sad feeling that she dare make no protest renders her doubly sorrowful. [Pg 106]

"Dear me!" says Miss Penelope, leaning back in her chair with pen well poised between her fingers, and a general air of pleased recollection full upon her, "it sounds quite like old times—

doesn't it?—to be invited to the Barracks at Clonbree."

"Quite," says Miss Priscilla, with an amused smile.

"You remember when the Whiteboys were so troublesome, in our dear father's time, what life the officers stationed here then, threw into the country round. Such routs! such dances! such kettle-drums! You can still recollect Mr. Browne—can you not, Priscilla?—that fashionable young man!"

"*You* have the best right to remember him," returns Miss Priscilla, in a meaning tone. "It would be too ungrateful of you if you did not, considering what a life you led him."

And at this the two old ladies break into hearty laughter and shake their heads reproachfully at each other.

"You *know* you broke his heart," says Miss Priscilla.

"Tell us about it, auntie," says Kit, eagerly, who is always sympathetic where romance is concerned; but the old ladies only laugh the more at this, and Aunt Priscilla tells her how her Aunt Penelope was a very naughty girl in her time, and created havoc in the affections of all the young men that came within her reach.

All this delights Aunt Penelope, who laughs consumedly and makes feeble protest with her hands against this testimony.

"Poor fellow!" she says, sobering down presently, and looking quite remorseful. "It is unkind to laugh when his name is mentioned. He was killed in the Indian Mutiny, long afterwards, in a most gallant charge."

"Yes, indeed," says Miss Priscilla. "Well, well, things *will* happen. Go on with the answer now, Penelope, as the man is waiting and it is woefully late."

Monica trembles. But Kit starts into life.

"Oh, *don't* refuse, Aunt Priscilla!" she cries, darting from her seat and throwing her arms round Miss Blake's neck. "*Don't*, now! I do so *want* to go, when I have got my invitation, and all."

"But——" begins Miss Priscilla; whereupon Kit, tightening her hold on her neck, with a view to staying further objection, nearly strangles her.

"No 'buts,'" she says, entreatingly; "Remember how disappointed I was about Madam O'Connor's, and be good to me now." [Pg 107]

"Bless the child!" breaks out Miss Priscilla, having rescued her windpipe and so saved herself from instant suffocation by loosening Kit's arms, and then drawing the child down upon her knee. "What is she talking about? who is going to refuse anything? Penelope, accept at once,—*at once*, or I shall be squeezed to death!"

"Then you *will* go?" exclaims Monica, joining the group near the davenport, and turning brilliant eyes upon her aunts. "Oh, I am so glad!"

"Why, we are dying to see the inside of the Barracks again, your aunt Penelope and I, especially your aunt Penelope," says Miss Blake, with a sly glance at her sister, who is plainly expecting it, "because she has tender recollections about her last visit there."

"Oh, now, Priscilla!" says Miss Penelope, modestly, but with keen enjoyment of the joke. After which an acceptance of his kind invitation is written to Captain Cobbett, and borne to him by the destroyer of Timothy's peace.

CHAPTER X.

How Monica falls a prey to the green-eyed monster—How Mr. Kelly improves the shining hours—And how Brian Desmond suffers many things at the hands of his lady-love.

For the next few days the sun is conspicuous by its absence, and Jupiter Tonans, with all his noisy train, is abroad. There is nothing but rain everywhere and at all hours, and a certain chill accompanying it, that makes one believe (with "Elia," is it not?) that "a bad summer is but winter painted green."

The light is dimmed, the winds sigh heavily, all through these days, and on the hills around, "the hooded clouds, like friars, tell their beads in drops of rain."

But on Thursday evening it clears a little,—not sufficiently to allow one to wander happily through shrubbery or garden, but enough to augur well for the morrow, when the much longed for dance at the Barracks is due.

And, indeed, when Friday dawns all nature is glorious. O'er sea and land there floats a brightness indescribable, with no fleck or flaw upon its beauty. In every nook and glade and hollow is glad sunshine, and a soft rushing breeze that bids the heart rejoice, and uplift itself in joyous praise to the Great Power who calls the heavens His Throne. [Pg 108]

Birds are singing upon every bough, to give the day "good-morrow," and the small streamlets, swollen by past rains, are chanting loud but soft harmonies to the water-pixies, as they dash headlong towards the river down below.

"No tears
Dim the sweet look that Nature wears."

but rather a smile is on leaf, and flower, and waving bracken. And on Monica, too, as, with glad eyes and parted lips, she steps lightly into the shadow of the old porch at Moyne. No sweeter presence ever honored it. Leaning against one of the pillars, she steps forward, and gazes almost gratefully at the merry sunbeams, as they creep up in homage to her feet and then go swiftly back again.

She is dressed to-day in a pale blue batiste gown, that rivals in hue the delicate azure of the skies above her. Her large black hat is a mass of Spanish lace, her long gloves are of the same sombre shade, and so are her shoes, though relieved by buckles. With that smile upon her lips, and the subdued expectation in her eyes, she looks the personification of all that is tender, pure, and lovable.

"Are you ready?" asks Kit, joining her. "The carriage is coming round."

"Quite."

"All but your fan: where is that?"

"Ah! true; I forgot it. It must be on my table. I——"

"No, do not stir. I will get it for you. It would be a shame to send you on any errand that might destroy your present pose, you look so like a cloud, or a thing out of one of Kate Greenaway's books."

"It is very rude to call me a thing; it is disheartening, when I believed I was looking my best," says Monica, laughing. Somehow Kit's praises always please her.

Then the carriage does come round, and they all get into it, and start for their seven-miles drive, a very slow seven miles, at the end of which they find themselves in the small town of Clonbree, mounting the steep hill that leads to the Barracks, which are placed on almost unsavory eminence,—all the narrow streets leading up to them being lined with close cabins and tiny cabins that are anything but "sweets to the sweet." [Pg 109]

Entering the small barrack-yard and finding a door hospitably open, the Misses Blake go up a wooden staircase, and presently find themselves on the landing-place above, where they are welcomed effusively by Mr. Ryde, who is looking bigger and hotter and stouter than usual.

Captain Cobbett in the largest room—there are but two available in these rustic barracks—is trying vainly to find a comfortable corner for old Lady Rossmoyne, who is both deaf and stupid, but who, feeling it her duty to support on all occasions (both festive and otherwise) the emissaries of her queen, has accepted this invitation and is now heartily sorry for her loyalty.

She is sitting in durance vile upon a low chair, with a carpet seat and a treacherous nature, that threatens to turn upon her and double her up at any moment if she dare to give way to even the smallest amount of natural animation: so perforce the poor old woman sits still, like "patience on a monument smiling at grief," and that her own grief, too, which, of course, is harder to bear!

"*So* glad you've come! We were quite in despair about you; but better late than never, eh?" says Mr. Ryde to Monica, with a fat smile. There is rather much of "too solid flesh" about his face.

"I daresay," says Monica, very vaguely: she is looking anxiously round her, hoping, yet dreading to see Desmond.

In the next room can be heard the sound of music. "My Queen" is being played very prettily upon a piano by somebody. Dancing is evidently going on, and Monica, who adores it, feels her toes trembling in her shoes.

"May I have the pleasure of this?" says Mr. Ryde. "I've kept it for you all along, you know. If you tell me you have already given it away, I shall feel myself aggrieved indeed."

"Was there ever so silly a young man?" thinks Monica, and then she says aloud, "No, it is not promised," and lets him place his arm round her, and reluctantly mingles with the other dancers. To do him justice, he waltzed very well, this fat young marine, so it cannot be said that she has altogether a bad time, and she certainly feels a little glow of pleasure as she pauses presently to recover her breath.

As she does so, her eyes rest on Desmond. He, too, is dancing, and with Olga Bohun. He is whispering to his partner, who is whispering back to him in a somewhat pronounced fashion, and altogether he is looking radiantly happy, and anything but the disconsolate swain Monica has been picturing him to herself. He is smiling down at Olga, and is apparently murmuring all sorts [Pg 110] of pretty things into her still prettier ear, because they both look quite at peace with each other and all the world.

A pang shoots through Monica's heart. He can be as happy, then, with one pretty woman as with another! She by no means, you will see, depreciates her own charms. All he wants is to have

"t'other dear charmer away."

At this moment she encounters his eyes, and answers his glad stare of surprise with a little scornful lowering of her lids. After which, being fully aware that he is still watching her in hurt amazement, she turns a small, pale, but very encouraging face up to Ryde, and says, prettily,—

"You said I was late, just now. Was I?"

"Very. At least it seemed so to me," says Ryde with heavy adoration in his glance.

Feeling, rather than seeing, that Mr. Desmond has brought his fair companion to an anchor close behind her, Monica says, in a soft sweet voice,—

"I didn't *mean* to be late. No, indeed! I hurried all I could; but my aunts are slow to move. I was *longing* to be here, but they would make no haste."

"You *really* longed to be here?" asks he, eagerly. "Well, that *was* good of you! And now you have come you will be kind to me, won't you? You will give me all the dances you can spare?"

"That would be a great many," says she, laughing a little. "You might tire of me if I said yes to that. The fact is, I know nobody here, and *certainly* there is no one I care to dance with."

"You will have another tale to tell later on," returns he, gazing with unrepressed admiration at her charming face. "Before the avalanche of worshippers descends, promise me all the waltzes."

"Are my dances, then, so necessary to you?" with a swift upward glance.

"They are, at all events, the only ones I care for," returns he, clumsily, but heartily. "All the others will lie in the scale with duty."

"'Every subject's duty is the king's; but every subject's soul is his own,'" quotes Monica, lightly. "Why dance unless you wish it?"

"Because my soul is *not* my own," responds he, with a sigh. "I am bound to dance with every undanceable woman here to-day, or they will go home and revile me. You *ought* to be sorry for me if you aren't." [Pg 111]

"Well, I am," says Monica; "and so you shall have every waltz on the programme."

With this she lets him take her in his arms again, and float away with her to the strains of the waltz then playing, and far away from Desmond's jealous ears.

"Well, I had no idea it was in her," says Mrs. Bohun, in a breathless sort of manner, when Monica has quite vanished. "All that was meant for you, you know; and how *well* she did it!"

"But *why* should it be meant for me? What have I done that she should so ill use me?" says Desmond, also breathless. "And you speak of her as if you admired her and she ought to be praised for her conduct when you have just heard from my own lips how devotedly I am attached to her!"

"I cannot help admiring genius when I see it," says Olga, with a gay laugh. "She made up her mind—naughty little thing!—to make you miserable a minute ago, and—she succeeded. What can compare with success! But in very truth, Brian," tapping his arm familiarly with her fan (an action Monica notes from the other side of the room), "I would see you a victor too, and in this cause. She is as worthy of you as you of her, and a fig for one's cousins and sisters and aunts, when Cupid leads the way."

She has thrown up her head, and is looking full of spirit, when young Ronayne, approaching her, says, smiling,—

"This is our dance, I think, Mrs. Bohun?"

"Is it? So far so good!" She turns again to Brian:

"'Faint heart never won fair lady,'" she says, warningly.

"I cannot accuse myself of any feebleness of that sort," says Desmond, gloomily. "As you see, it all rests with her."

"Perhaps she is afraid of the family feud," says Olga, laughing. "One hears such a lot about this Blake-Desmond affair that I feel I could take the gold medal if examined about it. There!—what nonsense! Go and speak to her, and defy those dear old ladies at Moyne."

"You were talking about that pretty Miss Beresford?" says Ronayne, as Brian moves away.

"Yes. But, sir," archly, "dare you see beauty in any woman when I am by?"

"Oh that I could see you really jealous, and of *me*!" returns he, half sadly, looking at her with longing eyes. "If I thought I could make your heart ache for even one short minute, I should be the happiest man alive." [Pg 112]

"*Boy*, you mean! Oh, traitor! And would you have me miserable for your own gratification?"

"It would be for yours later on. For that one moment you would gain a slave forever."

"And unless I am wretched for that one moment, I cannot gain my slave?"

"You know the answer to that only too well," returns he, with so much fervor that she refuses to continue the discussion.

"Talking of jealousy," she says, lightly, with a glance at him, "it is the dream of my life to make Rossmoyne jealous,—to reduce him to absolute submission. He is so cold, so precise, so English, that it would be quite a triumph to drag him at one's chariot-wheels. Shall I be able to do it?" she turns up her charming face to his, as though in question. She is looking her very sweetest, and is tenderly aware of the fact; and, indeed, so is he.

"I suppose so," he says, in answer to her, but slowly and reproachfully.

"But I must have help," says Olga. "*Some* one must help me. You?—is it not?"

"I?" with strong emphasis. "What should I have to do with it?"

"Not much, yet I count upon you. Why, who do you think I am going to make him jealous about? Eh?"

"How should I know?"

"How shouldn't you? Why it is of you,—*you*!" with quite a delicious little laugh. "So you will have to dance round after me all day for the future until your mission is fulfilled, and try to look as if you *really* loved me."

"You have mistaken your man," says Ronayne, quietly: "you must get some one else to help you in this matter. It is not for me, even if I did not love you; I should scorn so low a task."

"Love is an idle word," she says, her eyes flashing.

"It may be—to some. But I tell you no man's heart is of so poor value that it can be flung hither and thither at any one's pleasure,—no, not even at the pleasure of the woman he adores. You will seek some more complaisant lover to be your dupe on this occasion. I decline the office."

"You forget how you speak, sir!" she says, proudly; yet even as she gives way to this angry speech a gleam of deepest admiration so lights her eyes that she is obliged to let her lids fall over them [Pg 113] to cover the tell-tales beneath; her breath comes and goes quickly.

Something like relief comes to her when Lord Rossmoyne, stretching his long neck round the curtain that half shields the cushioned recess of the window where they are sitting, says, with considerable animation, for him,—

"Ah! so I have found you, Mrs. Bohun."

"You have indeed, and in good time. I am pining in prison, but you have come to deliver me."

"If I may."

"Such a dreary little spot, is it not? I don't know what could have induced me to enter it."

"Ronayne possibly," says Rossmoyne, with an unpleasant smile.

"Oh, dear, no!" contemptuously: "I came here of my own free will. We all do foolish things at times, I have not danced this last because Mr. Ronayne prefers pleasant converse. I don't. I thought you would never come to seek me. What were you doing?"

"Hunting for you, and thinking every minute an hour. These curtains"—touching them—"were jealous of you, and sought to hide you."

"Well, don't be so long next time," she says, looking up at him with a smile that a little more pressure would make tender and laying her hand on his arm.

She moves away. Ronayne, drawing his breath somewhat savagely, sits down on the sill of the window and gazes blankly into the barrack-yard below. He has still her programme in his hand, and is crumpling it unconscionably, hardly knowing what he does. But, if disturbed in mind, it is always *such* a comfort to smash something, be it a piece of pasteboard or one's most intimate friend.

She had forgotten her card, probably, and now it is almost useless. Ronayne's heart is full of bitterness, and he tries to swear to himself that for the future he will cleanse his heart of this coquette, who cares no more for him—nay, far less—than she does for her little toy terrier. Yet, even as these stern resolves seek vainly to root themselves in his breast, his eyes turn again to the room beyond, and make search for the siren who is his undoing. She is still, of course, with Rossmoyne, and is all smiles and pretty blushes, and is evidently both content and happy.

"I am a fool!—a madman!" he says to himself; and even as he says it his eyes light on Owen Kelly, [Pg 114] who by chance is looking at him too.

Crossing the room, the latter (as though drawn by the melancholy eyes that have met his) soon reaches the window where Ronayne stands disconsolate.

"Why so pale and wan, fond lover?" he says gayly, but with so kindly an intonation that even the most pugnacious could not take umbrage at it.

Now, Mr. Kelly's knowledge on all matters is so clear and precise that Ronayne does not dream of deceiving him in this matter.

"Of course you will laugh at me," he says, "but somehow I don't mind *your* ridicule much. It means only this, that I have just found out that she cares nothing at all for me."

"*She*, being Mrs. Bohun? Well, my dear lad, if an elderly gentleman's experience is of any use to you, you may have it cheap. *I* believe she cares a great deal for you. Lookers-on see most of the game, and I would back you against Rossmoyne any day."

"You are a very good fellow," says Ulic Ronayne, "the best I know; but I understand you. You are only saying that to console me."

"I am not, in faith: I say it because I think it."

"I wish I could think it."

"Try. 'If at first you don't succeed,' you know follow out the inestimable Watts's advice, and 'try again.' There's nothing like it: it gets to be quite a game in the long run. I thank my stars," laughing, "I have never been a slave to the 'pathetic fallacy' called love; yet it has its good points, I suppose."

"It hasn't," says Ronayne, gloomily.

"You terrify me," says Mr. Kelly, "because I feel positive my day is yet to come, and with all this misery before me I feel suicidal. Don't my dear fellow! don't look like that! Give her up; go and fall in love with some little girl of your own age or even younger."

The "even" is offensive, but Ulic is too far gone in melancholy to perceive it.

"It is too late for that kind of advice," he says: "I want her, and her only. I don't know how to describe it, but——"

"There are chords," quotes his friend gravely.

"Just so," says the miserable Ronayne, quite as gravely; which so upsets the gravity of his companion that it is with difficulty he conceals his ill-timed mirth. [Pg 115]

"What is that mutilated article in your hand?" he asks at length, when he has conquered his muscles.

"This—eh!—oh, her card, I suppose," says Ronayne, viciously. Yet even as he speaks he smooths out the crumpled card, and regards it with a dismal tenderness as being in part *her*.

"You're engaged to her for the next," says Mr. Kelly, looking over his shoulder: "what an unfortunate thing! If I were you," mournfully, "I should go home. Get ill. Do *something*."

"And so let her think I'm wasting in despair because she prefers another? No, I shan't," says Ronayne, with sudden animation. "I shall see it out with her. If she chooses to cancel this dance well and good, but I shall certainly remind her she promised it to me."

"Rash boy!" says Kelly, with a sigh. "As you refuse to hearken to the voice of common sense, and afflict yourself with a megrim, I leave you to your fate."

So saying, he turns aside, and, having gone a step or two, finds himself face to face with Miss Beresford.

"This dance is ours," he says, mendaciously, knowing well this is the first time they have met this evening.

Monica laughs: to be angry with so sad a visaged man as Owen Kelly would be a cruelty.

"I am glad of it," she says, "because I do not want to dance at all; and I think you will not mind sitting with me and talking to me for a little while."

"You remember me then?" he says, shifting his glass from one eye to the other, and telling himself she is as pretty as she is wise.

"I think so," shyly, yet with a merry glance; "you are that Master O'Kelly, of Kelly Grove, county Antrim, who is the bright and shining light of the Junior Bar."

"You do indeed know me," returns he, mildly.

"'Thy modesty's a candle to thy merit,'" quotes she, wickedly, in a low tone.

At this he smiles sadly (a luxury he rarely permits himself), and, taking up her hand, lays it on his arm.

"Come," he says, "I will sit with you, and talk with you, when, and where, and for as long as you like. The longer the greater bliss for me. The spaciousness of these halls, fair madam, as doubtless you have perceived, gives wide scope for choice of seats. In which secluded bower will it please you to efface yourself?" [Pg 116]

Monica glances from one small room to the landing-place, and from the landing-place to the other small room beyond, and naturally hesitates.

"There is another stairs besides the one we ascended," says Mr. Kelly. "I saw it when first I came: would *you* like to see it too?"

"I should indeed," says Monica, grateful for the hint, and, going with him, suddenly becomes aware of a staircase, leading goodness knows whither, upon the third step of which she seats herself, after a rapid glance around and upwards that tells her nothing, so mysterious are the workings of a barracks.

Mr. Kelly seats himself beside her.

"I suppose it is my mission to amuse you," he says, calmly, "as I dare not make love to you."

"Why not?" says Monica, quite as calmly.

"For one thing, you would not listen to me; and for another, I don't want my head broken."

Monica smiles, more because it is her duty to than for any other reason, because after the smile comes a sigh.

"I know few knights would tilt a lance for me," she says; and Kelly, glancing at her, feels a quick desire rise within him to restore sunshine to her perfect face.

"One knight should be enough for any one, even the fairest ladye in the land," he says.

"True; but what is to be for her who has none?" asks she, pathos in her eyes, but a smile upon her lips.

"She must be a very perverse maiden who has *that* story to tell," returns he; and then, seeing she has turned her face away from him, he goes on quietly,—

"You know every one here, of course."

"Indeed, no. The very names of most are unknown to me. Tell me about them, if you will."

"About that girl over there, for instance?" pointing to a dingy-looking girl in the distance, whose face is as like a button as it well can be, and whose general appearance may be expressed by the word "unclean."

"That is Miss Luker," says Kelly. "Filthy Lucre is, I believe, the name she usually goes by, on account of her obvious unpalatableness (my own word, you will notice), and her overwhelming affection for coin small and great."

"She looks very untidy," says Monica.

"She does, indeed. She is, too, an inveterate chatterbox. She might give any fellow odds and beat him; I don't believe myself there is so much as one comma in her composition." [Pg 117]

"Poor girl! What an exertion it must be to her!"

"Musn't it? Especially nowadays, when one *never* goes for much, real hard work of any kind being such a bore. That's her mother beside her. She is always beside her. Fat little woman, d'ye see?"

"Yes, a nice motherly-looking little woman she seems to be."

"Horribly motherly! She has a birthday for every month in the year!"

"How?" says Monica, opening her eyes.

"I don't so much allude to her own natal day (which by this time I should say is obscure) as to her children's. They came to her at all seasons, from January to December. There are fourteen of them."

"Oh, it *can't* be possible! Poor, *poor* soul!" says Monica, feeling quite depressed.

"She isn't poor; she is very well off," says Mr. Kelly, obtusely. "Much better than she deserves. So don't grieve for her. She glories in her crime. Well, it's 'a poor heart that never rejoices,' you know: so I suppose she is right. There's Miss Fitzgerald: do you admire her?"

"I am sure I *ought*," says Monica, simply; "but I *don't*."

"You have the courage of your opinions. Every one down here admires her tremendously. I agree with you, you know, but then," softly, "*I* am nobody!"

"Perhaps you think I am jealous," says Monica. "But indeed I am not."

"What a baby you are!" says Mr. Kelly. "*Who* could suppose you jealous of Bella Fitzgerald? 'Two stars keep not their motion in one sphere,' and I shouldn't think the fair Bella would have *much* motion if put in comparison with you. She always calls 'a spade a spade, and Branson's Essence of Coffee,' etc. In fact, she is material."

"That means she has common sense. Why call her 'material'?"

"Never mind. It is quite *immaterial*," says Mr. Kelly, tranquilly, after which silence reigns triumphantly for a moment or two, until a new figure presents itself on a small platform below them.

"Ah! there is Desmond," says Kelly. "He looks," innocently, "as if he was looking for somebody." [Pg 118]

"I hope he will find her," remarks Miss Beresford, with some acerbity and a most unnecessary amount of color.

"Perhaps he is looking for *me*," says Mr. Kelly, naively.

"Perhaps so," dryly.

"At all events, whoever it is, she, or he, or it, seems difficult of discovery. Did you ever see so woebegone a countenance as his?"

"I think he looks quite happy enough," says Monica, without sympathy.

Kelly lets his languid gaze rest on her for a moment.

"What has Desmond done to you?" he says at last, slowly.

"Done?" haughtily. "Nothing. What *could* he do?"

"Nothing, I suppose,—as you say. By the bye, I have not seen you dancing with him this afternoon."

"No."

"How is that?"

It is an indisputable fact that some people may say with impunity what other people dare not say under pain of excommunication. Owen Kelly, as a rule, says what he likes to women without rebuke, and, what is more, without incurring their displeasure.

"How is what?"

"I thought that day at Aghyohillbeg that you and Desmond were great friends."

"Friends! when we have only seen each other two or three times. Is friendship the growth of an hour?"

"No. But something else is." He looks at her *almost* cheerfully as he says this. "But neither you nor I, Miss Beresford, have anything to do with that flimsy passion."

"You mean——"

"Love!"

"*Is* there such a thing?" says Monica, wistfully, whereupon Mr. Kelly says to himself, "Now, what on earth has that fellow been doing to her?" but aloud he says, in his usual subdued tones,—

"I don't know, I'm sure, but they say so, and perhaps they, whoever they may be, are right. If so, I think it is a dangerous subject to discuss with *you*. Let us skip it, and go on. You haven't told me why you are not dancing with Desmond."

"*Why* should I dance with Mr. Desmond?"

"Because it is not always easy to have a refusal ready, perhaps, or——He has asked you?"

She would have given a good deal at this instant to be able to answer "No;" but the remembrance [Pg 119] of how he pleaded with her for one waltz that evening at the end of the Moyne meadow comes between her and her desire. So she says, "Yes," instead.

"And you would none of him?"

"*No.*"

"It isn't my part to ask why," says Kelly, with quite a miserable air; "but still I cannot help wondering how *any one* can dislike Desmond."

No answer. Miss Beresford is looking straight before her, but her color is distinctly higher, and there is a determination about her not to be cajoled into speech, that is unmistakable. Having studied her for a little, Mr. Kelly goes on,—

"I never know whether it is Desmond's expression or manner that is so charming, therefore I conclude it is both. Have you noticed what a peculiarly lovable way he has with him? But of course not, as, somehow he has the misfortune to jar upon you. Yet very few hate him. You see, you are that excellent thing, an exception."

"I do not hate him," says Monica; and, having thus unlocked her lips against her inclination, she feels Owen Kelly of Kelly's Grove has won the game; but she bears him no ill will for all that. "It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul!"

"No! well, hate is a bitter word, and an unmannerly. I am sorry, then, that you dislike him."

"Not even that."

"You mean, you regard him with indifference!"

"Yes, exactly that," says Monica, with slow deliberation.

"I am sorry for it. He is a man upon whom both men and women smile,—a rare thing,—a very favorite of Fortune."

"She is fickle."

"She may well be dubbed so, indeed, if she deserts him at his sorest need. But as yet she is faithful, as she ought to be, to the kindest, the sincerest fellow upon earth."

"Sincerest?"

As this repetition, and the fine sneer that accompanies it, escape her, she becomes aware that Desmond himself has come to the foot of the stairs, and is gazing at her reproachfully.

"Here is fickle Fortune's favorite literally at our feet," says Owen Kelly; and, before Monica can say anything, Brian has mounted the two steps that lie between him and her, and is at her side. [Pg 120]

"If I may not dance with you, may I at least talk to you for a moment or two?" he says, hurriedly.

"Certainly," with cold surprise.

"I don't think three of us could sit together comfortably on this one step," says Mr. Kelly, with a thoughtful glance at its dimensions,—"not even if we squeezed up to each other ever so much; and I am afraid," mournfully, "Miss Beresford might not like that, either. Would you, Miss Beresford?"

"Not much," says Monica. "But why need you stir? Mr. Desmond has asked at the most for two moments; they will go quickly by: in fact," unkindly, "I should think they are already gone."

"And yet he has not begun his '*talk*.' Make haste Desmond. Time, tide, and Miss Beresford wait for no man. Hurry! we are all on the tiptoe of expectation." As Mr. Kelly says all this in a breath, he encourages Desmond generously to "come on" by a wave of his hand; whereupon Brian, who is not in his sweetest mood, directs a glance at him that ought to annihilate any ordinary man, but is thrown away upon Kelly, who is fire-proof.

"Some other time, then, as I disturb you now," says Brian, haughtily, addressing himself pointedly to Monica.

"By no means," says his whilom friend, rising. "Take my place for your two moments,—not a second longer, remember! I feel with grief that Miss Beresford will probably hail the exchange of partners with rapture. 'Talk,' says Bacon, 'is but a tinkling cymbal, where there is no love;' and as she would not let me discourse on any topics tenderer than the solar system and the Channel Tunnel, I have no doubt she has found it very slow. Now, *you* will be the—er—other thing quite!"

With this speech, so full of embarrassing possibilities, he bows to Monica, smiles at the gloomy Desmond, and finally withdraws himself gracefully from their view. Not without achieving his end, however: they both heartily wish him back again even while he is going.

"What have I done?" asks Desmond, abruptly, turning to Monica, who is gazing in a rapt fashion at her large black fan.

"Done?"

"Don't answer me like that, Monica. I have offended you. I can see that. But how? Every moment of this wretched afternoon, until you came, I spent wondering when you would arrive. And yet when at last I *did* see you, you would vouchsafe me neither smile nor glance. In fact, you looked as if you *hated* me!" [Pg 121]

"*Every* moment?" sardonically.

"Every one."

"Even those spent with Mrs. Bohun?" To save her life she could not call her "Olga" now.

"With *her*?" staring in some surprise at his inquisitor. "Well, it certainly wasn't quite so bad—the waiting, I mean—then. Though still, with my mind full of you, I was——"

"You were indeed!" interrupting him hastily, with a contemptuous smile.

"Certainly I was," the surprise growing deeper.

"I wonder you are not ashamed to sit there and confess it," says Miss Beresford, suddenly, with a wrathful flash in her eyes. "I shall know how to believe you again. To say one thing to me one day, and another thing to another person another day, and——" Here she finds a difficulty in winding up this extraordinary speech, so she says, hurriedly, "It is *horrible*!"

"What is horrible?" bewildered.

But she pays no heed to his question, thinking it doubtless beneath her.

"At least," she says, with fine scorn, "you needn't be untruthful."

"Do you know," says Mr. Desmond, desperately, "you are making the most wonderful remarks I ever heard in my life? There is no beginning to them, and I'm dreadfully afraid there will be no ending."

"No doubt," scornfully, "you are afraid."

"If I allow I am," says Desmond, humbly, "will it induce you to explain?"

"You want no explanation," indignantly. "You know very well what you confessed a while ago,—that—that—'*you were*'! *There!*"

"*Where?*"

"Flirting with Olga Bohun!"

"What?"

"You did. You know you did. Oh, what perfidy! Only a moment since you declared it openly, shamelessly; and now you deny it! Why I wouldn't have believed it, even of *you*. How *can* you pretend to forget it?"

But that there are tears born of real emotion in her great eyes, Mr. Desmond would assuredly believe she is making a vast joke at his expense, so innocent is he of any offence.

"If by some unfortunate method," he says, calmly, "you have metamorphosed any speech of mine into a declaration relative to a flirtation with Mrs. Bohun, you have done an uncommonly clever thing. You have turned a lie into truth. I never said even one spoony word to Olga Bohun in all my life." [Pg 122]

"Then why," in a still much-aggrieved tone, but with strong symptoms of relenting, "did you say you were?"

"I don't remember saying it at all," says poor Mr. Desmond, who has forgotten all about his interrupted remark.

"Then what were you saying to Olga just as I came in?"

"Oh! *that!*"—brightening into a remembrance of the past by the greatest good luck, or the quarrel might have proved a final one (which would have been a sad pity, as so many right good ones followed it). "You stopped me just now when I was going to tell you about it. When you came this evening I was dancing with Olga, and talking to her of *you*. It was some small consolation."

"But you were smiling at her," says Monica, faltering, "and whispering to her—*whispering!*"

"Of you. You believe me? Monica, look at me. Do you know I really think that——"

But this valuable thought is forever lost. Glancing at his companion, he sees a change come over the spirit of her face. Her eyes brighten, but not with pleasurable anticipation. Quite the reverse. She lays her hand suddenly upon his arm, and gazes into the landing-place beneath.

"There is Aunt Priscilla!" she says, in an awestruck tone. "She has just come out of that room. She is, I *know*,"—a guilty conscience making a coward of her,—"looking for me. She may come here! Go, Go!"

"But I can't leave you here alone."

"Yes, you can; you can, indeed. Only try it. Mr. Desmond, *please* go." This she says so anxiously that he at once decides (though with reluctance) there is nothing left him but to obey.

And, after all, Aunt Priscilla never looks up those stairs, but passes by them, dimly lit as they are, as though they had never been built; and Desmond, unknowing of this, goes sadly into the dancing-room, ostensibly in search of Kelly, but with his mind so full of his cross little love that he does not see him, although he is within a yard of him at one time.

Now, Mr. Kelly, when he quitted the fateful staircase, had turned to his right, with a view to getting some friend to lounge against a doorway with him, but, failing in this quest, had entered the dancing-room, and edged round it by degree,—not so much from a desire for motion as because he was elbowed ever onwards by tired dancers who sought the friendly support of the walls. [Pg 123]

Reaching at length a certain corner, he determines to make his own of it and defend it against all assailants, be they men or Amazons.

It is a charming corner, and almost impregnable; it is for this very reason also almost unescapable, as he learns to his cost later on. However, he comes to anchor here, and looks around him.

He is quite enjoying himself, and is making private comments on his friends that I have no doubt would be rapturously received by them could they only hear them, when he wakes to the fact that two people have come to a standstill just before him. They are engaged in not only an animated but an amicable discussion, and are laughing gayly: as laughter is even more distinguishable in a crowd than the voice when in repose, Mr. Kelly is attracted by theirs, and to his astonishment discovers that his near neighbors are the deadly enemies of an hour agone,—*i. e.*, Mrs. Bohun and Ulic Ronayne.

No faintest trace of spleen is to be discovered in their tones. All is once more sunshine. Past storms are forgotten. They have evidently been carrying on their discussion for a considerable

time whilst dancing, because it is only the very end of it that is reserved for Mr. Kelly's delectation. He, poor man, is hemmed in on every side, and finds to his horror he cannot make his escape. This being so, he resigns himself with a grim sense of irony to the position allotted him by fate, and being a careful man, makes up his mind, too, to derive what amusement from it that he can.

"So you see everything depends upon judgment," says the fair widow, fanning herself languidly, but smiling archly.

"A good deal, certainly."

"*Everything*, *I* say. Determination to succeed, and the power to do it, are strong in themselves; but judgment tempers all things. And how few possess all three!"

"I, at least, am grateful for that. If every one was endowed with those three irresistible forces, I should have a bad chance. I should be but one among so many. Then it could only be decided by brute force."

"What could?" asks she, turning a fair but amazed face up to his.

"Oh, nothing!" returns he, with some confusion. "Only some silly thought of my own private brain, —not the part I was devoting to your argument. Forgive me. You were saying——" [Pg 124]

"That there is a tremendous amount of feebleness in most natures. The real clever thing is to be able to see when an opportunity for good arises, and then to grasp it. Most people can't see it, you know."

"Others *can*!" says Mr. Ronayne. As he speaks he passes his arm round her pretty waist and smiles saucily into her eyes.

"What!" exclaims she, smiling in turn, "am I an opportunity, then?"

"The sweetest one I know, and so I seize it," says the audacious youth; while Mr. Kelly, behind, feels as if he was going to sink into the ground.

"You don't understand what the word means, you silly boy," says the widow, laughing gayly.

"Don't I! I only wish I might parse and *spell* it with you," says Ronayne, his spirits rising; at which answer, I regret to say, pretty Mrs. Bohun laughs again merrily, and suffers him to lead her away into the dancing-circle without a rebuke, leaving Mr. Kelly limp with fear of discovery.

Now, his imprisonment being at an end, he leaves his corner, and, braving the anger of the dancing people, walks straight through their midst to the door beyond, ready to endure anything rather than the eavesdropping, however innocent, of a moment past.

Filled therefore with courage, he sallies forth, and on the landing outside encounters the two Misses Blake clothed for departure, with Monica and Kit beside them. Terence is still bidding adieu to Miss Fitzgerald whose tall charms have worked a way into his youthful affections.

Desmond is standing at a little distance from this group; Mr. Ryde is in the midst of it. He is expostulating with Monica about the cruelty of her early departure, in a tone that savors of tenderness and rouses in Mr. Desmond's breast a hearty desire to kick him. Then Mr. Ryde carries on his expostulations to where Aunt Priscilla is standing; and Brian tries vainly to gain a last glance from Monica, if only to see whether the treaty of peace between them—interrupted a while ago—has been really signed or not.

But Monica, either through wilfulness or ignorance of his near locality, or perhaps fear of Miss Priscilla, refuses to meet his longing eyes. For my part, I believe in the wilfulness.

Kit, who is always like the cockles of ancient fame, "*alive O*," sees his disconsolate face, his earnest, unrequited glance, and Monica's assumed or real indifference, and feels sad at heart for him. Deliberately, and with a sweet, grave smile, she holds out to him her small hand, and, regardless of consequences, gives his a hearty squeeze. Most thankfully he acknowledges this courtesy; whereupon, of her still further charity, she bestows upon him a glance from her dark eyes that speaks volumes and assures him he has in her a friend at court. *[Pg 125]*

Then all is over. The two Misses Blake go slowly and with caution down the steep staircase, Monica and Mr. Ryde (who grows more devoted every minute) following, Terence and Kit bringing up the rear.

During the drive home the Misses Blake (who have thoroughly enjoyed themselves) are both pleasant and talkative. As the old horses jog steadily along the twilit road, they converse in quite a lively fashion of all they have heard and noticed, and laugh demurely over many a small joke.

Kit of course, is in raptures. Her *first* party and *such* a success! She had danced one set of quadrilles and one polka! *two* whole dances! Ye gods, was there ever so happy a child! She chatters, and laughs, and rallies everybody so gayly that the old aunts are fain to die of merriment.

Yet Monica, who might—an' she chose—have had two partners for every dance, is strangely silent and depressed. No word escapes her: she leans back with her pretty tired head pressed close against the cushions. Perchance little Kit notices all this; because when any one addresses

Monica she makes answer for her in the most careless manner possible, and by her sharp wit turns the attention of all from the sister she adores; yet in her heart she is angry with Monica.

Once only during this homeward drive something occurs to disturb the serenity of the Misses Blake. Kit, in one of her merry sallies, has touched upon Miss Fitzgerald; whereupon Aunt Priscilla, mindful of that late and lingering adieu of Terence, says, suddenly,—

"And how do *you* like Miss Fitzgerald, Terence?"

"She's delightful, aunt!" says the stricken Terence, enthusiastically. "Perfectly enchanting! You never met so nice a girl!"

"Oh, yes! I think I have, Terence," says Miss Priscilla, freezingly. "I am, indeed, *sure* I have."

"There's something about her right down fetching," says Mr. Beresford, giving himself airs. [Pg 126] "Something—er—*there*, but difficult to describe."

"A 'je ne sais quoi young man,'" quotes the younger Miss Beresford, with a sneer. "She's tall enough to be one, at any rate. She is a horrid girl I think."

"You're jealous," says Terence, contemptuously. "Because you know you will never be half as good to look at."

"If I thought that," says Kit, growing very red, "I'd commit suicide."

"Tut! You are too silly a child to be argued with," says Terence, in a tone that is not to be borne.

Kit, rising in her seat, prepares for battle, and is indeed about to hurl a scathing rebuke upon him, when Miss Priscilla interrupts her.

"What is this great charm you see in Miss Fitzgerald, Terence?" she asks slowly.

"That is just what I cannot describe, aunt."

"I should think you couldn't, indeed!" puts in Kit, wrathfully.

"But, as I said before, she is delightful."

"She *may* be," says Priscilla, the most damning doubt in her tone. "She *may* be, my dear. Forbid that I should deny it! But there are some delightful people, Terence, that are not good for us."

Somehow, after this, conversation dwindles until it is gone. Terence sulks; Monica moons; Kit ponders; the Miss Blake snooze: and so at last home is reached.

CHAPTER XI.

How Kit sees a Vision, and being exhorted thereto by it, pleads a certain cause with great success.

It is ten o'clock, and as lovely a night as ever overhung the earth. The moon is at its fullest, the wind has fallen, all is calm as heaven itself, through which Dictynna's unclouded grandeur rolls.

The Misses Blake, fatigued by their unusual dissipation, ordered an early rout an hour agone, whereby bedroom candlesticks were in demand at nine or half-past nine o'clock. [Pg 127]

Now, in Monica's room Kit is standing by the open window gazing in rapt admiration at the dew spangled garden beneath. Like diamonds glitter the grass and the flowers beneath the kiss of the grass and the queen of night.

Moonbeams are playing in the roses, and nestling in the lilies, and rocking to and fro upon the bosom of the stream.

There is a peace unspeakable on all around. One holds one's breath and feels a longing painful in its intensity as one drinks in the beauty of the earth and sky. 'Twere *heaven* to be assured of love on such a night as this.

Stars make the vault above so fine that all the world, me-thinks, should be in love with night and pay no worship to the garish sun. There is a rush of feeling in the air,—a promise of better things to come,—of hope, of glad desire, of sweet love perfected!

"How lovely a night it is!" says Kit, leaning far out of the window, and gazing westward. She is at heart a born artist, with a mind, indeed, too full of strange, weird thoughts at times to augur well for the happiness of her future. Like many of her Irish race, she is dreamy, poetical,—intense at one moment, gay, wild impulsive the next.

"See what a flood of light there is on everything!" she says. "'*Bathed* in moonlight,' what a good thought was that. Monica, when I am as old as you, in a very few short years I shall be a poet."

"No, you won't, darling: you will be a musician. See what fairies lie beneath your fingers even now when you touch the piano or violin; be content, then, with your great gift, which most surely *is* yours. And to me, indeed, it seems a grander thing to thrill and enchain and draw to your feet

all hearts by the power of harmony that dwells within you, than by the divine gift of song that poets have."

"But their songs *are* harmony," says the child, turning quickly to her.

"Ay, the interpretation of it, but you have its very breath. No; search the world over, and you will find nothing so powerful to affect the souls of all as music."

"Well some day I shall want to do something," says Kit, vaguely; and then she turns to the window again, and lets her mind wander and lose itself in a mute sonata to the fair Isis throned above.

"It draws me," she says, presently, rising slowly and addressing Monica, but always with her gaze fixed upon the sleeping garden down below. "It is so bright,—so clear." [Pg 128]

"What, Kit?"

"The moonlight. I must," restlessly, "go down into it for a little moment, or I shall not sleep through longing for it."

"But the doors are closed, my dearest, and Aunt Priscilla is in bed, and so are the servants."

"So much the better. I can draw the bolts myself without being questioned. You said just now," gayly, "I have a fairy beneath my fingers. I think I have a moon-fairy in my heart, because I love it so."

"Stay here with me, then, and worship it sensibly from my window."

"What! do you look for sense in 'moon-struck madness'? No; I shall go down to my scented garden. I have a fancy I cannot conquer to walk into that tiny flame-white path of moonlight over there near the hedge. Do you see it?"

"Yes. Well, go, if Titania calls you, but soon return, and bring me a lily,—I, too, have a fancy, you see,—a tall lily, fresh with dew and moonshine."

"You shall have the tallest, the prettiest I can find," says Kit from the doorway, where she stands framed unknowingly, looking such a slender, ethereal creature, with eyes too large for her small face, that Monica, with a sudden pang of fear, goes swiftly up to her, and, pressing her to her heart, holds her so for a moment.

"I know what you are thinking now," says Kit, with another laugh,—"that I shall die early."

"Kit! Kit!"

"Yes. Isn't it strange? I can read most people's thoughts. But be happy about me. I look fragile, I know, but I shall not die until I am quite a respectable age. Not a hideous age, you will understand, but with my hair and my teeth intact. One keeps one's hair until forty, doesn't one?"

"I don't know. I'm not forty," says Monica. "But hurry, hurry out of the garden, because the dew is falling."

Down the dark staircase, through the darker halls, into the brilliant moonlight, goes Kit. The wind, soft as satin, plays about her pretty brows and nestles through her hair, rewarding itself thus for its enforced quiet of an hour ago. Revelling in the freedom she has gained, Kit enters the garden and looks lovingly around upon her companions,—the flowers.

Who would sleep when beauty such as this is flung broadcast upon the earth, waiting for man to feast his slothful eyes upon it? [Pg 129]

Lingeringly, tenderly, Kit passes by each slumbering blossom, or gazes into each drowsy bell, until the moonlit patch of grass she had pointed out to Monica is at last reached. Here she stands in shadow, glancing with coy delight at the fairyland beyond. Then she plunges into it, and looks a veritable fairy herself, slim, and tall, and beautiful, and more than worthy of the wand she lacks.

Walking straight up her silver path, she goes to where the lilies grow, in a bed close by the hedge. But, before she comes to them, she notes in the hedge itself a wild convolvulus, and just a little beyond it a wild dog-rose, parent of all roses. She stays to pluck them, and then—

"Kit," says a voice subdued and low, but so distinct as to sound almost in her ear.

She starts, and then looks eagerly around her, but nothing can she see. Was it a human voice, or a call from that old land that held great Zeus for its king? A message from Olympus it well might be, on such a night as this, when all things breathe of old enchantment and of mystic lore. Almost she fears yet hopes to see a sylvan deity peep out at her from the escalonia yonder, or from the white-flowered, sweetly-perfumed syringa in that distant corner,—Pan the musical, perhaps, with his sweet pipes, or a yet more stately god, the beautiful Apollo, with his golden lyre. Oh for the chance of hearing such godlike music, with only she herself and the pale Diana for an audience!

Perchance the gods have, indeed, been good to her, and sent her a special messenger on this yellow night. Fear forgotten, in the ecstasy of this hope, the strange child stands erect, and waits with eager longing for a second summons.

And it comes, but alas! in a fatally earthly tone that ruins her fond hope forever.

"Kit, it is I. Listen to me," says some one, and then a hole in the hedge is cleared, and Mr. Desmond, stepping through it, enters the moonlit patch, flushed but shamelessly unembarrassed.

Kit, pale with disappointment, regards him silently with no gentle glance.

"And to think," she says, at length, with slow scorn, looking him up and down with measureless contempt,—"to think I was mad enough to believe for one long moment that you might be Apollo, and that your voice was a cry from Parnassus!"

At which, I regret to say, Mr. Desmond gives way to most unseemly mirth. "I never dreamed I should attain to such glory," he says. "I feel like 'the rapt one of the godlike forehead.'" [Pg 130]

"You *may*," says the younger Miss Beresford, who has awakened from the dim dusk of "faerie lands forlorn" to the clearer light of earth. "You may," witheringly, "*feel* like it, but you certainly don't *look* like it."

"I am not complete, I know that," says Mr. Desmond still full of unholy enjoyment. "I lack 'bright Apollo's lute strung with his hair;' but if you will wait a moment I will run back to Coole and get the nearest thing to it."

He turns as if to fulfil his words, but Kit stops him.

"Don't go," she says, laughing gayly, now herself. "Even the very original lute would not transform you into a god. Stay if you want to. After all, now I am again in my senses, I daresay you are as good to talk to as a heathen deity."

"Oh, no," says Mr. Desmond, humbly. "They always thundered when they spoke: so think how imposing and convincing their arguments must have been!"

"Horrid, *I* should think," says Kit. "And now tell me what brought you here?"

This is abrupt, but, taking her in her own mood, Desmond answers, bluntly,—

"Monica."

"She *told* you to come?"

"No. But I want to see her."

"She has gone to her room."

"Make her leave it again. Tell her I cannot rest until I see her; tell her anything; only bring her to me for even one short moment."

"But it is some time since I left her: perhaps she is in bed."

"But not asleep yet, surely. She loves *you*, Kit: induce her, then, to come to her window, that I may even catch a glimpse of her, if I may not speak with her. But she cannot be in bed; it is so early," says Mr. Desmond, desperately.

"Well," says Kit, relenting, and striving to forget the blank occasioned by the substitution of an ordinary Desmond for an extraordinary deity, "I'll see what can be done."

"You will," eagerly, "really?"

"Yes, really. I will stand your friend," say Kit, solemnly, feeling now that, even if the old gods have denied her an intimate acquaintance with them, still they have devoted her to the service of Cupid, and have secretly commanded her to help on the machinations of his naughty little highness. [Pg 131]

"Then will you tell her I want to see her—*here, now*—for only a bare second if she so wills it? Will you tell her this from me? Dear Kit, *sweet* Kit, I entreat you to do this."

"Oh! how sweet I am when you want me to do something for you!" says she, with a little smile. "There! I can see through you as clearly as though you were crystal; but I like you all the same. You must have some good in you to fall in love with my Monica."

"Others can fall in love with her, too," returns he, with moody jealousy.

"Ah, yes! I saw that," says Kit, lifting her hands excitedly.

"Who could fail to see it? Who could fail to love her?" says Desmond, sadly. Then, being in such very poor case, and looking sorrowfully for comfort from any source, however small, he says, nervously,—

"Kit, answer me truthfully—you have sworn to be my friend: tell me, then, which do *you* count the better man,—him, or me?"

But that a sense of honor forbids him to pry into his love's secret thoughts, he would have asked whom *she* counted the better man.

"You," says Kit, calmly. "I have no doubt about it. I *hate* fat men, and—and so does Monica. I have heard her say so, over and over again."

"Oh, Kit! what a dear little girl you are!" says Mr. Desmond, with grateful fervor.

"Well, I'm glad you like me," says Kit, "because"—frankly—"I like you. It was very good of you to lend that gun to Terry; I haven't forgotten that, though, goodness knows, I only hope he won't do himself to death with it" (she delights in old-world phrases such as this); "and I like you, too, for loving Monica. Isn't she—" laying her hand upon his arm, and looking trustfully into his eyes, —"*isn't* she pretty?"

"She is like an angel," says Desmond, feeling all his heart go out to the fragile, ethereal-looking child before him, as he listens to her praises of her sister.

"Or a saint, perhaps. Monica is a saintly name. Was she not the mother of St. Augustine?" says Kit, quickly. After the old gods, passion for the saints, and their lilies and roses and fiery trials, animates her childish bosom. "Oh! and that reminded me," she says: "she told me to bring her in [Pg 132] a lily, fresh with dew,—one of those lilies over there in that dark corner. Do you see them,—tall and white?"

"I see. Let me pick one for her. Here, take it to her, and," laying his lips upon it, "*this* with it."

"I will. And now let me run in and try my utmost to persuade her to come out here. But," doubtfully, as she remembers how Monica refused with studied coldness to meet his parting glance at the Barracks a few hours ago, "do not be too sure of her coming. She *may* refuse, you know. She is peculiar in many ways, and she thinks herself bound in honor to Aunt Priscilla not to look at you. But stay here, just in this spot, and think all the time that I am doing my very best for you."

Her little face is so earnest as she says all this, so fearful that he may have to endure disappointment, that he is greatly touched. Pushing back her hair from her forehead with both hands, he lays a light but loving kiss upon her brow.

"Go, my best friend. I trust all to you," he says, after which the slender sprite springs away from him, and, entering the shadows beyond, is soon lost to him.

Reaching the house, she mounts the stairs with swift but silent footsteps, and, after a nervous hesitation before the door of her aunt Priscilla's room, finds herself once again face to face with Monica.

That pretty cause of all this plotting is not in bed, as Kit had predicted might be the case. She is not even undressed. She has only exchanged her azure gown for a loose white morning robe, long and trailing, and lavishly trimmed at the throat and wrists with some rare old Mechlin lace that Aunt Penelope had given her a week ago, glad in the thought that it may perchance add another charm to the beauty of her darling.

Her hair is rolled up in a small, soft knot behind; her face is a little pale; her eyes, large and luminous, have great heavy shadows lying beneath them, suggestive of fatigue and tiring thought. Altogether, she is looking as lovely as any heart can desire.

"Ah, you have returned!" she says, as Kit enters. "How long you have been! I gave you up. I thought some pixy had become enamoured of you and had carried you off to his kingdom."

"I was in danger of nothing so insignificant as a pixy. It was the great Apollo's self I feared," says Kit, with a sly humorous smile. "And here is your lily: *he* sent it to you with his love and a kiss." [Pg 133]

"Apollo?" smiling.

"Why, yes. Who else could it be at this hour?"

"Yet there is something strange in your manner."

"That is as it should be. On such a night as this, how could one escape a little touch of that 'moonstruck madness' I spoke of a while since? Go out yourself, walk through that moonlit garden just where I walked, to where in that corner over the rays melt into shadow, and try if there be nothing in it to make your heart beat faster."

"I could do it, and return calm as I am now."

"Then you are no true woman."

"What! must a woman be so foolishly romantic as to tremble in the moonlight, to be true?"

"Moonlights differ. There is a witchery abroad to-night. Go, and judge for yourself if there be not truth in my words."

"I can see enough of it from this," says Monica, leaning her bare snowy arms—from which her loose sleeves have fallen—upon the window-ledge, and turning her eyes to the pale sky studded with bright stars, "to bewitch me, if indeed it has the power you ascribe to it."

Foiled in her first effort to send her to Desmond's arms, Kit flings herself upon the ground beside her, and lays her arms upon her lap and looks lovingly but reproachfully into her eyes.

"I think you were a little unkind to that dear Brian this evening," she says.

"That dear Brian will recover from my cruel treatment, I make no doubt," says Monica, with

affected lightness, though, in truth, remorse is gnawing at her heartstrings.

"If he does, he will show his very good sense. He loves you: why, then, do you *flout* and scorn him?"

In the ancient library below, the young ladies in the novels always *flouted* their lovers. Not having the faintest idea how they perform this arduous task, Kit still adopts the word as having a sonorous sound, and uses it now with—as she hopes—great effect.

"I do *not* flout him," says Monica, indignantly. "But what am I to do? am I to make Aunt Priscilla wretched, then, because of him, and break her poor heart perhaps?"

"Oh, bother her heart!" says the younger Miss Beresford, with more candor than decency: "think of *his* poor heart, if you like, wasting and wearing away because of your unkindness. If *I* had a [Pg 134] lover, that is not how I should treat him. I should do anything in the world he asked me. I should defy everybody in the world for him, and think them well lost. I should run away with him at a moment's notice if he asked me. *Now!*"

"Oh, Kit!" says Monica, aghast at all this energy.

"I should indeed," nothing daunted; "I shouldn't hesitate. And, at all events, I should be civil to him at all times. Why, the way you treated that wretched young man to-day at Clonbree Barracks was, I consider, shameful! And you call yourself, I dare say, soft-hearted. To *look* at you, one would think you couldn't be unkind if you tried; and yet the *barbarity* of your conduct to-day, to a person who literally worships the ground you walk on, was——"

"But what did I do?" interrupts poor Monica, trembling before this whirlwind.

"What *didn't* you do? you mean. You would not even grant him one kind parting glance. I could have *cried* for him, he looked so sad and forlorn. I think he looked like suicide,—I do, indeed,—and I shouldn't wonder a bit if in the morning we heard——"

"Oh, Kit, don't! *don't!*" says Monica, in an agony, as this awful insinuation gains force with her.

"Well, I won't then," says the advocate, pretending to surrender her point by adroitly changing her front. A very Jesuit at soul is this small Kit. "After all, I daresay he will grow tired of your incivility, and so—forget you. Some one else will see how dear a fellow he is, and smile upon him, and then he will give you up."

This picture, being in Monica's eyes even *more* awful than the former, makes great havoc in her face, rendering her eyes large and sorrowful, and, indeed, so suffused with the heart's water that she seems upon the very verge of tears. She turns these wet but lovely orbs upon her tormentor.

"That would be the best thing he could do for *himself*," she says, so sadly that Kit insensibly creeps closer to her; "and as for me, it doesn't matter about me, of course."

"Monica, you like him, then," says Kit, suddenly, rising on her knees and looking into her sister's averted eyes. "I am sure of it: I know it now. Why did you not confide in me before?"

"Because it seems all so hopeless; even—if I loved him enough to marry him—*they* would never give in" (meaning, presumably, her aunts): "so why should he or I waste time over so impossible a [Pg 135] theory?"

"Why should it be impossible? Why should you not be married?"

"Because the fates are against us. Not," quickly, "that *that* so much matters: I don't want to marry *anybody*! But—but," lowering her lids, "I do want him to *love* me."

"My dear child, talk sense if you talk at all," says the material Kit. "There never yet was a heroine in any novel ever read by me (and I have had a large experience) who didn't want to marry the man of her heart. Now just look at that girl of Rhoda Broughton's, in 'Good-by, Sweetheart!' We can all see she didn't die of any disease, but simply because she couldn't be wedded to the man she loved. *There's* a girl for you! give *me* a girl like that. If ever I fall in love with a man, and I find I can't marry him, I shall make a point of dying of grief. It is so graceful; just like what I have heard of Irving and Ellen Terry—I mean, Romeo and Juliet!"

"But I can't bear to deceive Aunt Priscilla," says Monica. "She is so kind, so good."

"Stuff and nonsense!" says Kit promptly. "Do you suppose, when Aunt Priscilla was young, she would have deserted—let us say—Mr. Desmond the elder, at the beck and call of any one? She has too much spirit, to do her credit. Though I must say her spirit is rather out of place now, at times."

"What would you have me do, then?" asks Monica, desperately.

"Oh, nothing," says Kit, airily,—"really *nothing*. I am too young, of course, to give advice," with a little vicious toss of her small head. "And of course, too, I know nothing of the world's ways," with another toss, that conveys to her auditor the idea that she believes herself thoroughly versed and skilled in society's lore, but that as yet she is misunderstood. "And it is not my place, of course, to dictate to an elder sister." This severely, and evidently intended as a slap at Monica because of some little rebuke delivered by her, the other day, on the subject of age. "But," with concentrated energy, "I would not be *brutal*, if I were you."

"Brutal?" faintly.

"Yes, *brutal*, to keep him waiting for you all this time in the shadow near the ivy wall!"

Having discharged this shell, she waits in stony silence for a reply. She waits some time. Then — [Pg 136]

"Are you speaking of—of Mr. Desmond?" asks Monica, in a trembling voice.

"Yes. He is standing there now, and has been, for—oh, for hours,—on the bare chance of gaining one word from you."

"Now?" starting.

"Yes. He said he would wait until I had persuaded you to go out. If I had such a lover, I know I should not keep him waiting for me all the evening *shivering* with cold."

(It is the balmiest of summer nights.)

"Oh! what shall I do?" says Monica, torn in two between her desire to be true to her aunt and yet not unkind to her lover.

"As I said before," says the resolute Kit, turning her small pale face up to her sister, "I know I am not entitled to dictate to any one, but this I know, too, that if I were you, and *twenty* Aunt Priscillas were at my side, I should still—go to him! There!"

She conquers. Monica rises slowly, and as a first move in the desired direction goes—need I say it?—to the looking-glass. Need I say, also, that she feels dissatisfied with her appearance?

"Then I suppose I had better dress myself all over again," she says, glancing with much discontent at the charming vision the glass returns to her.

"No, no!" says Kit, decidedly. She has now arranged herself as Mistress of the Ceremonies, and quite gives herself airs. "Do not add even a touch to your toilet. You are quite too sweet as you are, and 'time presses'" (another quotation from one of her mouldy volumes).

"But *this*," says Monica, plucking at her pretty loose gown, that hangs in limp artistic folds round her slight figure and is pranked out with costly laces.

"It is perfect! Have you no eyes for the beautiful? There, go, you silly child; Nature has been so good to you, you now deride her prodigality, and make little of the gifts she has bestowed upon you. Go to——"

"Good gracious!" says Monica, pausing to stare at her aghast. "Where did you learn all that?"

"It is in a book below; I learned it by heart, to say it to you some day, and now I have done it. There, be quick! He will be *gone* if you don't make haste. His patience by this time must be exhausted. Think what he has been enduring; I only hope he hasn't fainted from sheer fatigue, that's all!" [Pg 137]

"Will you stay here till I come back," says Monica, nervously, "or will you come with me?"

"I shall stay here; and don't hurry on my account. I shall be quite happy with this lamp and your Chaucer. There, go now; and tell him I sent you. And," mischievously, "don't be civil to him, you know, but rate him soundly for presuming to disturb your worship at this hour."

"Oh! if any one sees me!" says Monica, quaking.

"You will never get hanged for a big crime," returns Kit, laughing; and then Monica steps out lightly, fearfully, upon the corridor outside, and so, with her heart dying within her, creeps past her aunt's doors, and down the wide staircase, and through the hall, and at last into the silver moonlight!

CHAPTER XII.

How Monica with faltering footsteps enters the mysterious moonlight, and how she fares therein.

What a noise the tiny gravel makes beneath her feet, as she hurries rapidly towards the garden! How her heart beats! Oh that she were back again in her pretty safe room, with the naughty Kit to scold! Oh, if Aunt Priscilla were to rise, and, looking out of her bedroom window, catch a glimpse of her, as she hastes to meet the man she has been forbidden to know! A thousand terrors possess her. The soft beauty of the night is unseen, the rushing of sweet brooks in the distance is unheard. She hurries on, a little, lithe, frightened figure, with wide eyes and parted lips, to the rendezvous she has not sought. And what a little way it had seemed in the glad daylight, yet what a journey in the silent, fearsome night! There are real tears, born of sheer nervousness, in her beautiful eyes, as she runs along the garden path, and at last—*at last*—finds herself face to face with Desmond.

"Ah, you have come!" cries he, gladly, going to meet her while yet she is a long way off.

"Yes." She can say no more, but her fear has departed at sight of him, and once more she grows calm, collected, and mistress of herself. She keeps well away from him, however, and holds out to him—that "white wonder"—her hand, from a very great distance, as it seems to him. Does she [Pg 138] distrust him, then? Thinking of this, Brian takes the extended hand, and holds it in a clasp that though tender is light, and refrains with much forbearance from pressing his lips to it.

"To come *here*, and at this hour! It is madness!" says Monica, hastily.

"A very blessed madness, then, and with method in it: it has enabled me to see *you*."

"Oh, do not talk like that. You ought not to see me at all. And, now, what is it? Kit said you wanted me sadly."

"And so I do, and not only now but always."

"If," reproachfully, "it is nothing pressing, would not to-morrow have done?"

"To-morrow never comes. There is nothing like to-day; and how could I have lived till to-morrow? I could not sleep, I could not rest, until I had seen you. My heart seemed on fire. Monica, how could you have treated me as you did to-day?"

She is silent. The very fact of her not answering convinces him her coldness at the Barracks was intentional, and his tone takes an additional sadness as he speaks again.

"You meant it then?" he says. "You would not throw me even one poor glance. If you could only look into my heart, and read how cruelly I felt your unkindness, you might——"

"I don't know what you mean," says Monica. "Why should you talk of unkindness? Why should I be kinder to you than to another?"

"Of your grace alone; I know that," says the young man, humbly. He has paid court to many a town-bred damsel before this, and gained their smiles too, and their sighs; yet now he sues to this cold child as he never sued before, and knows his very soul is set on her good will.

"Why must you choose me to love,—*me*, of all the world?" says Monica, tremulously: "it is wide, there are others—and——"

"Because I must. It is my fate, and I am glad of it. Whom worthier could I love?" says the lover, with fond, passionate reverence.

"Many, no doubt. And why love at all? Let us be friends, then, if it is indeed decreed that our lives meet——"

"There could never be mere friendship between you and me. If your heart sleeps, at least your sense must tell you that." [Pg 139]

"Then I could wish myself without sense. I want to know nothing about it. Alas! how sad a thing is love!"

"And how joyous! It is the one emotion to be fed and fostered. 'All others are but vanity.' I will persist in loving you until I die."

"That is a foolish saying; and, even if you do, what will come of it all?" says Monica, with a sigh.

"Marriage, I trust," returns he, right cheerily. "Because, to give you another example of love's endurance, and to quote old Southey to you, I will tell you that he says,—

> 'It is indestructable;
> Its holy flame forever burneth:
> From heaven it came, to heaven returneth.'

but not yet awhile, I hope."

"You are a special pleader," says she, with a sudden smile.

"For the cause that I plead I would that I were a more eloquent advocate."

"You are eloquent enough," glancing at him for a moment, and then again turning away from him; "too eloquent," she says, with a little sigh.

He is still holding her hands, but now he does not speak or answer her in any wise. A silence falls upon them, calm as the night. In "full orbed glory" the moon above sails through the skies.

> "A dewy freshness fills the silent air;
> No mist obscures, nor cloud, nor speck, nor stain,
> Breaks the serene of heaven."

"There is one thing I must say, Monica," says the young man at last, lifting her face gently with one hand until her eyes look into his own: "remember, my life is in your hands."

"Do not overburden me," she answers, but in so low a voice that it can scarce be heard. Yet *he* hears.

"My darling, must I be a burden to you?" he says. "Monica, if this my courtship is hateful to you, or more than you can bear, dismiss me now, and I will go from you, no matter what it costs me."

"You are no true lover, to talk like that," she says, with a shadowy smile.

"I am lover enough to wish you no pain or weariness of spirit."

"I doubt you are too good for me," she answers with a little burst of feeling. [Pg 140]

"I must be a paragon indeed if that be so," returns he. "Oh, Monica, if you could only love me!"

"I *dare* not." Then, as though sorry for these words, she holds out her hands to him, and says, with a quick smile, "Oh, Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?"

"I wish I knew," returns he sadly. "Yet if I were sure of one thing I should not despair. Monica, tell me you don't like Ryde."

"I can't," says Monica. "He is very kind to me always. I am sure I ought to like him."

"How has he been kind to you?"

"Oh, in many ways."

"He has brought you a cup of somebody else's tea, I suppose, and has probably trotted after you with a camp-stool; is that kindness?"

"If one is hot or tired, yes."

"You are one of the most grateful specimen of your sex. I wish there was anything for which you might be grateful to me. But I am not great at the *petits soins* business."

"I shouldn't have thought so this afternoon," says Monica, maliciously, "when you were happy with Olga Bohun. But see, the moon has risen quite above the elms. I must go."

"Not yet. There is something else. When am I to see you again?—when?"

"That is as fate wills it."

"*You* are my fate. Will it, then, and say to-morrow."

"No, no!" exclaims she, releasing her hands from his, "I cannot indeed. I *must* not. In being here with you now I am doing wrong, and am betraying the two people in the world who are most kind to me. How shall I look into their eyes to-morrow? No; I will not promise to meet you anywhere —*ever*."

"How tender you are with them, and with me how cruel!"

"You have many joys in your life, but they how few!"

"You are wrong there. The world has grown useless to me since I met you. You are my one joy, and you elude me; therefore pity me too."

"Who made you so gracious a courtier?" asks she, with a little shrug of her rounded shoulders.

"Now you cast scorn upon me," says Desmond, half angrily, and as he says it the thought of Kit's word *flout* comes to her, and she smiles. It is an idle thought, yet it is with difficulty she cleaves to the less offensive smiles and keeps herself from laughing aloud. [Pg 141]

"Why should I do that?" she says, a little saucily. Indeed, she knows this young man to be so utterly in her power—and power is so sweet when first acquired, and so prone to breed tyranny—that she hardly turns aside to meditate upon the pain she may be causing him.

"I don't know," a little sadly; then, "Monica, you like me?"

"Yes, I like you," says Miss Beresford, as she might have answered had she been questioned as to her opinion of an aromatic russet.

Repressing a gesture of impatience, Desmond goes on calmly,—

"Better than Ryde?"

"Than Mr. Ryde?" She stops and glances at the gravel at her feet in a would-be thoughtful fashion, and pushes it to and fro with her pretty Louis Quinze shoe. She pauses purposely, and makes quite an affair of her hesitation.

"Yes, Ryde," says he, impatiently.

"How can I answer that?" she says, at length, with studied deliberation, "when I know so little of either him—or you?"

His indignation increases.

"Knowing us both at *least* equally well, you must have formed by this time some opinion of us."

"I should indeed," says the young girl, slowly, always with her eyes upon the gravel; "but unfortunately it never occurred to me,—the vital necessity of doing so, I mean."

Though her head is still bent, he can detect the little amused smile that is curving her mobile lips. There can be small doubt but that she is enjoying his discomfiture immensely.

"Certainly there is no reason why *you* should waste a thought on either him or me," he returns, stiffly.

"No; and yet I do waste one on—*you*—sometimes," says she, with a gleam of tenderness, and a swift glance from under her long lashes that somehow angers him intensely.

"You are a coquette," he says, quietly. There is contempt both in his look and tone. As she hears it, she suddenly lifts her head, and, without betraying chagrin, regards him steadfastly.

"Is that so?" she says. "Sometimes I have *thought* it, but——"

The unmistakable hope her pause contains angers him afresh. [Pg 142]

"If you covet the unenviable title," he says, bitterly, "be happy. You can lay just claim to it. You are more than worthy of it."

"You flatter me," she says, letting a glance so light rest upon him that it seems but the mere quiver of her eyelids.

"I meant no flattery, believe me."

"I do believe you: I quite understand."

"Not quite, I think," exclaims he, the sudden coldness of her manner frightening him into better behavior. "If—if I have said anything to offend you, I ask your forgiveness."

"There is nothing to forgive, indeed, and you have failed to offend me. But," slowly, "you have made me very sorry for you."

"*Sorry?*"

"Yes, for your most unhappy temper. It is quite the worst, I think, I have ever met with. *Good*-night Mr. Desmond: pray be careful when going through that hedge again; there are some rose-trees growing in it, and thorns do hurt so dreadfully."

So saying, she gathers up her white skirts, and, without a touch of her hand, or even a last glance, flits like a lissome ghost across the moonlit paths of the garden, and so is gone.

CHAPTER XIII.

How Kit reads between the lines—How the Misses Blake show themselves determined to pursue a dissipated course, and how Monica is led astray by an apt pupil of Machiavelli.

Early next morning Bridget, Monica's maid, enters Kit's room in a somewhat mysterious fashion. Glancing all round the room furtively, as though expecting an enemy lying in ambush behind every chair and table, she says, in a low, cautious tone,—

"A letter for you, miss."

As she says this, she draws a note from beneath her apron, where, in her right hand, it has been carefully hidden,—*so* carefully, indeed, that she could not have failed to create suspicion in the breast of a babe.

"For me," says Kit, off her guard for once.

"Yes, miss." [Pg 143]

"Who brought it?"

"A bit of a gossoon, miss, out there in the yard beyant. An' he wouldn't give me his name; but sure I know him well for a boy of the Maddens', an' one of the Coole people. His father, an' his gran'father before him, were laborers with the ould Squire."

"Ah, indeed!" says Kit. By this time she has recovered her surprise and her composure. "Thank you, Bridget," she says, with quite a grandiloquent air: "put it there, on that table. It is of no consequence, I dare say: you can go."

Bridget—who, like all her countrywomen, dearly likes a love-affair, and is quite aware of young Mr. Desmond's passion for her mistress—is disappointed.

"The gossoon said he was to wait for an answer, miss," she says, insinuatingly. "An' faix," waxing confidential, "I think I caught sight of the coat-tails of Misther Desmond's man outside the yard gate."

"You should never think on such occasions, Bridget; and coat-tails are decidedly *low*," says the younger Miss Beresford, with scathing reproof.

"They weren't very low, miss. He wore one o' them cutaway coats," says Bridget, in an injured tone.

"You fail to grasp my meaning," says Kit, gravely. "However, let it pass. If this note requires an answer, you can wait in the next room until I write it."

"Very well, miss," says the discomfited Bridget; and Kit, finding herself in another moment alone, approaches the table, and with a beating heart takes up the note. "It is—it *must* be from Brian!"

The plot thickens; and *she* has been selected to act a foremost part in it! She is to be the confidante,—the tried and trusted friend; without her aid all the fair edifice Cupid is erecting would crumble into dust.

And is there no danger, too, to be encountered,—perhaps to be met and overcome? If perchance all be discovered,—if Aunt Priscilla should suddenly be apprised of what is now going on beneath her very spectacles,—will not she,—Kit,—in her character of "guide, philosopher, and friend" to the culprits, come in for a double share of censure? Yes, truly there are breakers ahead, and difficulties to be overcome. There is joy and a sense of heroism in this thought; and she throws up her small head defiantly, and puts out one foot with quite a martial air, as it comes to her. [Pg 144]

Then she tears open the envelope, and reads as follows:—

> "Dear Little Kit,—Owing you all the love and allegiance in the world for having helped me once, I come to you again. How am I to pass this long day without a glimpse of *her*? It is a love-sick swain who doth entreat your mercy. Does any happy thought run through your pretty head? If so, my man is waiting for it somewhere; befriend me a second time.
>
> "Ever yours,
> "Brian."

Prompt action is as the breath of her nostrils to Kit. Drawing pen and ink towards her, without a moment's hesitation, she scribbles an answer to Desmond:—

> "We are going towards Ballyvoureen this afternoon, to take a pudding to old Biddy Daly: any one *chancing* to walk there also might meet us. Count upon me always.
>
> "Kit."

This Machiavellian epistle, which she fondly believes to be without its equal in the matter of depth, she folds carefully, and, enclosing it in an envelope void of address or anything (mark the astuteness of *that*!), calls to Bridget to return to her.

"You will find the boy you mentioned as being by birth a Madden," she says, austerely, "and give him this; and you will refrain from gossiping and idle talking with him, which is not convenient."

It would be impossible to describe the tone in which she says this. Bridget, much disgusted, takes the note silently, and with sufficient nervousness to make itself known. Indeed, she is so plainly impressed by Kit's eloquence that the latter's heart sings aloud for joy.

"Yes, miss," she says, in a very subdued voice, and goes away with indignant haste, to tell cook, as she passes through the kitchen, that "Faix, Miss Kit might be her own gran'mother,—she is so ould an' quare in her ways."

Kit meantime goes in search of Monica, with a mind stored with crafty arguments for the beguiling of that unconscious maiden. Hearing voices in the morning-room, she turns in there, and finds the whole family in conclave.

Miss Priscilla is speaking.

"Yes, I certainly think hospitality of some sort should be shown them," she is saying, with quite an excited flush on her dear old ugly face. "We cannot, of course, do much; but afternoon tea, now, and some pleasant people to meet them,—and strawberries,—and a little stroll round the gardens —eh? And, Penelope, you used to be a great hand at claret-cup in our dear father's time; and then there is tennis. I really think, you know, it might be done." [Pg 145]

She quite bridles with pleasure at the bare anticipation. To entertain once more,—again to welcome guests beneath the old roof! For many years a nightly game of patience has been the sole dissipation the Misses Blake have known, and here of late days they have been going hither and thither to dances and garden-parties, and have acknowledged to themselves secretly that the change is sweet. And now they are actually discussing the idea of indulging in wild festivities on their own part! Surely these children from Jerusalem have much to answer for!

"Is there going to be a party *here*, Aunt Priscilla?" asks Kit with enlarged eyes.

"Well, my dear, we are debating the possibilities of it,—just the pros and cons," says Miss Priscilla, precisely. "Your aunt Penelope agrees with me that some attention is due to those young men in Clonbree Barracks."

"You are going to ask Captain Cobbett and Mr. Ryde here! Oh, what fun!" cries Kit, seating herself, minus invitation, on Miss Priscilla's knee, and twining her arms round her neck. "Do you know, when with mother we didn't dare call our souls our own; but with you we are having real

good old times! Aren't we, now?"

"Oh, Kit!—my *dear* Kit!—you must not speak so of your lost mother," cry the old ladies in a breath, both greatly distressed.

"Well, I shan't if you don't wish it; but it is true, for all that. And so you are really going to ask that big young man and his little captain to come here?"

"Your Aunt Penelope and I both feel that some hospitality should be shown to Her Majesty," says Miss Priscilla, pompously.

"The Queen!" says Kit aghast. "You aren't going to ask *her* to Moyne are you? Windsor is a long way off, and she is pretty well on now, you know, and I don't believe she'd come."

"Not personally. But we shall pay her the compliment through her trusty servants the marines. Not that we owe her much," says Miss Priscilla, shaking her head. "I cannot think she has behaved quite fairly towards us in many ways. Never coming to see us, I mean, or sending the [Pg 146] prince, or having a residence here, or that——"

"Still," breaks in Miss Penelope, coming to Her Majesty's relief, with the evident and kindly desire of showing her up in a more favorable light, "I have always understood that in private life she is a most exemplary woman,—a blameless wife so long as she was allowed to be so, and a most excellent mother."

"And grandmother," chimes in Miss Priscilla, gracefully, as though ashamed of her former acrimonious remarks. "From what I can glean from the papers, she seems quite devoted to those poor little motherless girls of Hesse."

It is quite plain that the Misses Blake regard their sovereign more as Victoria and sister than queen and mistress.

"She has sent these men to Clonbree to protect our lives and properties in these perilous times," goes on Miss Priscilla, in her clear, soft voice, "and so I think we are bound to show them any civility in our power."

"More especially the life and property of old Desmond," says Terry, at this moment, with a noble disregard of consequences. He is sitting at a distant window, tying flies, and makes this unfortunate remark without the faintest appearance of malice prepense. "They say he is running a regular rig with his tenants,—playing old Harry with 'em, in fact," he goes on, debonairly; "but they'll stop his little game for him with a bullet before long, I shouldn't wonder."

As the forbidden name is thus cavalierly thrown into their midst, like a bomb, Monica flushes first a warm crimson and then turns cold with fright.

The old ladies stiffen in their chairs, but never a word say they; they are too much overcome for ordinary rebuke. Kit, however, to whom any excitement is welcome, betrays an open admiration for the bold Terence and waits hopefully for what may come next.

It is even worse than might be expected. Terence, either unaware or careless of the sensation he has produced, closes one eye to examine with pleased scrutiny the gaudy fly he has just completed, after which he says, with a suggestion of jocoseness that under the circumstances is perfectly abominable,—

"I say, Aunt Priscilla, as Cobbett has been sent to look after old Desmond in particular, don't you think, if you entertain him, it will be to old Desmond, and *not* Her Majesty, you will be paying attention, after all?"

He stops and smiles blandly. If, indeed, I said a *grin* illuminates his countenance, I might be nearer the truth. It is apparent to everybody that he is *jesting* on this sacred subject. [Pg 147]

"Terry!" says Monica, with a little gasp.

"Well?" says Mr. Beresford, amiably, purposely misunderstanding the horror of her tone, and looking up as though thirsting for the remainder of her speech. It doesn't come. Monica, fearful of provoking him to further monstrosities, forbears from answer of any kind.

"Terence," says Miss Priscilla, with slow solemnity, "I have frequently told you that we object to hearing that detested name mentioned in our presence. It offends both your aunt Penelope and me. I must again beg that for the future we may be spared a repetition of it."

"When I was going to give Tim Daly a sound thrashing for his impertinence yesterday, you stopped me and bade me forgive my enemies," says Terence, calmly, questioningly. "Why don't you forgive old Desmond?"

"Because——That is quite another thing altogether. I mean——I——it seems to me——No matter *what* it seems now; we can't discuss it," says Miss Priscilla, making a desperate effort to catch the horns of her dilemma and to escape from it.

"Let us discuss our party instead," says Kit, cheerfully, who is really of the greatest use at times. "When is it to be, Aunt Pris?"

"Next week, I suppose," says Miss Penelope, promptly, seeing that Miss Priscilla is still too agitated to reply. "And I think it would be rather nice to have tea in the orchard."

"Oh! how quite too lovely!" says Kit, clasping her hands.

"Quite too utterly consummately, preciously intense?" mutters Terence, *sotto voce*, regarding Kit sideways, who returns his rapturous glance with one full of ineffable disdain.

"I hope Michael won't object," says Miss Penelope, nervously. Michael is the gardener, and they are all, without exception, afraid of him.

"Nonsense, my dear! why should he?" says Miss Priscilla. "It isn't because he has been here for years that he is to forbid us the use of our own grounds, and of late I consider there is great fault to be found with him. Long service should not generate neglect, and of late there has not been a good lettuce or a respectable dish of asparagus in the garden."

"There wasn't even any thyme last week," says Kit, who maintains an undying feud with Michael. "He had to get some fresh plants from Cahirmore." [Pg 148]

"Time was made for slaves," says Terence, meditatively. "*You* aren't a slave, are you?"

"I should hope not," says Kit, icily.

"Then you can't want time: so don't worry that poor old man in the garden about it. He hasn't a scythe, or a bald head, or a dismal forelock: so he *can't* know anything about it."

"You are so clever," says the younger Miss Beresford, with unmixed scorn, "that I wonder something dreadful doesn't happen to you."

"So do I," says Terence.

"Well, auntie, and whom shall we ask to meet these men of war?" says Kit, ignoring him,—publicly, to his great delight.

"I suppose Madam O'Connor and all her party, and the Frenches, and Lord Rossmoyne,—who I hear is still in the country,—and——Penelope, my dear, will you sit down and write the invitations now for Friday next, as I must get ready to go to the coast-guard station? That girl of Mitson's is ill, and wants to see me."

Monica rising at this moment to leave the room, Kit follows her.

"It is really *too* amazing," she says, when they find themselves in the hall. "To think of their blossoming into a real live party! I feel quite overcome."

"So do I," says Monica, laughing.

"There is only one drawback to it," says Kit, softly: "I am *so* sorry Brian can't be asked."

Monica flushes furiously, and swerves away from her somewhat impatiently; but reply she makes none.

"There are cobwebs in my brain," says Kit, raising her hands languidly to her head, with the oppressed air of one who is bravely struggling with a bad headache. "I think I shall go for a walk to Biddy Daly's to try and rout them. I promised her old mother a pudding the last day I was there, and to-day cook has it ready for me. Will you come with me, Monica? *Do.*"

"Not to-day, I think," says Monica, lazily.

"I wish you would! I do so *hate* going anywhere by myself. And, somehow, I am half afraid to go alone to-day, I feel—so—so faint. However," with a resigned sigh, "never mind; I dare say if I *do* drop in a deadly swoon, somebody will pick me up." [Pg 149]

"My dear Kit, if you feel like that, don't go," says Monica, naturally alarmed.

"I have promised old Mrs. Daly; I must go," replies Kit, with the determination of a Brutus. "If I am not back in time for dinner, you will understand what has happened."

This is awful! Monica turns quite pale.

"Of course I shall go with you," she says, hurriedly. "Is your head so very bad, darling? How bravely you carried it off in there!" pointing towards the morning-room they have just left. "However, it would be only like you to hide your worries from us, lest they should make us unhappy."

At this, it must be allowed to her credit, Kit feels some strong twinges of remorse,—not enough, however, to compel confession.

"It is really hardly worth talking about," she says, alluding to the headache; and this, at all events, is the strict truth.

CHAPTER XIV.

How Kit's plot is betrayed, and how a walk that begins gayly ends in gloom.

The road to Mrs. Daly's is full of beauty. On one side of it runs Coole, its trees rich with leafy branches; upon the other stretches a common, green and soft, with a grand glimpse of the ocean far down below it.

"Why walk on the dusty road when those fields are green in there?" says Kit, pointing to Coole; and, after a faint hesitation, Monica follows her over the wall and into the dark recesses of the woods. The grass is knee deep in ferns and trailing verdure; great clumps of honeysuckle, falling from giant limbs of elm, make the air sweet. Some little way to their right—but where they cannot see because of the prodigality of moss and alder and bracken—a little hidden brook runs merrily, making

> "Sweet music with th' enamell'd stones,
> Giving a gentle kiss to every sedge
> He overtaketh in his pilgrimage."

Some thought belonging to the past night coming to Kit, she turns to Monica with a little laugh. [Pg 150]

"How silent you have been about last night's adventure!" she says. "I watched you from your own window until the shadows caught you. You looked like a flitting spirit,—a—a bhoot."

"A *boot*!" says Monica, very justly surprised.

"Yes," loftily. Kit's educational course, as directed by herself, has been of the erratic order, and has embraced many topics unknown to Monica. From the political economy of the Faroe Isles, it has reached even to the hidden mysteries of Hindostan.

"I must have struck you then as being in my liveliest mood," says Monica, still laughing. "Terry told us yesterday he was as gay as old boots. As I looked like *one*, I suppose I was at least half as gay as he was. After all, there is nothing like leather, no matter how ancient."

"There's an *h* in my bhoot," says Kit, with some disgust. "Really, the ignorance of some people—even the *nicest*—is, surprising."

"Then why don't you take it out?" says Monica, frivolously. "Not that I know in the very least what harm a poor innocent letter could do there."

"You don't understand," says Kit, pitifully.

"I don't indeed," says Monica, unabashed.

"A bhoot is an Indian ghost."

"And you thought I looked like an Indian ghost! with a turban! and an Afghan! and a scimitar! Oh, Kit! Did I really look like the mahogany table beneath the silver moonbeams? and did my eyes glitter?"

"What a goose you are!" says Kit, roaring with laughter. "No, you looked lovely; but I was reading an Indian story yesterday, and it came into my head."

"You read too much," says Monica. "'Much learning will make you mad,' if you don't take care. Remember what Lord Bacon says, 'Reading maketh a full man.' How would *you* like to be a full woman,—like Madam O'Connor, for example?"

"Francis Bacon never meant it in that sense," says Kit, indignantly. "I really *wonder* at you Monica." And, having so scolded her idol, she relapses into silence for a considerable time.

"Oh! what lovely dog-roses!" says Monica, presently, pointing to a hanging spray of pink blossoms, satisfying as a happy dream. "I *must* get them."

She springs up a mossy bank as she speaks, regardless of the blackberry branches that cross her path, barring her way, and catching viciously at her skirts, as though to hinder her progress. [Pg 151]

"Oh, take care!" cries Kit, forgetting all about Lord Bacon in her terror lest her pretty sister shall not show to the best advantage in her lover's eyes. "Your gown will be torn. Wait, wait, until I set you free from these dreadful thorns."

"'Alas! how full of briers is this working-day-world,'" quotes Monica, gayly. "There, now I am all right, and I have got my pretty roses into the bargain. Are they not sweet?—*sweet?*" holding them right under Kit's nose.

"They are, indeed. And, by the by, here we are," pointing to a low farmhouse in the distance.

Reaching it, and finding the door as usual open, they enter what might be the hall in another house, but is here the kitchen. There is no leading up to it. From the moment you cross the threshold the kitchen lies before you.

It is a large room, if it may so be called, with a huge fireplace in which a dozen fires might be stowed away and forgotten. Just now there is a flame somewhere in its blackmost depths that cannot possibly annoy these June visitors, as one has to search for it to find it.

An old woman, infirm and toothless, yet with all the remains of great beauty, sits cowering over this hidden turf fire, mumbling to herself, it may be, of golden days now past and gone, when she had been the fairest colleen at mass or pattern, and had counted her lovers by the score. Yea,

those were good old times, when the sky was ever blue and all the earth was young.

Two young women, sitting near her, but farther from the chimney-nook, are gossiping idly, but persistently, in the soft, mellifluous brogue that distinguishes the county Cork.

As the Beresford girls enter, these two latter women rise simultaneously and courtesy with deep respect. The youngest of them, who is so like the handsome old woman in the corner of the fireplace as to be unmistakably of kin to her, comes quickly forward to greet her visitors with the kindly grace and the absence of consciousness that distinguish the Irish peasantry when doing the honors of their own homes. This lack of *mauvaise honte* arises perhaps from the fact that they are so honestly glad to welcome a guest beneath their roof that they forget to be shy or backward.

She makes a slight effort to pull down her tucked-up sleeves, and then desists, for which any one with a mind artistic should be devoutly grateful, as her arms, brown as they are from exposure to [Pg 152] the sun, are at least shaped to perfection. She is dressed in a maroon-colored skirt and body, the skirt so turned up in fishwife fashion (as *we* wore it some seasons ago) that a dark-blue petticoat beneath, of some coarse description, can be distinctly seen.

Her throat is a little bare, arms, as I have said, quite so, far up above the elbows. She is stout and comely, with a beautiful laughing mouth, and eyes of deepest gray, merry as her lips. Outside, lying about, half naked in the warm sunshine, are three or four boys with the same eyes and mouth, undeniably her children.

"Wisha! 'tis meself's glad to see ye," she says, with a beaming smile. "Good luck to yer faces. 'Tis a long time now, Miss Beresford, since ye came, or Miss Kit there."

"I promised your mother a pudding, and I have brought it," says Kit.

"Look at that, now! 'Tis a trouble we are to ye entirely. Mother, wake up a bit, an' thank Miss Kit for what she's brought ye."

"Ye're too kind, asthore, too kind," mumbles the old woman in the corner, turning eyes that are still full of light upon the child, "to think of an ould 'ooman now in the grave as it might be. Ay, faix! An' the bells a-ringin' too. I can hear 'em sometimes, when the wind's down——"

"Nonsense, mother! the yard (churchyard) will be lonely for ye yet awhile," says Mrs. Daly, junior, cheerfully. "See, now! taste this: 'twill do ye good. An' you'll sit down, Miss Monica, I hope. Take care, honey, till I dust the chair for ye." This is dexterously done with the corner of her apron. "An' ye'll take a dhrop o' tay too, may be; oh, ye will now, if only to plase me, afther yer long walk, an' all to honor the ould woman."

"Ah, there is Mrs. Moloney!" says Kit, addressing the second younger woman, who is a thin little peasant with a somewhat discontented expression. "The sun blinded my eyes so that I could not see you at first. Have you heard from your boy at sea?"

"Yes, miss. Praises be above! He's doin' well, he says; but it's belike I'll never see a sight of his handsome face again."

"Oh, nonsense, now, Mrs. Moloney, me dear! What are ye talkin' like that for?" says young Mrs. Daly, who seems to be the parish consoler. "Sure it's back he'll be wid ye before the new year." [Pg 153]

"Oh, yes, I *hope* so," says Monica, softly.

"'Tis hard to hope, miss, wid the rowling wind o' nights, an' the waves dashin' up on the beach."

"Ye're an ould croaker," says Mrs. Daly, giving her a good-humored shake, "An' now sit down, Miss Monica an' Miss Kit, do, till I get ye the sup o' tay. Mrs. Moloney, me dear, jist give the fire a poke, an' make the kittle sing us a song. 'Tis the music we want most now."

It would have been considered not only a rudeness, but an act *hauteur*, to refuse this simple hospitality: so the girls seat themselves, and, indeed, to tell the truth, are rather glad than otherwise of this chance of securing their afternoon tea.

"An' how are the old ladies up above?" says Mrs. Daly, meaning the Misses Blake.

"Quite well, thank you," says Monica. "It was only yesterday Aunt Priscilla was saying she should come down and see old Mrs. Daly."

"She's as welcome as the flowers in May whenever she comes," says the daughter-in-law. "D'ye hear that, mother? Miss Priscilla's comin' to see ye, some day soon. Ay, 'tis a good friend she always was to the poor, summer an' winter; an' isn't it wondherful now, Miss Monica, how she's kept her figure all through? Why," raising her hands with an expressive gesture of astonishment, "'twas Friday week I saw her, an' I said to meself, says I, she's the figure o' a young girl, I says. Ye'll take a taste o' this home-made cake, alanna."

She is made happy forever by Kit's unmistakable enjoyment of this last-named luxury.

"Ay, she's an iligant figure even now," says Mrs. Moloney, in her depressing voice. "But time an' throuble is cruel hard on some of us. I had a figure meself when I was young," with a heartrending sigh.

"Ye were always slight, me dear, an' ye're slight now too," says Mrs. Daly, tenderly. "I niver see

the like o'ye for keepin' off the flesh. Why, I remember ye well as a slip o' a girl, before yer blessed babby was born, an' ye were a screed, me dear,—a screed."

"Yes, I was always ginteel," says Mrs. Moloney, openly consoled. Still she sighs, and sips her tea with a mournful air. Mrs. Daly is drinking hers with much appreciation out of her saucer, it being considered discourteous to offer anything to a guest without partaking of the same one's self.

At this moment a little cooing sound coming from the other corner of the fireplace makes itself heard. Instantly the old woman stooping over the turf embers rouses herself, and, turning, puts [Pg 154] out her withered hand lovingly towards what looks like a box covered with colored stuff of some sort. Young Mrs. Daly rises too, precipitately and, hurrying across the kitchen, bends over the box.

"Ay, she's awake sure enough!" says the old woman, who has quite brightened into life. "See how she looks at ye, Molly! The colleen of the world, she was! asthore machree-sthig."

Many another fond name is muttered, such as "pulse o' my heart," and such like, before Mrs. Daly junior emerges from the supposed box, but *not* empty-handed.

"Oh! it is the baby!" cry Monica and Kit, in a breath. "Oh! what a darling baby! and what red, red cheeks, just like a June rose!"

It is the only daughter of the house, so the mother is of course inordinately proud of it. She places it, with quite a little flourish of triumph, in Monica's arms, to Kit's terrible but unspoken disappointment.

"She grows prettier every day. She is really the sweetest baby I ever saw in my life!" says Monica, enthusiastically, to whom babies are an endless joy.

The mother is pleased beyond doubt at these compliments, yet a shade of anxiety crosses her brow. To praise a child *too* much in the superstition of these simple folks, is to "overlook" it; and when a child is "overlooked" it dies. The smiles fades from Mrs. Daly's bonny face, and her mouth grows anxious.

"You should say, 'God bless her,' miss, when ye give her the good word," says Mrs. Moloney, timidly, who is also bending over the beloved bundle, and notes the distress in her neighbor's eyes.

"God bless her!" says Monica with pretty solemnity, after which the mother's face clears, and sunshine is again restored to it.

"I think she knows ye," she says to Monica. "See how she blinks at ye! Arrah! look, now, how she clutches at yer hand! Will ye come to yer mother now, darlin',—will ye? Sure 'tis starvin' ye must be, by this."

"Oh! don't take her yet," says Monica, entreatingly.

A little figure with naked legs and feet, creeping into the doorway at this moment, draws near the baby as if fascinated. It is Paudheen, the eldest son of the house, and baby's *nurse*,—save the mark!

"Come nearer, Paddy," says Monica, smiling at him with sweet encouragement; but Paddy stops [Pg 155] short and regards her doubtfully.

"Come, then, and kiss your little sister," continues Monica, gently; but Paddy is still obdurate, and declines to hearken to the charmer, charm she never so wisely. There is, indeed, a sad lack both of sweetness and light about Paddy.

"An' what d'ye mane be standin' there, an' niver a word out o' ye in answer to the lady, ye ill-mannered caubogue?" cries his mother, deeply incensed. The laughter is all gone from her face, and her eyes are aflame. "What brought ye in at all, ye ugly spalpeen, if ye came without a civil tongue in yer head?"

"I came to see the baby an' to get me dinner," says the boy, with hanging head, his silence arising more from shyness than sullenness. The potatoes have just been lifted from the fire by Mrs. Moloney, and are steaming in a distant corner. Paudheen looks wistfully towards them.

"Dickens a sign or taste ye'll get, then, if only to tache ye better manners. Be off, now, an' don't let me see ye agin."

"I'm hungry," says the boy, tears coming into his eyes.

"Oh, Mrs. Daly!" says Monica, in a distressed tone.

"A deal o' harm it will do him to be hungry, thin!" says the culprit's mother, with an angry voice, but with visible signs of relenting in her handsome eyes. "Be off wid ye now, I tell ye." This is the last burst of the storm. As the urchin creeps crestfallen towards the doorway her rage dies, its death being as sudden as its birth. "Come back here!" she cries, inconsistently. "What d'ye mane be takin' me at me word like that? Come back, I tell ye, an' go an' ate something, ye crathur. How dare ye behave as if I was a bad mother to ye?"

The boy comes back, and, raising his bonny head, smiles at her fondly but audaciously.

"Look at him, now, the blackguard," says the mother, returning the smile in kind. "Was there ever the like of him? Go an' ate yer praties now, and thank yer stars Miss Monica was here to say a good word for ye."

Paddy, glad of his rescue, casts a shy glance at Monica, and then, going over to where his grandmother and the pot of potatoes rest side by side, sits down (close cuddled up to the old dame) to fill his little empty stomach with as many of those esculent roots as he can manage, which, in truth, is the poor child's only dinner from year's end to year's end. And yet it is a [Pg 156] remarkable fact that, in spite of this scanty fare, the Irish peasant, when come to man's estate, is ever strong and vigorous and well grown. And who shall say he hasn't done his queen good service, too, on many a battle-field? and even in these latter days, when sad rebellion racks our land, has not his name been worthy of honorable mention on the plains of Tel-el-Kebir?

"I don't think he *looks* like a bad boy, Mrs. Daly," says Monica, reflectively, gazing at the liberated Paddy.

"Bad, miss, is it?" says the mother, who, having made her eldest born out a villain, is now prepared to maintain he is a veritable saint. "You don't know him, faix. Sure there niver was the like of him yet. He is a raal jewel, that gossoon o' mine, an' the light of his father's eyes. Signs on it, he'd die for Daly! There niver was sich a love betwixt father an' son. He's the joy o' my life, an' the greatest help to me. 'Tis he minds the pig, an' the baby, an' ould granny there, an' everything. I'd be widout my right hand if I lost him."

"But I thought you said——" begins Monica, mystified by this change from righteous wrath to unbounded admiration.

"Arrah, niver mind what I said, acushla," says the younger Mrs. Daly, with an emphatic wink. "Sure 'twas only to keep him in ordher a bit, I said it at all at all! But 'tis young he is yet, the crathur."

"*Very* young. Oh, Mrs. Daly, *look* at baby! See how she is trying to get at my hair!" Monica is beginning in a delighted tone,—as though to have one's hair pulled out by the roots is the most enchanting sensation in the world,—when suddenly her voice dies away into silence, and she herself stares with great open violet eyes at something that darkens the doorway and throws a shadow upon the assembled group within.

It is Desmond!

Kit, feeling as guilty as though she were the leading character in some conspiracy, colors crimson, and retires behind Mrs. Moloney. She lowers her eyes, and is as mute as death. But Monica speaks.

"Is it you?" she says. Which, of course, is quite the silliest thing she *can* say, as he is standing there regarding her with eyes so full of light and love that the cleverest ghost could not copy them. But then she is not sillier than her fellows, for, as a rule, all people, if you remark, say, "Is that you?" or "Have you come?" when they are actually looking into your face and should be able [Pg 157] to answer the question for themselves.

"Yes, it is," says Desmond, with such an amount of diffidence (I hope it wasn't assumed) as should have melted the heart of the hardest woman upon earth. Monica is *not* the hardest woman upon earth.

Still, she makes him no further speech, and Desmond begins to wonder if he is yet forgiven. He is regarding her fixedly; but she, after that first swift glance, has turned her attention upon the baby on her knee, and is seemingly lost in admiration of its little snub nose. Why will she not look at him? What did he say to her last night that is so difficult to forgive? Can wrath be cherished for so long in that gentle bosom? Her face is as calm as an angel's; surely

> "There's nothing ill can dwell in such a temple."

"Ah! come in, Misther Desmond," says Mrs. Daly, hospitably. "I'm glad 'tis company I have before you the day. Maybe 'twill coax ye to come again. Where have you been this week an' more? Faix, ye were so long in comin', I thought 'twas angry wid me ye were."

"Nobody is ever angry with a pretty woman like you," says Desmond, saucily.

"Oh, now, hark to him!" says Mrs. Daly laughing heartily. "I wonder ye aren't ashamed of yourself. An' is the ould Squire hearty?"

"He's as well as even *you* could wish him. How d'ye do, Kit? Won't you come and speak to me?"

He has been afraid to shake hands with Monica up to this, but now she turns suddenly towards him and holds out to him one slender fair hand, the other being twined round the baby. She does this musingly.

He grasps the little snowy hand with almost senile delight, and holds it for—as long as he dares. During this undefined period he tells himself what a perfect picture she is, with her clear, pale, beautiful face, and her nut-brown hair, and the tender sweetness of her attitude, as she bends over the smiling baby. Could any vaunted Madonna be half as lovely? At this moment a growing contempt for all the greatest masterpieces of the greatest masters permeates his being and renders him weak in faith.

"Won't ye sit down, thin?" says Mrs. Daly. Being a woman, she grasps the situation at a glance, and places a chair for him close to Monica. "What's the matther wid ye to-day, Misther Desmond, that ye haven't a word to give us?" [Pg 158]

"You ought to know what I'm thinking of," says Desmond, accepting the chair, and drawing it even a degree closer to Monica.

"Faix, thin, I don't," says Mrs. Daly junior, her handsome face full of smiles. A love-affair is as good as a saint's day to an Irish peasant; and here she tells herself, with a glance at Monica, is one ready-made to her hand.

"I'm thinking what a lucky man Daly is," says Desmond, promptly.

"Oh, git along wid ye now, an' yer blarney!" says Mrs. Daly, roaring with laughter; whilst even Mrs. Moloney the dismal, and the old granny in the corner, chime in merrily.

And then the visit comes to a close, and they all rise and bid Mrs. Daly and the others "good-by;" and Monica, mindful of his late affliction, bestows a soft parting word upon the subdued Paddy.

And now they are all in the open air again, and, turning down the boreen that leads to the Daly's homestead, reach the road that leads to Moyne. It is Desmond's way as well as theirs, so he accompanies the girls without remark.

"What brought you to see the Dalys, to-day?" asks Monica, suddenly, without any ulterior meaning beyond the desire of making conversation; but to Kit's guilty soul this question seems fraught with mischief.

"Oh, I often go to see Daly. I want him to come fishing with me to-morrow: he's the best man about here for that, and trudges behind one for miles without complaining."

"Poor Daly!"

"Well, I hope you enjoyed your visit to-day," says Kit, blithely, glancing at him mischievously from beneath her broad hat.

"There was a drawback," says Brian, unthinkingly. "I went there full of hope, and, after all, she never offered me any of your pudding!"

Tableau!

Kit's agonized glance and Monica's questioning eyes awake Mr. Desmond to a knowledge of what he has done.

"How did *you* hear of Kit's pudding?" asks Monica, looking keenly from Brian to Kit, and then back again.

"Oh!—the pudding," stammers Desmond.

"There! don't commit yourself," says Monica, in a tone that trembles. "Oh, Kit!" [Pg 159]

Both culprits are afraid to look at her. Does the tremble mean tears, or anger, or what? Perhaps horror at their duplicity, or contempt. Is she hopelessly angered?

Then a suppressed sound reaches their ears, creating a fresh panic in their breasts. Is she positively *choking* with indignation? Cautiously, anxiously, they glance at her, and find, to their everlasting relief, that she is convulsed with laughter.

"When next you meditate forming a brilliant plot such as this," she says to Kit, "I think I should look out a more trustworthy accomplice if I were you."

"Catch me having a secret with *him* again," says Kit now her fears are appeased, turning wrathfully upon Desmond.

"I quite forgot all about it, I did, indeed," exclaims he, penitently. "Forgive me this time, and I'll promise never to do it again."

"And I'll promise you you shan't have the chance," says Kit, with fervor.

"*Why* was I to be deceived?" says Monica. "I think I have been very basely treated. If you, Kit, desired a clandestine meeting with Mr. Desmond, I don't see why *I* was to be drawn into it. And it was a stupid arrangement, too: two is company, three trumpery. I know, if I had a lover, I should prefer——"

"Monica!" says Kit, indignantly; but Monica only laughs the more.

"It is *my* turn now, you know," she says.

"Kit had nothing to do with it: it was all my fault," says Desmond, laughing too. "If you must pour out the vials of your wrath on some one, let it be on me."

"Yes, give him a good scolding, Monica," says Kit viciously, but with a lovely smile. "I am going to pick to some ferns for Aunt Pen; when I return I hope I shall find that recreant knight of yours—I mean *mine*—at the point of death!"

At this she flits away from them, like the good little thing she is, up a sloping bank, and so into

the fields beyond, until Desmond and Monica are as much alone as if a whole sphere divided them from their kind. Dear little Kit! When her own time comes may she be as kindly dealt with!

"You are angry with me still,—about last night," says Desmond, softly, "and, I own, with cause. But I was miserable when I called you a coquette, and misery makes a man unjust. I wrote to Kit this morning,—I was afraid to write to you,—and she was very good to me." [Pg 160]

"How good?" plucking a leaf from a brier, as she goes slowly, *very* slowly—down the road.

"She brought me *you*. Do you know, Monica, I have been as unhappy as a man can be since last I saw you,—a whole night and part of a day? Is it not punishment enough?"

"Too much for your crime," whispers she, softly, turning suddenly towards him and letting her great luminous eyes rest with forgiveness upon his. She smiles sweetly, but with some timidity, because of the ardor of the glance that answers hers. Taking her hand with an impulsive movement impossible to restrain, Desmond presses it rapturously to his lips. Drawing it away from him with shy haste, Monica walks on in silence.

"If I had written to you, and not to her, would you still have been here to-day?" asks he, presently.

"I think not."

"That is a cruel answer, is it not?"

"Would you have me belie my nature?" asks she, with quick agitation; "would you have me grow false, secret, deceitful? My aunts trust me: am I to prove myself unworthy of their confidence?"

"I am less to you, then, than your aunts' displeasure!"

"You are less to me than my conscience; and yet——"

With a violent effort, that betrays how far her thoughts have been travelling in company with his, she brings herself back to the present moment, and a recollection of the many reasons why she must not listen to his wooing. "Why should you believe yourself anything to me?" she asks, in a voice that quivers audibly.

"Ah, why, indeed?" returns he, bitterly. There is such pain in his voice and face that her soul yearns towards him, and she repents of her last words.

"I am wrong. You *are* something to me," she says, in a tone so low that he can scarcely hear it. But lovers' ears are sharp.

"You *mean* that, Monica?"

"Yes," still lower.

"Then why cannot I be *more* to you? Why am I to be denied a chance of forwarding the cause in which all my hopes are centred? Monica, say you will meet me somewhere—*soon*."

"How can I?" she says, tremulously. Her voice is full of tears. She is altogether different from the coquettish, provoking child of last night. "You forget all I have just now said." [Pg 161]

"At least tell me," says he, sadly, "that if you could you would."

There is a pathetic ring in his tone, and tears rise to her eyes. Can anything be so hopeless as this love-affair of hers?

"Yes, I would," she says, almost desperately.

"Oh, darling—*darling*!" says the young man with passion. He holds her hands closely, and looks into her troubled eyes, and wishes he might dare take her into his arms and, pressing her to his heart, ask her to repeat her words again. But there is something in the calm purity of her beautiful face that repels vehemence of any sort; and as yet—although the dawn is near—her love has not declared itself to her own soul in all its strength.

"I have at least one consolation," he says, at last, calling to mind the quietude that surrounds Moyne and its inhabitants, and the withdrawal from society that has obtained there for many years. "As you are not allowed to see me,—except on such rare occasions as the present when the Fates are kind,—you cannot at least see *any one else*,—often, that is."

"Meaning?——"

"Ryde."

She laughs a little, and then colors.

"Aunt Priscilla has asked him to come to Moyne next Friday," she says, looking at the ground: "she is giving an At Home on that day, for him and Captain Cobbett. She says she feels it is a duty to her queen to show some attention to her servants."

In her tone, as she says this, there is a spice of that mischief that is never very far from any pretty woman.

"He is to be invited to Moyne,—to spend an entire day with you!" says Desmond, thunderstruck by this last piece of news.

"Oh, no! only part of it," says Monica, meekly.

"It is just as bad. It is disgraceful! Your aunts are purposely encouraging *him* to keep you away from me. Oh, *why*," wretchedly, "should this unlucky quarrel have arisen between our house and yours?"

"Well, that's your fault," says Monica.

"Mine?"

"Your uncle's, then. It is all the same," unjustly.

"I really can't see *that*," says Mr. Desmond, very righteously aggrieved; "that is visiting the sins of the uncles upon the nephews with a vengeance! Monica, at least promise me you won't be civil to him." [Pg 162]

"To your uncle?"

"Nonsense! You know I mean Ryde."

"I can't be rude to him."

"You can. Why not? It will keep him from calling again."

No answer.

"Oh, I daresay you *want* him to call again," says Desmond, angrily.

At this moment, the gates of Moyne being in sight, and those of Coole long passed, Kit suddenly appears on the top of a high stone wall, and calls gayly to Desmond to come and help her alight.

"And now go away too," she says: "you are forbidden goods, you know, and we must not be seen talking to you, under pain of death."

"Good-by," says Desmond, with alacrity, who is, in truth, sulky, and undesirous of further parley with his beloved. "Good-by, Miss Beresford."

"Good-by," says Monica, shortly.

"We shall see you again soon, no doubt," says Kit, kindly, in her clear, sweet treble.

"I think it very improbable," returns he, raising his hat gravely and taking his departure.

"Now, what *have* you been saying to that wretched young man, Monica?" says Kit, severely, standing still in the middle of the road, the better to bring her sister beneath the majesty of her eye.

"Nothing. Nothing that any reasonable being could object to," declares Monica, with such an amount of vigor as startles Kit. "But of all the ill-tempered, bearish, detestable men I ever met in my life, *he is the worst*."

Which unlooked for explosion from the gentle Monica has the effect of silencing Kit for the remainder of the walk. [Pg 163]

CHAPTER XV.

How the Misses Blake discover a gigantic fraud—How Terence is again arraigned, and brought before the Court on a charge of duplicity—and how he is nearly committed for contempt.

Reaching home, they find the atmosphere there decidedly clouded. Miss Priscilla, who has returned from her drive just a moment before, is standing in the hall, gazing with a stern countenance upon the old-fashioned eight-day clock, in which two or three people might be safely stowed away. The clock regards her not at all, but ticks on loudly with a sort of exasperating obstinacy, as though determined to remind every one of the flight of time.

"Who has wound this clock?" demands Miss Priscilla, in an awful tone. With a thrill of thankfulness the girls feel they can answer truthfully, "Not I."

"Dear me!" says Miss Penelope, timidly, advancing from the morning-room; "I did. You were so long out, Priscilla, and I feared—I mean, I thought it would save you the trouble."

"Trouble in winding a clock! What trouble could there be in that? And it is *never* wound until Saturday evening. For twenty years I have wound it on Saturday evening. A good eight-day clock nearly fifty years old can't bear being tampered with. Now, Penelope, why did you do that? You know that I can't endure old rules to be upset."

"But, my dear Priscilla, I only thought as I was passing——"

"You *thought*, Penelope; but I wish you *wouldn't* think. There are other things you ought to think about that you often neglect; and——"

"Now, Priscilla, is that just? I think—I *hope* I seldom neglect my duty; and I must say I didn't expect this from *you*."

Here Miss Penelope dissolves into tears, to Monica's grief and dismay.

"Oh, Aunt Priscilla, I am sure Aunt Pen only meant to save you trouble," she says, earnestly, putting her arms round Miss Penelope, who sobs audibly on her shoulder.

"And who says I thought anything else?" says poor Miss Priscilla, fiercely, though her voice trembles with emotion: it is terrible to her to see her faithful friend and sister in tears of her causing. "Penelope, I meant nothing, but I have heard something that has grieved and disturbed me: so I must needs come home and avenge my ill-temper on the best creature in the world. Alas! I am a wicked woman." [Pg 164]

"Oh, no, no," cries Miss Penelope. "My dear Priscilla, you will break my heart if you talk thus. My good soul, come in here and tell me what has happened to distress you."

In truth it is quite plain now that something has happened during her drive to take Miss Priscilla's well-balanced mind off its hinges.

"Where is Terence?" she asks, looking from one to other of the group in the hall.

"Here," says Terence himself, coming leisurely towards her from a side-passage.

"Come in here with me," says Miss Priscilla; and they all follow her into the morning-room.

Here she turns and faces the unconscious Terence with a pale, reproachful face.

"When I tell you I have just come from Mitson the coast-guard, and that I thanked him for having lent you his gun, you will understand how I have been grieved and pained to-day," she says, a tremor in her voice.

Terence is no longer unconscious; and Monica feels that her heart is beating like a lump of lead.

"Oh! what is it, Priscilla?" asks Miss Penelope, greatly frightened.

"A tale of craft and cunning," says Miss Priscilla in a hollow tone. "Mitson tells me he never lent him that gun. Terence has wilfully deceived us, his poor aunts, who love him and only desire his good. He has, I fear, basely mystified us to accomplish his own ends, and has indeed departed from the precious truth."

"I never said Mitson did lend it to me," says Terence, sullenly: "you yourself suggested the idea, and I let it slide, that was all."

"All! Is not prevarication only a *mean* lie? Oh, Terence, I am so deeply grieved! I know not what to say to you."

The scene is becoming positively tragical. Already a sense of crime of the blackest and deepest dye is overpowering Terence.

"Whom *did* you get that gun from, Terence?" asks Miss Priscilla, sternly.

No answer. [Pg 165]

"Now, Terence, be calm," says Miss Penelope. "Sit down now, Terence, and collect yourself, and don't be untruthful again."

"I have told no lie, aunt," says Terence, indignantly.

"Then tell your good Aunt Priscilla who gave you the gun."

Dead silence.

"Are we to understand that you *won't* tell us, Terence?" asks Miss Priscilla, faintly. She is now much the more nervous of the two old maids.

Terence casts a hasty glance at Monica's white face, and then says, stoutly,—

"I don't want to tell, and I *won't*!"

"Terence!" exclaims the usually mild Miss Penelope, with great indignation, and is going to further relieve her mind, no doubt, when Miss Priscilla, throwing up her hands, checks her.

"Let him alone, Penelope," she says, sadly. "Perhaps he has some good reason: let us not press him too far. Obduracy is better than falsehood. Let us go and pray that heaven may soften his heart and grant him a right understanding."

With this the two old ladies walk slowly and with dignity from the room, leaving the criminal with his sisters.

Monica bursts into tears and flings her arms round his neck. "You did it for *me*. I know it!—I saw it in your eyes," she says. "Oh, Terence, I feel as if it was all my fault."

"Fiddlesticks!" says Mr. Beresford, who is in a boiling rage. "Did you ever hear anything like her? and all about a paltry thing like that! She couldn't behave worse if I had been convicted of murder. I'm convinced"—viciously—"it was all baffled curiosity that got up her temper. She was

dying to know about that gun, and so I was determined I wouldn't gratify her. A regular old cat, if ever there was one."

"Oh, no! don't speak like that; I am sure they love you—and they were disappointed—and——"

"They'll have to get through a good deal of disappointment," says Terence, still fuming. "What right have they to make me out a Sir Galahad in their imaginations? I'd perfectly *hate* to be a Sir Galahad; and so I tell them." This is not strictly correct as the Misses Blake are out of hearing. "And as for their love, they may keep it, if it only means blowing a fellow up for nothing."

"Aunt Penelope was just as bad," says Kit. "I really"—with dignified contempt—"felt quite *ashamed* of her!" [Pg 166]

Miss Priscilla keeps a diary, in which she most faithfully records all that happens in every one of the three hundred and sixty-five days of every year.

About this time there may be seen in it an entry such as follows:

"*Saturday, July 3.*—I fear Terence told a LIE! He *certainly* equivocated! Penelope and I have done our best to discover the real owner of THE gun, but as yet have failed. The secret rests with Terence, and to force his confidence would be unchristian; but it *may* transpire in *time*."

After this come sundry other jottings, such as—

"*Monday, July 5.*—Past four. Fanny Stack called. Penelope in the garden, as usual. All the trouble of entertaining falling upon *my* hands. Still, I do not repine. Providence is good; and Penelope of course, dear soul, should be allowed the recreation that pertains to her garden. And, indeed, a sweet place she makes of it."

After this again comes a third paragraph:

"*Tuesday, July 6.*—Terence again most wilful, and Kit somewhat saucy; yet my heart yearns over these children. God grant they be guided by a tender hand along the straight and narrow way!"

It is the next day, July 7, and the two Misses Blake, standing in the dining-room, are discussing Terence again. They have had a great shock, these two old ladies, in the discovery of a duplicity that they in their simplicity have magnified fourfold. How is it possible they should remember how *they* felt thirty years ago?

"I doubt we must keep a tight hand upon him, Penelope," says Miss Priscilla, sorrowfully. "The rector is very lax. He goes to him day by day, but beyond Greek and Latin seems to imbibe little else. And *morals* are the groundwork of all, and surely superior to the languages spoken by those who believed in heathen gods. I wonder at the rector, I must say. But we must only make up for his deficiences by keeping a tight hand, as I said before, upon this unhappy boy."

"Yes, but not *too* tight, Priscilla; that might only create a rebellious feeling and destroy all our chances of success. And we are bent on leading this poor dear boy (poor Katherine's boy, Priscilla) into the way of truth."

"Yes, yes; we must be cautious, *most* cautious, in our treatment," says Miss Priscilla, nervously, "and very careful of his comings and goings, without *appearing* to be so! Dear me! dear me! I [Pg 167] wonder if the greatness of our cause justifies so much deceit. It sounds jesuitical, my dear Penelope, say what we can."

"The end justifies the means," says Miss Penelope, as solemnly as if this speech emanated from her throat as an original remark.

"Oh, don't! my dear Penelope!" says Miss Priscilla, with a shudder; "that is *their* principal argument."

"Whose? The children's?" asks Miss Penelope, startled.

"No; the Jesuits,—the Inquisitors,—those dreadful people we read of in 'Westward Ho,'" says Miss Priscilla, protestingly. "Still, I agree with you; secrecy is the part we have to play. We must keep one eye" (as if there was only one between them) "upon him without *seeming* to do so. And there he is,"—pointing through the window to where Terence may be seen coming slowly towards the window in which they stand in a most unhappy frame of mind.

"I wonder where he can have been for the past half-hour," says Miss Priscilla presently, in a nervous whisper, though Terence is so far off that if she spoke at the top of her lungs he could not have heard her.

"Perhaps if we ask him he may tell us," says Miss Penelope, equally nervous and decidedly with great doubt as to the success of her suggestion.

"Well, you ask him," says Miss Priscilla.

"I am greatly wanting in *force* on occasions such as these," says Miss Penelope, hurriedly. "No, no, my dear; you ask him. But be gentle with him, my dear Priscilla."

"Why can't *you* do it?" persists Miss Blake, plainly anxious to shift the obnoxious task from her own shoulders to another's. "You have great influence with the children, I have remarked many times."

"Nothing to *yours*," says Miss Penelope, with an agitated wave of her hand. "I couldn't do it; indeed I *couldn't*, my dear Priscilla," openly quaking. "Don't ask me. See, here he comes! Now be firm,—be *firm*, Priscilla, but lenient, *very* lenient: he is only a boy, remember, and even the great Luther was strangely wanting in principle when young."

"It is my duty; I suppose I must go through with it," says poor Miss Priscilla, sighing; and then she throws wide the window and calls to Terence to come to her.

"Where have you been, Terence?"

"At the back gate, aunt." [Pg 168]

"But, my *dear* Terence, *why* at the back gate? Such a nice day for a good long wholesome walk! Why spend it at the back gate?"

"Because—that is—I——"

"My dear boy, be calm. Wait a moment now, Terence, and don't hurry yourself. There is no occasion for haste."

"I was only going to say, aunt——"

"Pause now, Terence: consider well before you speak. Though, indeed, there should be no need for consideration when only the simple but lovely truth is required. Truth is always lovely, Terence; it is a flower of great beauty. Collect yourself, now." (This is a favorite formula with the Misses Blake.) "Don't tell a lie, Terence!"

"Why should I tell a lie?" says Terence, fiercely, feeling at this moment that death, when compared with nagging, would be sweet.

"Oh, Terence, what a tone! and to your good aunt Penelope, who loves you! Such a tone as that, my dear, is unchristian. Now, we don't want to know what you were *doing* at the back gate. Why should you be afraid of us? Are we not your greatest friends? But what could you have been doing for half an hour at the back gate, Terence?"

"I went up there with Michael, aunt."

"I didn't ask you that, dear. I am afraid you have no confidence in us, Terence. I didn't ask you who went with you. Can't you say yes or no, Terence? Were you *long* at the gate?"

"No, aunt."

"Was any one but Michael with you?"

"Yes, aunt."

"Was it Adams?"

"No, aunt."

"Can't you say anything but yes or no, Terence? Have you no command of the Queen's English, after all the money, too, your poor father wasted on your education,—and now the rector? Speak up, my dear child, and tell us everything honestly and nobly."

"But there is nothing to tell, aunt, except that——"

"No, collect yourself, Terence; take time, my dear. *Now*, answer me: who was with you, besides Michael?"

"Timothy, aunt."

The hoary-headed butler being, like Cæsar's wife, above suspicion, the Misses Blake are pulled up pretty short,—so short, indeed, that they forget to ask if any one besides the respectable [Pg 169] Timothy was at the obnoxious back gate. Perhaps had they known that the smith's son, and two or three other young men, had been there, and that all had been talking the most violent politics, their fears for Terence's morality would have increased rather than diminished.

As it is, they are well pleased.

"But why didn't you say that at once, my dear boy? We are so afraid of your mixing with evil companions."

Terence thinks of the smith's son, and his unqualified opinion that all landlords and aristocrats and sovereigns should be "stamped out," and wonders if *he* would come under the category of evil companions, but he wisely refrains from speech.

"And," says Miss Penelope, softly, "why didn't you tell us before leaving the house where you were going? I am sure, if you had, both your aunt Priscilla and I would have been delighted *to go*

with you, busy though we were."

This is the climax. Again in Terence's fevered imagination the smith's son arises, wielding his brawny brown arm like a sledge-hammer, as he noisily lays down the laws of extermination: he can see himself, too, joining in the fray, and defying the smith's son's opinion with an eloquence of which he had been only proud. He feels he is deceiving these two old ladies, and is angry with himself for doing it, and still more angry with them for making him do it.

"I am glad we have heard the truth at *last*, Terence," says Miss Priscilla. "There is nothing so mean or contemptible as a lie."

"You are enough to make *any* fellow tell a lie," bursts out Terence, with miserable rage, "with your questionings and pryings!"

At this awful speech, the two Misses Blake burst into tears, and Terence dashes in a fury from the room.

CHAPTER XVI.

How the afternoon at Moyne proves a great success—How Olga Bohun is led into a half confession, and how Monica, growing restless, seeks a dubious solitude.

"It is quite the loveliest old place in the world!" says Mrs. Bohun, in her soft plaintive voice, speaking very enthusiastically. "We ought to be more than grateful to you, dear Miss Blake, for letting us see it." [Pg 170]

Miss Priscilla reddens with suppressed satisfaction but says,—

"Tut tut, my dear! It is only a funny old-fashioned spot, after all," in quite an off-hand manner.

It is Friday,—*the* Friday,—as the Misses Blake have been thinking of it for days, in fear and trembling, as being the date of their first hospitable venture for many years.

All the Aghyohillbeg party, and the men from Clonbree Barracks, and some other neighbors, are strolling through the sweet antiquated gardens of Moyne, hedged with yews fantastically cut. The roses, white and red and yellow, are nodding their heads lazily, bowing and courtesying to the passing breeze. The stocks and mignonette are filling the air with perfume. Tall lilies are smiling from distant corners, and the little merry burn, tumbling over its gray boulders through the garden, is singing a loud and happy song, in which the birds in the trees above join heartily.

The lazy hum of many insects makes one feel even more perceptibly how drowsy-sweet is all the summer air.

Mrs. Bohun has now flitted away with Monica, who in her white gown looks the prettiest flower of all, in this "wilderness of sweets," with the tall, infatuated Ryde and handsome young Ronayne in their train. Mrs. Bohun, who is in one of her most mischievous moods to-day, has taken it into her head to snub Lord Rossmoyne and be all that is of the sweetest to Ulic Ronayne, a proceeding her cousin, Mrs. Herrick, regards with dismay.

Not so, however, does Bella Fitzgerald regard it. She, tall, and with a would-be stately air, walks through the grounds at Lord Rossmoyne's side, to whom she has attached herself, and who, *faute de mieux*, makes himself as agreeable as he can to her, considering how he is inwardly raging at what he is pleased to term Olga's disgraceful behavior.

Miss Priscilla has now been seized upon by Madam O'Connor and carried off for a private confab.

"And you really *must* let her come to us for a week, my dear," says Madam O'Connor, in her fine rich brogue. "Yes, now, really I want her. It will be quite a favor. I can't withstand a pretty face, as you well know 'tis a weakness of mine, my dear, and she is really a pearl. Olga Bohun is talking of getting up tableaux or some such nonsense, and she wants your pretty child to help us." [Pg 171]

"I should like her to go to you. It is very kind of you," says Miss Priscilla, but with unmistakable hesitation.

"Now, what is it? Out with it, Priscilla!" says Madam O'Connor, bluntly.

Miss Priscilla struggles with herself for yet another minute, and then says, quickly,—

"That young man Desmond,—will *he* be staying in your house?"

"Not if you object, my dear," says Mrs. O'Connor, kindly; "though I do think it is a pity to thwart that affair. He is as nice and as pleasant a young fellow as I know, and would make a jewel of a husband; and money—say what you like, my dear Priscilla—is always something. It ranks higher than *revenge*."

"There is no revenge. It is only a just resentment."

"Well, I'll call it by any name you like, my dear, but I must say——"

"I must beg, Gertrude, you will not discuss this unhappy subject," says Miss Priscilla, with some agitation.

"Well, I won't, there. Then let it lie," says Madam O'Connor, good-humoredly. "And tell me, now, if I come over to fetch Monica on Monday, will she be ready for me?"

"Quite ready. But we have not consulted her yet," says Miss Priscilla, clinging to a broken reed.

"Olga is talking to her about it. And, if she's the girl she *looks*, she'll be glad of a change, and the chance of a sweetheart," says Madam O'Connor, gayly.

"What lovely lilies!" says Mrs. Bohun, standing before a tall white group.

"Oh, don't!" says Owen Kelly, who has joined her and Monica. "Whenever I hear a lily mentioned I think of Oscar Wilde, and it hurts very much."

"I like Oscar Wilde. He is quite nice, and *very* amusing," says Olga.

"I wonder if I could make my hair grow," says Mr. Kelly, meditatively. "He's been very clever about his; but I suppose somebody taught him."

"Well, I think long hair is dirty," says Mrs. Bohun, with an abstracted glance at Ronayne's lightly-shaven head.

Then, as though tired of her sweet *role* and of its object (Ronayne) and everything, she turns capriciously aside, and, motioning away the men with her hand and a small frown, sits down at [Pg 172] Hermia Herrick's feet and plucks idly at the grasses near her.

"So we are dismissed," says Kelly, shrugging his shoulders. Monica has disappeared long ago with the devoted Ryde. "Your queen has her tempers, Ronayne."

"There are few things so cloying as perfection," says Ronayne, loyally.

"I entirely agree with you,—so much so that I hope Providence will send me an ugly wife. She—I beg your pardon—Mrs. Bohun does pretty much what she likes with you, doesn't she?"

"Altogether what she likes. She's been doing it for so long now that I suppose she'll go on to the end of the chapter. I hope it will be a long one. Do you know," says the young man, with a rather sad little laugh, "it sounds of course rather a poor thing to say, but I really think it makes me *happy*, being done what she likes with?"

"It is only to oblige a friend that I should seek to understand such a hopelessly involved sentence as that," says Mr. Kelly, wearily. "But I have managed it. You're as bad a case as ever I came across, Ronayne, and I pity you. But, 'pon my soul, I respect you too," with a flash of admiration: "there is nothing like being thoroughly in earnest. And so I wish you luck in your wooing."

"You're a very good fellow, Kelly," says Ronayne gratefully.

In the mean time, Olga, tiring of tearing her grasses to pieces, looks up at Hermia.

"How silent you are!" she says.

"I thought that was what you wanted,—silence. You have been talking all day. And, besides, if I speak at all, it will be only to condemn."

"Nevertheless speak. Anything is better than this ghastly quiet; and, besides, frankly, I need not mind you, you know."

"You are flirting disgracefully with that Ronayne boy."

"What harm, if he *is* a boy?"

"He is not such a boy as all that comes to; and, if you don't *mean* it, you are overkind to him."

"He is my baby," says Olga, with a little laugh; "I often tell him so. Why should I *not* be kind to him?"

"Oh, if you are *bent* on it."

"I am bent on nothing. You do run away so with things!"

"I think you might do better."

"I'm not going to do anything," says the widow. She throws off her hat, and ruffles up all her [Pg 173] pretty pale gold hair with impatient fingers.

"Oh! if you can *assure* me of that!"

"I don't want to assure you of anything."

"So I thought. That is why I say you might do better."

"I might do worse, too."

"Perhaps. But still I cannot forget there was Wolverhampton last year. A title is not to be despised; and he was devoted to you, and would, I think, have made a good husband."

"I daresay. He was fool enough for anything. And I liked him, rather; but there was something in him—wasn't there, now, Hermia?—something positively enraging at times."

"I suppose, then, your fancy for young Ronayne arises from the fact that there is *nothing* in him," says Hermia, maliciously: "that's his charm, is it?"

Mrs. Bohun laughs.

"I don't suppose there is very much in him," she says: "that in itself is such a relief. Wolverhampton was so overpowering about those hydraulics. Ulic isn't a savant, certainly, and I don't think he will ever set the Liffey afire, but he is 'pleasant too to think on.' Now, mind you, I don't believe I care a pin about Ulic Ronayne,—he is younger than I am, for one thing,—but still I don't care to hear him abused."

"I am not abusing him," says Hermia. "It was you said he was no savant, and would be unlikely to set the Liffey afire."

"For which we should be devoutly grateful," says Olga, frivolously. "Consider, if he *could*, what the consequences would be, both to life and property. Poor young man! I really think Government ought to give him a pension because he *can't*."

"And what about all the other young men?" asks Hermia. And then she yawns.

Here Monica—who has been absent with Mr. Ryde for the best part of an hour—comes up to them, and presently Terence, with the Fitzgeralds, and Miss Priscilla and Lord Rossmoyne.

"I heard a story yesterday I want to tell you," says Terence, gayly, singling out Miss Fitzgerald and Olga, and sinking upon the grass at the former's feet. He is such a handsome merry boy that he is a favorite with all the women. Miss Priscilla stands near him; the others are all conversing together about the coming plays at Aghyohillbeg.

"It is about the curate," says Terence, gleefully. "You know, he is awful spoons on the ugliest [Pg 174] French girl, and the other day he wanted to run up to Dublin to get her a ring, or something, but ——"

"Now, Terence, dear, surely that is not the way to pronounce that word," says Miss Priscilla, anxiously; "such a vulgar pronounciation—'bu-ut.' How you drawled it! How ugly it sounds—'bu-ut!' Now put your lips together like mine, so, and say 'but,' *shortly*. Now begin your story again, and tell it nicely."

Terence begins again,—*very* good humoredly, thinks Olga,—and has almost reached the point, when Miss Priscilla breaks in again:

"Now, not so fast, my dear Terence. I really cannot follow you at all. I don't even understand what you are at. Gently, my dear boy. Now begin it all over again, and be more explicit."

But the fun is all out of Terence by this time, though Olga is so convulsed with laughter that it might have been the best story on record, which somewhat astonishes though it consoles Terence, as when his funny incident is related in a carefully modulated voice, and with a painful precision, it strikes even him as being hopelessly uninteresting. However, Mrs. Bohun certainly enjoys it,—or something else, perhaps: fortunately, it never occurs to Terry to ponder on the "something else."

"Hermia, Olga, come now, my dears. You can't stay here for *ever*, you know," cries Madam O'Connor's loud but cheery voice. "It is nearly seven. Come, I tell you, or the Misses Blake, our good friends here, will think we mean to take up our residence at Moyne for good."

"Oh, now, Gertrude!" says Miss Priscilla, much shocked. But Madam O'Connor only laughs heartily, and gives her a little smart blow on the shoulder with her fan. Olga laughs too, gayly, and Hermia lets her lips part with one of her rare but perfect smiles. If she likes any one besides Olga and her children, it is bluff and blunt old Gertrude O'Connor.

One by one they all walk away, and presently Moyne is lying in the dying sunshine, in all its usual quietude, with never a sound to disturb the calm of coming eve but the light rustling of the rising breeze among the ivy-leaves that are clambering up its ancient walls.

Kit and Terry are indoors, laughing merrily over the day, and congratulating themselves upon the success it has certainly been. [Pg 175]

"Yes. I do think, Penelope, they all enjoyed themselves," says Miss Priscilla, in high glee; "and your claret-cup, my dear, was superb."

But Monica has stolen away from them all. The strange restlessness that has lain upon her all day is asserting itself with cruel vigor, and drives her forth into the shadows of the coming night.

All day long she has struggled bravely against it; but, now that the enforced necessity for liveliness is at an end, she grows dreamy, *distraite*, and feels an intense longing for solitude and air.

Again she walks through the now deserted garden, where the flowers, "earth's loveliest," are

drooping their sweet heads to seek their happy slumbers. Past them she goes with lowered head and thoughts engrossed, and so over the lawn into the wood beyond.

Here Coole and Moyne are connected by a high green bank, that in early spring is studded and diamonded with primroses and now is gay with ferns. Not until she has reached this boundary does she remember how far she has come.

She climbs the bank, and gazes with an ever-growing longing at the cool shade in the forbidden land, at the tall, stately trees, and the foxgloves nodding drowsily.

It is a perfect evening, and as yet the god of day—great Sol—is riding the heavens with triumphant mirth, as though reckless of the death that draweth nigh. Shall he not rise again to-morrow morn in all his awful majesty, and so defy grim Mars? It is, indeed, one of those hours when heaven seems nearest earth, "as when warm sunshine thrills wood-glooms to gold," and "righteousness and peace have kissed each other," and Nature, tender mother, smiles, and all the forest deeps are by "a tender whisper pierced."

Conscience forbidding her, she abstains from entering those coveted woods, and, with a sigh, seats herself upon the top of the green bank.

"Monica!" says a voice close to her, yet not close to her,—mysteriously, far up in mid-air, right over her head. She starts! Is the great wood peopled with satyrs, ouphs, or dryads? [Pg 176]

CHAPTER XVII.

The marvellous history of how Monica finds the green-eyed monster in a beech-tree—and how, single-handed, she attacks and overcomes him.

It is not a tender voice. It is not even a gentle or coldly friendly voice. It is, when all is told, a distinctly angry voice, full of possible reproaches and vehement upbraidings.

Monica, raising her head with extreme nervousness, had just time to see Mr. Desmond in the huge fir-tree above her, before he drops at her feet.

"What on earth were you doing up there?" asks she, thinking it wise to adopt the offensive style, so as to be first in the field, feeling instinctively that a scolding is coming and that she deserves it.

"Watching *you*," returns he, sternly, nothing dismayed by her assumption of injured innocence, so her little ruse falls through.

"A charming occupation, certainly!" says Miss Beresford, with fine disgust.

"I climbed up into that tree," says Mr. Desmond, savagely, "and from it saw that you had spent your entire day with that idiot, Ryde."

"Do you think," says Miss Beresford, with awful calm, "that it was a *gentlemanly* thing to climb into that tree, like a horrid schoolboy, and spy upon a person?—*do you?*"

"I don't," vehemently, "but I was driven to it. I don't care what is gentlemanly. I don't care," furiously, "what you think of me. I only know that my mind is now *satisfied* about you, and that I know you are the most abominable flirt in the world, and that you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Well, I'm not," with great self-possession.

"The more to your discredit! That only means that you are bent on doing it again."

"I shall certainly always talk to any man who talks to me. That is," cuttingly, "any man who knows how to conduct himself with propriety."

"Meaning—*I* don't, I suppose?"

"*Certainly* you don't."

"Oh, if it comes to that," says Desmond, in tones of the deepest desperation, and as if nothing is left to expect but the deluge in another moment. [Pg 177]

And, in effect, it comes. Not, as one has been taught to expect, in sudden storm, and wind, and lightning, but first in soft light drops, and then in a perfect downpour, that bursts upon them with passionate fury.

As they are standing beneath a magnificent beech, they get but a taste of the shower in reality, though Desmond, seeing some huge drops lying on Monica's thin white gown, feels his heart smite him.

"Here, take this," he says, roughly, taking off his coat and placing it round her shoulders.

"No, thank you," says Miss Beresford, stiffly.

"You must," returns he, and, to his surprise, she makes no further resistance. Perhaps she is cowed by the authority of his manner; *perhaps* she doesn't like the raindrops.

Encouraged, however, by her submission to a further daring of fortune, he says, presently,—

"You might have given Cobbett a turn, I think, instead of devoting yourself all day to that egregious ass."

"He prefers talking to Hermia. I suppose you don't want me to go up to people and ask them to be civil to me?"

"Some other fellow, then."

"You would be just as jealous of him, whoever he was."

"I am not jealous at all," indignantly. "I only object to your saying one thing to *me* and another to *him*."

"What is the one thing I say to you?"

This staggers him.

"You must find me a very monotonous person if I say only one thing to you always."

"I haven't found you so."

"Then it—whatever it is—must be one of the most eloquent and remarkable speeches upon record. *Do* tell it to me."

"Look here, Monica," says Mr. Desmond, cautiously evading a reply: "what I want to know is—what you *see* in Ryde. He is tall, certainly, but he is fat and effeminate, with 'a forehead villanous low.'"

"Your own is very low," says Miss Beresford.

"If I thought it was like *his*, I'd make away with myself. And you listen to all his stories, and believe them every one. I don't believe a single syllable he says: I never met such a bragger. To listen to him, one would think he had killed every tiger in Bengal. In my opinion, he never even saw one." [Pg 178]

"'Les absents ont toujours tort,'" quotes she, in a low, significant tone.

This is the finishing stroke.

"Oh! you *defend* him," he says, as savagely almost as one of those wild beasts he has just mentioned. "In your eyes he is a hero, no doubt. I daresay all women see virtue in a man who 'talks as familiarly of roaring lions as maids of thirteen do of puppy-dogs.'"

"I don't think maids of thirteen, as a rule, talk much of puppy-dogs. I'm sure Kit doesn't," says Monica, provokingly. "And really, to do Mr. Ryde justice too, I never heard him mention a roaring lion. Perhaps you are thinking of Artemus Ward's lion that goes about 'seeking whom he may devour somebody.'" She smiles in a maddening fashion.

"I am thinking of Ryde," says Desmond. "I am thinking, too, how mad I was when I thought you liked me better than him. I *did* think it, you know; but now I am *desillusionnee*. It is plain to me you are infatuated about this fellow, who is 'perfumed like a milliner' and hasn't two ideas in his head."

"I can't think where you find all your quotations," says Monica, who is now seriously annoyed; "but I must ask you not to worry me any further about Mr. Ryde."

"You are madly in love with him," says Desmond, choking with rage. Upon which Miss Beresford loses the last remnant of her patience, and very properly turns her back on him.

The rain has ceased, but during its reign has extinguished the dying sun, which has disappeared far below the horizon. A great hush and silence has followed the petulant burst of storm, and a peace unspeakable lies on all the land. There is a little glimpse of the ocean far away beyond the giant firs, and one can see that its waves are calm, and the fishing-boats upon its bosom scarcely rock.

The grass is bending still with the weight of the past rain, and a plaintive dripping from the trees can be heard,—a refreshing sound that lessens the sense of heat. The small birds stir cosily in their nests, and now and then a drowsy note breaks from one or another; a faint mist, white and intangible, rises from the hills, spreading from field to sky, until

> "The earth, with heaven mingled, in the shadowy twilight lay,
> And the white sails seemed like spectres in a cloud-land far away."

"Ah! you don't like me to say that," says Desmond, unappeased by the beauty of the growing night; "but——" [Pg 179]

"Do not say another word," says Monica, imperiously. The moon is rising slowly—slowly,—and so, by the by, is her temper. "I forbid you. Here," throwing to him his coat; "I think I have before remarked that the rain is *quite* over. I am sorry I ever touched anything belonging to you."

Desmond having received the coat, and put himself into it once more, silence ensues. It does, perhaps, strike him as a hopeful sign that she shows no haste to return home and so rid herself of a presence she has inadvertently declared to be hateful to her, because presently he says, simply, if a little warmly,—

"There is no use in our quarreling like this. I won't give you up without a further struggle, to *any* man. So we may as well have it out now. Do you care for that—for Ryde?"

"If you had asked me that before,—sensibly,—you might have avoided making an exhibition of yourself and saying many rude things. I don't in the least mind telling you," says Miss Beresford, coldly, "that I *can't bear* him."

"Oh, Monica! is this *true*?" asks he, in an agony of hope.

"Quite true. But you don't deserve I should say it."

"My darling! My 'one thing bright' in all this hateful world! Oh!" throwing up his head with an impatient gesture, "I have been so wretched all this evening! I have suffered the tortures of the ——"

"Now, you musn't say naughty words," interrupts she, with an adorable smile. "You are glad I have forgiven you?"

This is how she puts it, and he is only too content to be friends with her on any terms, to show further fight.

"*More* than glad."

"And you will promise me never to be jealous again?"

This is a bitter pill, considering his former declaration that jealousy and he had nothing to do with each other; but he swallows it bravely.

"Never. And you—you will never again give me cause, darling, will you?"

"I gave you no cause now," says the darling, shaking her pretty head obstinately. And he doesn't dare contradict her. "You behaved really badly," she goes on, reproachfully, "and at such a time, too,—just when I was dying to tell you *such* good news." [Pg 180]

"Good?—your aunts—" eagerly, "have relented—they——"

"Oh, no! oh, *dear*, no!" says Miss Beresford. "They are harder than ever against you. Adamant is a *sponge* in comparison with them. It isn't that; but Madam O'Connor has asked me to go and stay with her next Monday for a week!—there!"

"And me too?"

"N—o. Aunt Priscilla made it a condition with regard to my going that you shouldn't be there."

"The——And Madam O'Connor gave in to such abominable tyranny?"

"Without a murmur."

"I thought she had a soul above that sort of thing," says Mr. Desmond, with disgust. "But they are all alike."

"Who?—women?"

"Yes."

"You mean to tell me I am like Aunt Priscilla and Madam O'Connor?"

"*Old* women, I mean," with anxious haste, seeing a cloud descending upon the brow of his beloved.

"Oh!"

"And, after all, it *is* good news," says Brian, brightening, "because though I can't stop in the house for the week, still there is nothing to prevent my riding over there every one of the seven days."

"That's just what I thought," says Monica, ingenuously, with a sweet little blush.

"Ah! you wished for me, then?"

She refuses to answer this in any more direct manner than her eyes afford, but says, quickly, doubtfully,—

"It won't be deceiving Aunt Priscilla, your coming there to visit, will it? She must know she cannot compel Madam O'Connor to forbid you the house. And she knows perfectly you are an intimate friend of hers."

"Of course she does. She is a regular old tyrant,—a Bluebeard in petticoats; but——"

"No, no; you must not abuse her," says Monica: so he becomes silent.

She is standing very close to the trunk of the old beech, half leaning against it upon one arm which is slightly raised. She has no gloves, but long white mittens that reach above her elbow to where the sleeves of her gown join them. Through the little holes in the pattern of these kindly mittens her white arms can be seen gleaming like snow beneath the faint rays of the early moon. [Pg 181] With one hand she is playing some imaginary air upon the tree's bark.

As she so plays, tiny sparkles from her rings attract his notice.

"Those five little rings," says Desmond, idly, "always remind me of the five little pigs that went to market,—I don't know why."

"They didn't all go to market," demurely. "One of them, I *know*, stayed at home."

"So he did. I remember now. Somehow it makes me feel like a boy again."

"Then, according to Hood, you must be nearer heaven than you were a moment ago."

"I couldn't," says Desmond, turning, and looking into her beautiful eyes. "My heaven has been near me for the last half-hour." If he had said *hour* he would have been closer to the truth.

A soft, lovely crimson creeps into her cheeks, and her eyes fall before his for a moment. Then she laughs,—a gay, mirthful laugh, that somehow puts sentiment to flight.

"Go on about your little pigs," she says, glancing at him with coquettish mirth.

"About your rings, you mean. I never look at them that I don't begin this sort of thing." Here, seeing an excellent opportunity for it, he takes her hand in his. "This little turquoise went to market, this little pearl stayed at home, this little emerald got some—er—cheese——"

"No, it wasn't," hastily. "It was roast beef."

"So it was. Better than cheese, any day. How stupid of me! I might have known an emerald—I mean a pig—wouldn't like cheese."

"I don't suppose it would like roast beef a bit better," says Monica; and then her lips part and she bursts into a merry laugh at the absurdity of the thing. She is such a child still that she finds the keenest enjoyment in it.

"Never mind," with dignity, "and permit me to tell you, Miss Beresford, that open ridicule is rude. To continue: *this* little pearl got none, and this little plain gold ring got—he got—what on earth did the little plain gold pig—I mean, ring—get?"

"*Nothing.* Just what *you* ought to get for such a badly-told story. He only cried, 'Wee.'" [Pg 182]

"Oh, no, indeed. He shan't cry at all. I won't have tears connected with you in any way."

She glances up at him with eyes half shy, half pleased, and with the prettiest dawning smile upon her lips.

He clasps the slender fingers closer, as though loath to part with them, and yet his tale has come to a climax.

"If I have told my story so badly, perhaps I had better tell it all over again," he says, with a base assumption of virtuous regret.

"No. I would not give you that trouble for the world," she says, mischievously, and then the dawning smile widens, brightens into something indescribable, but perfect.

"Oh, Monica, I do think you are the sweetest thing on earth," says the young man, with sudden fervid passion; and then all at once, and for the first time, he puts out his arms impulsively and draws her to him. She colors,—still smiling, however,—and after a brief hesitation, moves slowly but decidedly back from him.

"You don't *hate* me to touch you, do you?" asks he, rather hurt.

"Oh, no, indeed!" hurriedly. "Only——"

"Only what, darling?"

"I hardly know what," she answers, looking bewildered. "Perhaps because it is all so strange. Why should you love *me* better than any one?—and yet you do," anxiously, "don't you?"

The innocently-expressed anxiety makes his heart glad.

"I adore you," he says, fervently; and then, "Did no one ever place his arm round you *before*, Monica?"

He finds a difficulty in even asking this.

"No, no," with intense surprise at the question, and a soft, quick glance that is almost shamed. "I never had a lover in my life until I met you. No one except you ever told me I was pretty. The first time *you* said it I went home (when I was out of your sight," reddening, "I ran all the rest of the way) and looked at myself in the glass. Then," naively, "I knew you were right. Still I had my doubts; so I called Kit and told her about it; and she," laughing, "said you were evidently a person of great discrimination, so I suppose she agreed with you."

"She could hardly do otherwise."

"Yet sometimes," says Monica, with hesitation and a downcast face, "I have thought it was all mere fancy with you, and that you don't love me *really*." [Pg 183]

"My sweetheart, what a cruel thing to say to me!"

"But see how you scold me! Only now," nervously plucking little bits of bark from the trunk of the tree, "you accused me of dreadful things. Yes, sometimes I doubt you."

"I wonder where I leave room for doubt? Yet I must convince you. What shall I swear by, then?" he asks, half laughing: "the chaste Diana up above—the lovers' friend—is in full glory to-night; shall I swear by her?"

"'Oh, swear not by the moon, the inconstant moon, lest that thy love prove likewise variable,'" quotes she archly; "and yet," with a sudden change of mood, and a certain sweet gravity, "I do not mistrust you."

She leans slightly towards him, and unasked, gives her hand into his keeping once again. She is full of pretty tender ways and womanly tricks, and as for the best time for displaying them, for this she has a natural talent.

Desmond, clasping her hand, looks at her keenly. His whole heart is in his eyes.

"Tell me that you love me," he says, in a low unsteady voice.

"How can I? I don't know. I am not sure," she says, falteringly; "and," shrinking a little from him, "it is growing very late. See how the moon has risen above the firs. I must go home."

"Tell me you love me first."

"I *must* not love you; you know that."

"But if you might, you could?"

"Ye—es."

"Then I defy all difficulties,—aunts, and friends, and lovers. I shall win you in the teeth of all barriers, and in spite of all opposition. And now go home, my heart's delight, my best beloved. I have this assurance from you, that your own lips have given me, and it makes me confident of victory."

"But if you fail," she begins, nervously; but he will not listen to her.

"There is no such word," he says, gayly. "Or, if there is, I never learnt it. Good-night, my love."

"Good-night." A little frightened by his happy vehemence she stands well away from him, and holds out her hands in farewell. Taking them, he opens them gently and presses an impassioned kiss on each little pink-tinged palm. With a courteous reverence for her evident shyness, he then releases her, and, raising his hat, stands motionless until she has sprung down the bank and so reached the Moyne fields again. [Pg 184]

Then she turns and waves him a second and last good night. Returning the salute, he replaces his hat on his head, and thrusting his hands deep in his pockets, turns towards Coole—and dinner. He is somewhat late for the latter, but this troubles him little, so set is his mind upon the girl who has just left him.

Surely she is hard to win, and therefore—*how* desirable! "The women of Ireland," says an ancient chronicler, "are the coyest, the most coquettish, yet withal the coldest and virtuousest women upon earth." Yet, allowing all this, given time and opportunity, they may be safely wooed. What Mr. Desmond complains of bitterly, in his homeward musings to-night, is the fact that to him neither time nor opportunity is afforded.

"She is a woman therefore to be won;" but how is his courtship to be sped, if thorns are to beset his path on every side, and if persistent malice blocks his way to the feet of her whom he adores?

He reaches home in an unenviable frame of mind, and is thoroughly unsociable to Owen Kelly and the old squire all the evening.

Next morning sees him in the same mood; and, indeed, it is about this time he takes to imagining his little love as being a hapless prisoner in the hands of two cruel ogres (I am afraid he really does apply the term "ogres" to the two old ladies of Moyne), and finds a special melancholy pleasure in depicting her as a lonely captive condemned to solitary confinement and dieted upon bread and water.

To regard the Misses Blake in the light either of ogres or witches required some talent; but Mr. Desmond, at this period of his love-affair, managed it.

He would go about, too, singing,—

> "Oh, who will o'er the downs so free,"

taking immense comfort out of, and repeating over and over again, such lines as—

"I sought her bower at break of day,
'Twas guarded safe and sure;"

"Her father he has locked the door,
Her mother keeps the key;
But neither bolt nor bar shall keep
My own true love from me,"—

until bars, and bolts, and locks, and keys seemed all real. [Pg 185]

CHAPTER XVIII.

How, after much discussion, the devoted, if mistaken, adherents of Thalia gain the day—and how, for once in his life, Owen Kelly feels melancholy that is not assumed.

"I wish you would all attend," says Olga Bohun, just a little impatiently, looking round upon the assembled group, with brows uplifted and the point of a pencil thrust between her rose-red lips.

"Thrice-blessed pencil!" murmurs Mr. Kelly, in a *very* stage whisper. "Man is the superior being, yet he would not be permitted to occupy so exalted a position. Are you a stone, Ronayne, that you can regard the situation with such an insensate face?" Mr. Ronayne is at this moment gazing at Mrs. Bohun with all his heart in his eyes. He starts and colors. "I cannot help thinking of that dear little song about the innocent daisy," goes on Mr. Kelly, with a rapt expression. "But I'd 'choose to be a *pencil*, if I might be a flower.'"

"Now *do* let us decide upon something," says Olga, taking no heed of this sally, and frowning down the smile that is fighting for mastery.

"Yes; now you are all to decide upon something at once," says Mr. Kelly, gloomily. "There is a difficulty about the right way to begin it, but it must be done; Mrs. Bohun says so. There is to be no deception. I shall say one, two, three, and away, and then every one must have decided: the defaulter will be spurned from the gates. Now, one, two——Desmond," sternly "you are not deciding!"

"I am, indeed," says Desmond, most untruthfully. He is lying on the grass at Monica's feet, and is playing idly with her huge white fan.

"You are not doing it properly. I daresay Miss Beresford is making you uncomfortable; and I am sure you are trying to break her fan. Come over here and sit by me, and you will be much happier."

"Penance is good for the soul. I shall stay here," says Desmond.

"If we mean to get up tableaux, we certainly ought to set about them at once," says Herrick, indolently.

"There doesn't seem to be any work in anybody," says Olga, in despair. [Pg 186]

"Try me," says Lord Rossmoyne, bending over her chair. He has only just come, and his arrival has been unannounced.

"Ah! *thank* you!"—with a brilliant smile. "Now you *do* look like business."

It is Monday, and four o'clock. Aghyohillbeg lying basking in the sunshine is looking its loveliest,—which is saying a great deal. The heat is so intense on this sweet July day that every one has deserted the house and come out to find some air,—a difficulty. They have tried the grass terraces, in vain, and now have congregated beneath a giant fir, and are, comparatively speaking, cool.

Just before luncheon Madam O'Connor brought Monica home in triumph with her from Moyne, to find Desmond, handsome and happy, on her doorstep, waiting with calm certainty an invitation to that meal. He got it, and to dinner likewise.

"We have set our hearts on tableaux, but it is *so* difficult to think of any scene fresh and unhackneyed," says Olga, gazing plaintively into Lord Rossmoyne's sympathetic face.

"Don't give way," says Mr. Kelly, tenderly. "It must be a poor intellect that couldn't rise superior to such a demand as that. Given one minute, I believe even I could produce an idea as novel as it would be brilliant."

"You shall have your minute," says Olga, pulling out her watch. "Now—begin——"

"Time's up," she says, presently, when sixty seconds have honestly expired.

"You might have said that thirty seconds ago, and I should not have objected," says Mr. Kelly, with an assured smile.

"And your idea."

"*The Huguenots!*"

Need I say that every one is exceedingly angry?

"Ever heard it before?" asks Mr. Kelly, with aggressive insolence; which question, being considered as adding insult to injury, is treated with silent contempt.

"I told you it was not to be done," says Olga, petulantly addressing everybody generally.

"I can't agree with you. I see no reason why it should fall to the ground," says Miss Fitzgerald, warmly, who is determined to show herself off in a gown that has done duty for "Madame Favart," and the "Bohemian Girl," and "Maritana," many a time and oft.

"I have another idea," says Mr. Kelly, at this opportune moment. [Pg 187]

"If it is as useful as your first, you may keep it," says Olga, with pardonable indignation.

"I am misunderstood," says Mr. Kelly, mournfully, but with dignity. "I shall write to Miss Montgomery and ask her to make another pathetic tale about me. As you are bent on trampling upon an unknown genius,—poor but proud—I shall *not* make you acquainted with this last beautiful thought which I have evolved from my inner consciousness."

"Don't say that! *do* tell it to us," says Monica, eagerly, and in perfect good faith. She knows less of him than the others, and may therefore be excused for still believing in him.

"Thank you, Miss Beresford. *You* can soar above a mean desire to crush a rising power. You have read, of course, that popular poem by our poet-laureate, called 'Enid.'"

"Yes," says Monica, staring at him.

"I mean the poem in which he has so faithfully depicted the way in which two escaped lunatics would be sure to behave if left to their own devices. Considered as a warning to us to keep bolts and bars on Colney Hatch and Hanwell, it may be regarded as a delicate attention. Dear Tennyson! he certainly is a public benefactor. There is a scene in that remarkable poem which I think might suit us. You remember where, after much wild careering in the foreground, the principal idiots decide upon riding home together, pillion fashion?"

"I—I think so," says Monica, who plainly doesn't, being much confused.

"'Then on his foot she sat her own and climbed,'—and then she threw her arms round him in a most unmaidenly fashion, if I recollect aright; but of course mad people *will* be vehement, poor souls; they can't help it. Now, supposing we adopted that scene, wouldn't it be effective? One of Madam O'Connor's big carriage-horses, if brought forward,—I mean the one that kicked over the traces, yesterday,—would, I firmly believe, create quite a sensation, and in all probability bring down the house."

"The stage, certainly," says Desmond.

"Ah! you approve of it," says Kelly, with suspicious gratitude. "Then let us arrange it at once. Miss Beresford might throw her arms round Ryde, for example: that would be charming."

Desmond looking at this moment as if he would willingly murder him, Mr. Kelly is apparently satisfied, and sinks to rest with his head upon his arm once more. No one else has heard the [Pg 188] suggestion.

"I think you might help me, instead of giving voice to insane propositions," says Olga, reproachfully, turning her eyes upon Mr. Kelly's bowed form,—he is lying prostrate on the grass,—which is shaking in a palsied fashion. "I really *did* believe in *you*," she says, whereupon the young man, springing to his feet, flings his arms wide, and appeals in an impassioned manner to an unprejudiced public as to whether he has not been racking his brain in her service for the last half-hour.

"Then I wish you would go and rack it in somebody else's service," says Mrs. Bohun, ungratefully.

"Hear her!" says Mr. Kelly, gazing slowly round him. "She still persists in the unseemly abuse. She is bent on breaking my heart and driving sleep from mine eyelids. It is ungenerous, the more so that she knows I have not the courage to tear myself from her beloved presence. You, Ronayne, and you, Rossmoyne, can sympathize with me:

> 'In durance vile here must I wake and weep,
> And all my frowzy couch in sorrow steep.'

Fancy a frowzy couch saturated with tears! you know," reproachfully to Olga, "*you* wouldn't like to have to lie on it."

"Oh, do come and sit down here near me, and be silent," says Olga, in desperation.

"Why not have a play?" says Captain Cobbett, who with Mr. Ryde has driven over from Clonbree.

"'The play's the thing,'" says Brian Desmond, lazily; "but when you are about it, make it a farce."

"Oh, *no*!" says Miss Fitzgerald, with a horrified gesture; "*anything* but that! Why not let us try one of the good old comedies?—'The School for Scandal,' for example?"

"*What!*" says Mr. Kelly, very weakly. He is plainly quite overcome by this suggestion.

"Well, why not?" demands the fair Bella, with just a *soupcon* of asperity in her tone,—as much as she ever allows herself when in the society of men. She makes up for this abstinence by bestowing a liberal share of it upon her maid and her mother.

"It's—it's such a naughty, naughty piece," says Mr. Kelly, bashfully, beating an honorable retreat from his first meaning.

"Nonsense! One can strike out anything distasteful."

"Shades of Farren—and——Who would be Lady Teazle?" says Olga. [Pg 189]

"I would," says Bella, modestly.

"That is more than good of you," says Olga, casting a curious glance at her from under her long lashes. "But I thought, perhaps——You, Hermia, would you not undertake it? You know, last season, they said you were——"

"No, dear, thanks. No, *indeed*," with emphasis.

"Cobbett does Joseph Surface to perfection," breaks in Mr. Ryde, enthusiastically.

"Oh, I say now, Ryde! Come, you know, this is hardly fair," says the little captain, coyly, who is looking particularly pinched and dried to-day, in spite of the hot sun. There is a satisfied smirk upon his pale lips, and a poor attempt at self-depreciation about his whole manner.

"You know you took 'em by storm at Portsmouth, last year,—made 'em laugh like fun. You should see him," persists Ryde, addressing everybody generally.

"Perhaps you mean the part of Charles Surface," says Ronayne, in some surprise.

"No. Joseph: the sly one you know," says Ryde chuckling over some recollection.

"Well, it never occurred to me that Joseph's part might be termed a *funny* one," says Mr. Kelly, mildly; "but that shows how ignorant all we Irish are. It will be very kind of you, Cobbett, to enlighten us,—to show us something *good*, in fact."

"Really, you know, you flatter me absurdly," says Cobbett, the self-depreciation fainter, the smirk broader.

Lord Rossmoyne, whose good temper is not his strong point, glances angrily at him, smothers an explosive speech, and walks away with a sneer.

"And Sir Peter,—who will kindly undertake Sir Peter?" asks Olga, with a smile that is faintly sarcastic. "Will you, Owen?" to Mr. Kelly.

"Don't ask me. I could not act with Cobbett and Miss Fitzgerald. I mean, I should only disgrace them," says Kelly, who is a member of a famous dramatic club in Dublin, and who has had two offers from London managers to tread the boards. "I feel I'm not up to it, indeed."

"I suspect you are not," says Hermia Herrick, with a sudden smile that lights up all her cold impassive face. Kelly, catching it, crawls lazily over to her, along the grass, Indian fashion, and finding a fold of her gown lays his arm on it, and his head on his arm, and relapses into silence.

"Ryde has done it," says Captain Cobbett. [Pg 190]

"Indeed!" says Olga, raising questioning eyes to the big marine standing behind Monica's chair.

"Ye—es. We—er—do a good deal of that sort of thing in *our* country," says Ryde, with conscious worth. "I have done Sir Peter once or twice; and people have been good enough not to—" with a little laugh—"*hiss* me. I have a style of my own; but—er——" with an encouraging glance at the other men, "I daresay there are many here who could do it as I do it."

"Not *one*, I am convinced," says Desmond, promptly; and Monica laughs softly.

"We must think it over. I don't believe anything so important could be got up without deep deliberation——" Olga is beginning, when Kelly, by a movement of the hand, stops her.

"Do let it go on to its bitter end," he says, in a whisper, with most unusual animation for him. "Mrs. Herrick, help me."

"Why not, Olga?" says Hermia, in a low tone. "The principal characters are willing; we have not had a real laugh for some time: why throw away such a *perfect* chance?"

"Oh! *that*——" says Olga.

Here a slight diversion is caused by the appearance of a footman, tea tray, a boy, a gypsy table, a maid, a good deal of fruit, maraschino, brandy, soda, *and* Madam O'Connor. The latter, to tell the truth, has been having a siesta in the privacy of her own room, and has now come down, like a giant refreshed, to see how her guests are getting on.

"Well, I hope you're all happy," she says, jovially.

"We are mad with perplexity," says Olga.

"What's the matter, then, darling?" says Madam. "Hermia, like a good child, go and pour out the tea."

"I'll tell you all about it," says Brian, who is a special favorite of Madam O'Connor's, coming over to her and stopping behind her chair to whisper into her ear.

Whatever he says makes her laugh immoderately. It is easy to bring smiles to her lips at any time,—her heart having kept at a standstill whilst her body grew old,—but now she seems particularly fetched.

"Yes, yes, my dear Olga, let them have their own way," she says merrily.

"Very good. Let us consider it settled," says Mrs. Bohun. "But I *should* like some tableaux afterwards, as a wind-up."

"Yes, certainly," says Ronayne. "What do you think, Madam?"

"I have set my mind on them," says his old hostess, gayly. "You are such a handsome boy, Ulic, that I'm bent on seeing you in fancy clothes; and so is somebody else, I daresay. Look at the children, how they steal towards us; were there ever such demure little mice? Come here, Georgie, my son, I have peaches and pretty things for you." [Pg 191]

The kind old soul holds out her arms to two beautiful children, a boy and a girl, who are coming slowly, shyly towards her. They are so like Hermia Herrick as to be unmistakably hers. The boy, coming straight to Madame O'Connor, climbs up on her lap and lays his bonny cheek against hers; but the girl, running to her mother, who is busy over the tea-tray, nestles close to her.

"Gently, my soul," say Hermia, in a soft whisper. Though she still calmly pours out the tea, with Kelly beside her, she lets the unoccupied hand fall, to mingle with the golden tresses of the child. As her hand meets the little sunny head, a marvellous sweetness creeps into her face and transfixes it to a heavenly beauty. Kelly, watching her, marks the change.

Going round to the child, he would have taken her in his arms,—as is his habit with most children, being a special favorite in every nursery; but this little dame, drawing back from him, repels him coldly. Then, as though fearing herself ungracious, she slowly extends to him a tiny, friendly hand, which he accepts. The likeness between this grave baby and her graver mother is so remarkable as to be almost ludicrous.

"I think you haven't given Mr. Kelly even one kiss to-day," says her mother, smiling faintly, and pressing the child closer to her. "She is a cold little thing, is she not?"

"I suppose she inherits it," says Owen Kelly, without lifting his eyes from the child's fair face.

Mrs. Herrick colors slightly.

"Will you let me get you some tea, Fay?" says Mr. Kelly, addressing the child almost anxiously.

"No, thank you," says the fairy, sweetly but decidedly. "My mammy will give me half hers. I do not like any other tea."

"I am not in favor to-day," says Kelly, drawing back and shrugging his shoulders slightly, but looking distinctly disappointed. It may be the child sees this, because she comes impulsively forward, and, standing on tiptoe before him, holds her arms upwards towards his neck.

"I want to kiss you now," she says, solemnly, when he has taken her into his embrace. "But no one else. I only want to kiss *you* sometimes—and *always* mamma." [Pg 192]

"I am content to be second where mamma is first. I am glad you place me with her in your mind. I should like to be always with mamma," says Kelly. He laughs a little, and kisses the child again, and places her gently upon the ground, and then he glances at Hermia. But her face is impassive as usual. No faintest tinge deepens the ordinary pallor of her cheeks. She has the sugar tongs poised in the air, and is apparently sunk in abstruse meditation.

"Now, I wonder who takes sugar and who doesn't," she says, wrinkling up her pretty brows in profound thought. "I have been here a month, yet cannot yet be sure. Mr. Kelly, you must call some one else to our assistance to take round the sugar, as you can't do everything."

"I can do *nothing*," says Kelly, in a low tone, after which he turns away and calls Brian Desmond to come to him.

CHAPTER XIX.

How Desmond asserts himself, and shows himself a better man than his rival—And how a bunch of red roses causes a breach, and how a ring heals it.

"Then it is decided," says Olga. "'The School for Scandal' first, and tableaux to follow. Now for *them*. I suppose four altogether will be quite sufficient. We must not try the patience of our poor audience past endurance."

"It will be past that long before our tableaux begin," says Ulic Ronayne, in a low tone. He is dressed in a tennis suit of white flannel, and is looking particularly handsome.

Olga makes a pretty little *moue*, but no audible response.

"I have two arranged," she says, "but am distracted about three and four. Will anybody except Mr. Kelly come to my assistance?"

"Oh, you're jealous because you didn't think of 'Enid' and the carriage-horse yourself," returns that young man, with ineffable disdain,—"or that Dolly Varden affair."

"Well, that last might do,—modified a little," says Olga, brightening. "Mr. Ryde is enormous enough for anything. Quite an ideal Hugh."

"Quite," says Ronayne, with a smile. [Pg 193]

"Then it has arranged itself; that is, if you agree, dear?" says Olga, turning to Monica.

"It shall be as you wish. I mean, I know nothing about it," gently; "but I shall like to help you if I can."

"I mean you don't object to the subject,—or Mr. Ryde?" says Olga, kindly, unaware that Mr. Ryde has come away from the tea-table and is now close behind her. Monica, however, sees him, and smiles courteously.

"Oh, no," she says, as in duty bound.

And then the fourth is found and grasped, and all trouble is at an end.

"*So* glad I can now take my tea in peace," says Olga, with a sigh of profound relief. "*Who* would be stage-manager?"

"Ah! you don't do much of this kind of thing in Ireland, I daresay," says Mr. Ryde.

"What kind of thing?" asks Olga, sweetly, who doesn't like him. "Tea-drinking?"

"No—acting—er—and that."

"I'm afraid I'm quite at sea about the '*that*,'" says Olga, shaking her blonde head. "Perhaps we do a good deal of it, perhaps we don't. Explain it to me."

("Awful stoopid people!—not a word of truth about their ready wit," says Mr. Ryde to himself at this juncture.)

"Oh, well—er—let us confine ourselves to the acting," he says, feeling somehow at a loss. "It is new to you here, it seems."

"I certainly have never acted in my life," begins Monica; "but——"

Mrs. Bohun interrupts her.

"We are a hopelessly benighted lot," she says, making Ryde a present of a beautiful smile. "We are sadly behind the world,—*rococo*"—shrugging her shoulders pathetically—"to the last degree. You, Mr. Ryde, have opened up to us possibilities never dreamt of before; touches of civilization hitherto unknown."

"I should think in your case a very little tuition would be sufficient," says Ryde, with such kindly encouragement in his tone that Ronayne, who is at Olga's feet, collapses, and from being abnormally grave breaks into riotous laughter.

"You must teach us stage effects,—is that the proper term?—and correct us when we betray too crass an ignorance, and—above all things, Mr. Ryde," with an arch glance, "you must promise not to lose your temper over the *gaucheries* of your Dolly Varden." [Pg 194]

"Whose Dolly Varden?" asks Desmond, coming up at this instant laden with cups of tea.

"Mr. Ryde's."

"He is to be Hugh to Miss Beresford's Dolly," says Ronayne.

"Yes, isn't it good of Monica? she has consented to take the part," says Olga, who is really grateful to her for having helped her out of her difficulty.

"*Have* you?" says Desmond, turning upon Monica with dilated eyes.

"Yes. Is that tea for me?" returns she, calmly, with great self-possession, seeing that sundry eyes are upon her.

"For you, or any one," replies he. Tone can convey far more meaning than words. The words just now are correct enough, but the tone is uncivil to the last degree. Monica, flushing slightly, takes a cup from him, and Olga takes the second.

There is a short silence whilst they stir their tea, during which Madam O'Connor's voice can be distinctly heard,—it generally *can* above every tumult. She is discoursing enthusiastically about some wonderful tree in her orchard, literally borne down by fruit.

"You never saw such a sight!" she is saying,—"laden down to the ground. The finest show of pears in the country. I was telling Williams he would do well to prop it. But I suppose it will ruin the tree for the next two years to come."

"What, the propping?" says Rossmoyne.

"No, the enormous produce, you silly boy!" says his hostess, with a laugh.

Monica, who is growing restless beneath Desmond's angry regard, turns to her nervously.

"I think I should like to see it," she says, softly.

"Allow me to take you to it," says Ryde, quickly, coming to her side.

"Miss Beresford is coming with *me*," interposes Desmond. His face is pale, and his eyes flash ominously.

"That is for Miss Beresford to decide."

"She *has* decided," says Desmond, growing even paler, but never removing his eyes from his rival's. He is playing a dangerous game, but even in the danger is ecstasy. And, as Monica continues silent, a great joy fills his soul.

"But until"—begins the Englishman, doggedly—"I hear——"

"Mrs. Bohun's cup is causing her embarrassment. See to it," interrupts Desmond, unemotionally. [Pg 195] And then, turning to Monica, he says, "Come," coldly, but with such passionate entreaty in his eyes that she is borne away by it, and goes with him submissively across the lawn, until she has so far withdrawn herself from her companions that a return would be undignified.

They go as far as the entrance to the orchard, a good quarter of a mile, in silence, and then the storm breaks.

"I won't have that fellow holding you in his arms," says Desmond, pale with grief and rage, standing still and confronting her.

"I thought you said you would never be jealous again," says Monica, who has had time to recover herself, and time, too, to grow angry.

"I also said I hoped you would never give me cause."

"Mrs. Bohun has arranged this tableau."

"Then disarrange it."

"But how?"

"Say you won't act with Ryde."

"You can't expect me to make myself laughable in that way."

"Then *I'll* do it."

"And so make me laughable in another way. I can't see what right you have to interfere," she breaks out suddenly, standing before him, wilful but lovely. "What are you to me, or I to you, that you should order me about like this?"

"You are all the world to me,—you are *my wife*," says the young man, in a solemn tone, but with passionately angry eyes. "You can refuse me if you like, but I shall go to my grave with your image only in my heart. As to what I am to *you*, that is quite another thing,—less than nothing, I should say."

"And no wonder, too, considering your *awful* temper," says Monica, viciously; but her tone trembles.

At this he seems to lose heart. A very sad look creeps into his dark eyes and lingers there.

"Well, do what you like about these wretched tableaux," he says, so wearily that Monica, though victorious, feels inclined to cry. "If they give you a moment's pleasure, why should I rebel? As you say, I am nothing to you. Come, let us go and look at this famous pear-tree."

But she does not stir. They are inside the orchard, standing in a very secluded spot, with only some green apples and an ivied wall to see them. Her eyes are downcast, and her slender fingers are playing nervously with a ribbon on her gown. Her lips have taken a remorseful curve. Now, [Pg 196] as though unable to restrain the impulse, she raises her eyes to his for a brief second, but, brief as it is, he can see that they are full of tears.

"Brian," she says, nervously.

It is the first time she has ever called him by his Christian name, and he turns to her a face still sad indeed, but altogether surprised and pleased.

"Now, that is good of you," he says.

"There is nothing good about me," says Monica, tearfully. "I am as horrid as I well can be, and you are——Brian, I will give up that tableau. I will not be Dolly Varden; no, not if Mr. Ryde went

on his *knees* to me."

"My dear, *dear* love!" says Mr. Desmond.

"Do you indeed love me," says Monica, softly, "in spite of all I do?"

"I love you *because* of all you do. What is there not commendable in every action of yours? I love you; I live always in the hope that some day you will be more to me than you are to-day. A presumptuous hope perhaps," with a rather forced smile, "but one I *will* not stifle. I suppose every one lives in a visionary world at times, where some 'not impossible she' reigns as queen. I dare say you think my queen *is* impossible, yet you little know what dreams have been my playmates, night and day."

"Am I your queen?" sweetly.

"Yes, darling."

"And you are glad I have given up this tableau?"

"I don't know what I should have done if you hadn't."

"Then, now you will do something for me," says Miss Beresford, promptly.

"Anything," with enthusiasm.

"Then to-morrow you are to come here *without* the roses I heard you promising Miss Fitzgerald this afternoon."

Her tone is quite composed, but two little brilliant flecks of color have risen hurriedly and are now flaunting themselves on either pretty cheek. She is evidently very seriously in earnest.

"She asked me for them: she will think it so ungenerous, so rude," says Desmond.

"Not ungenerous. She will never think you that, or rude either," says Monica, gauging the truth to a nicety. "*Careless* if you will, but no more; and—I *want* you to seem careless where she is concerned." [Pg 197]

"But why, my dearest?"

"Because I don't like her; she always treats me as though I were some insignificant little girl still in short petticoats," says Miss Beresford, with rising indignation. "And because—because, too ——"

She pauses in some confusion.

"Go on: because what?" with gentle encouragement.

"Well, then, because I know she wants to *marry* you," says Monica, vehemently, but in a choked voice.

"What an extraordinary idea to come into your head!" says Desmond, in a choked tone also, but from a different emotion.

"What are you laughing at?" severely. "At me?"

"My darling, it seems so absurd, and——"

"I *forbid* you to laugh," in a tone replete with anger but highly suggestive of tears. "Don't do it."

"I'll never laugh again, my pet, if it offends you so dreadfully."

"But your eyes are laughing; I can see them. I can see a great deal more than you think, and I know that hateful girl has made up her mind to marry you as soon as ever she can."

"That will be never."

"Not if you go on bringing her roses and things."

"What harm can a simple rose do?"

"If you are going to look at it in that light, I shall say no more. But in a very little time you will find she has married you, and *then* where will you be?"

Her jealousy is too childishly open to be misunderstood. Mr. Desmond's spirits are rising with marvellous rapidity; indeed, for the past two minutes he feels as if he is treading on air.

"As you won't have me, I don't much care *where* I shall be," he says with the mean hope of reducing her to submission by a threat. In this hope he is doomed to be disappointed, as she meets his base insinuation with an unlowered front.

"Very good, *go* and marry her," she says, calmly, as if church, parson, and Miss Fitzgerald are all waiting for him, in anxious expectation, round the corner.

"No, I shan't," says Desmond, changing his tactics without a blush. "Catch me at it! As you persist in refusing me, I shall never marry, but remain a bachelor forever, for your sweet sake." [Pg 198]

"Then say you will not bring those roses to-morrow. Or, better still, say you will bring them,

and"—all women, even the best are cruel—"give them to me *before* her."

"My darling! what an unreasonable thing to ask me!"

"Oh! I daresay! when people don't *love* people they always think everything they do unreasonable."

This rather involved sentence seems to cut Mr. Desmond to the heart.

"Of course, if you say that, I must do it," he says.

"Don't do it on my account," with a wilful air.

"No, on my own, of course."

"Well, remember I don't ask you to do it," with the most disgraceful ingratitude. "Do as you wish about it."

"Your wishes are mine," he says, tenderly. "I have had no divided existence since that first day I saw you,—how long ago it seems now——"

"Very long. Only a few weeks in reality, but it seems to myself that I have known and—liked you all my life."

"Yet that day when I saw you on the hay-cart is hardly two months old," says Desmond, dreamily.

As a breath of half-forgotten perfume, or a long-lost chord fresh sounded, brings back the memories of a lifetime, so does this chance remark of his now recall to her a scene almost gone out of mind, yet still fraught with recollections terrible to her self-love.

"Two months,—only two?—oh, it must be more," she says, with a pang. Surely time ought to lessen the feeling of shame that overpowers her whenever she thinks of that fatal day.

"So wearisome a time, my own?" asks he, reproachfully.

"No, it is not that. It is only——. Oh, Brian, that day you speak of, when I was on that horrid hay-cart, did you—I mean—did I—that is—did I look very ungraceful?"

The word she is dying to say is *dis*graceful, but she dares not.

"Ungraceful?"

"Yes. Terry says that when we were passing you that day I was—was," with a desperate rush, "kicking up my heels?"

She is trembling with shame and confusion. Crimson has sprung to her cheeks, tears to her eyes.

"I don't believe a word of it," says Mr. Desmond, comprehending the situation at last. "But, even supposing you were,—and, after all, that is the sort of thing *every one* does on a bundle of hay,"— [Pg 199] as though it is quite the customary thing for people generally to go round the world seated on hay-carts,—"I didn't see you—that is, your heels, I mean; I saw only your face,—the prettiest face in the world. How could I look at anything else when I had once seen that?"

"Brian!" turning to him impetuously, and laying both her hands upon his shoulders, "I do think you are the dearest fellow on earth."

"Oh, Monica! am I the dearest to you?" He has twined his arms round her lissome figure, and is gazing anxiously into her eyes.

"Yes,—yes, *certainly*." And then, with a *naivete* indescribable, and with the utmost composure, she says,—

"I think I should like to give you a kiss!"

Is the blue dome still over his head, or has the sky fallen? The thing he has been longing for, with an intensity not to be portrayed, ever since their first meeting, but has not dared to even *hint* at, is now freely offered him, as though it were a thing of naught.

"Monica!" says her lover, the blood rushing to his face, "do you *mean* it?" He tightens his clasp round her, yet still refrains from touching the sweet lips so near his own. A feeling of honest manliness makes him hesitate about accepting this great happiness, lest, indeed, he may have misunderstood her. To him it is so great a boon she grants that he hardly dares believe in its reality.

"Of course I do," says Miss Beresford, distinctly offended. "I—at least, I *did*. I don't now. I always want to kiss people when I feel fond of them; but you don't, evidently, or else, perhaps, you aren't really fond of me at all, in spite of all you have said. Never mind. Don't put yourself out. It was merely a passing fancy on my part."

"Oh, don't let it pass," exclaims her lover, anxiously. "Darling *life*, don't you know I have been longing, *longing* to kiss you for weeks past, yet dared not, because something in your eyes forbade me? And now, to have you of your own accord really willing to give my dear desire seems too much."

"Are you sure that it is that, or——"

"My angel, what a question!"

"Yet perhaps you think——Don't kiss me just to oblige me, you know. I don't care so much about it as all *that*, but——"

She finds it impossible to finish the sentence, because——

[Pg 200]

Dexterously, but gently, she draws herself away from him, and stands a little apart. Looking at her, he can see she is troubled. He has opened his lips to speak, but by a gesture she restrains him.

"I know it now," she says. This oracular speech is accompanied by a blush, vivid as it is angry, and there are large tears in her eyes. "I should not have asked *you* to kiss *me*. That was your part, and you have taught me that I usurped it. Yet I thought only that I was fond of you, that you were my friend, or like Terry, or—" here the grievance gains sound, "you *should* not have kissed me like that."

"You didn't suppose I was going to kiss you as Terry might?" asks he, with just indignation. "He is your brother; I am—not."

"I don't know anything about it, except this, that it will be a very long time before you have the chance of doing it again. I can't bear being *hugged*."

"I am very sorry," says Mr. Desmond, stiffly. "Let me assure you, however, that I shall never cause you such offence again until you wish it."

"Then say never at once," says Monica, with a pout.

"Very good," says Desmond. It may now be reasonably supposed that he has met all her requirements, and that she has no further complaints to bring forward; but such is not the case.

"I don't like you when you talk to me like that," she says, aggressively, and with a spoiled-child air, glancing at him from under her sweeping lashes.

"How am I to talk to you, then?" asks he, in despair.

"You know very well how to talk to Miss Fitzgerald," retorts she, provokingly, and with a bold attempt at a frown. Yet there is something about her naughty little face, a hidden, mocking, mischievous, yet withal friendly smile as it were, that disarms her speech of its sting and gives Brian renewed hope and courage.

He takes her hand deliberately and draws it unrepulsed through his arm.

"Let us go up this walk," he says, "and leave all angry words and thoughts behind us."

He makes a movement in the direction indicated, and finds that she moves with him. He finds, too, that her slender fingers have closed involuntarily upon his arm. Plainly, she is as glad to be at peace with him as he with her.

Coming to a turn in the path, shaded by two rugged old apple-trees now growing heavy with their green burden, Desmond stands still, and, putting his right hand in his pocket, draws out something from it. As he does this he colors slightly. [Pg 201]

"You wear all your rings on your right hand," he says, with loving awkwardness, "and it seems to me the other poor little fingers always look neglected. I—I wish you would take this and make it a present to your left hand."

"*This*" is a thick gold band, set with three large diamonds of great brilliancy in gypsy fashion.

"Oh! not for me!" says Monica, recoiling, and clasping her hands behind her back, yet with her eyes firmly fastened upon the beautiful ring.

"Why not for you? Some day I shall give you all I possess; now I can give you only such things as this."

"Indeed I must not take it," says Monica; but even as she utters the half-hearted refusal she creeps unconsciously closer to him, and, laying her hand upon his wrist, looks with childish delight and longing at the glittering stones lying in his palm.

"But I say you must," says Desmond, taking a very superior tone. "It is yours, not mine. I have nothing to do with it. It was never meant for me. See," taking up her hand and slipping the ring on her engaged finger, "how pretty your little white hand makes it look!"

It is always a difficult thing to a woman to bring herself to refuse diamonds, but doubly difficult once she has seen them positively adorning her own person.

Monica looks at the ring, then sighs, then turns it round and round mechanically, and finally glances at Desmond. He returns the glance by passing his arm round her shoulders, after which there is never another word said about the ownership of the ring.

"But it will put my poor little pigs in the shade, won't it?" says Monica, looking at her other hand,

and then at him archly. "Oh! it is lovely—*lovely*!"

"I think I might have chosen you a prettier one, had I run up to Dublin and gone to Waterhouse myself," says Desmond; "but I knew if I went I could not possibly get back until to-morrow evening, and that would mean losing two whole days of our precious seven."

This speech pleases Monica, I think, even more than the ring.

"I am glad you did not go," she says, softly.

"So am I—especially as——" Here he pauses, and then goes on again hurriedly. "If I had gone, Monica, you would not have forgotten me?" [Pg 202]

"How could I forget you in two little days?"

"They would have been two very big days to me. But tell me, if I were to go away from you for a far longer time—say for a whole month—would you still be faithful? Should I find you as I left you,—indifferent to others at least, if not wholly mine?"

"Why should I change?"

"Darling, there are so many reasons." He draws his breath quickly, impatiently. "Some day, you may meet some one else—more suited to you, perhaps, and——"

"I shall never do that." She interrupts him slowly, but decidedly.

"You are sure?"

"Yes."

The answer in words perhaps is meagre; but he, looking into the depths of her soft eyes, sees a surer answer there, and is satisfied.

The shadows are growing longer and slower. They do not dance and quiver now in mad glee, as they did an hour agone.

"I think we must go back," says Monica, with unconcealed regret.

"What! you will throw me again into temptation? into the very arms of the fair Bella?" says Desmond, laughing.

"Reflect, I beg of you, before it is too late."

"After all," says Monica, "I don't think I have behaved very nicely about her. I don't think now it would be a—a pretty thing to make you give me the roses before her. No, you must not do that; and you must not manage to forget them, either. You shall bring the handsomest you can find and give them to her,—but *publicly* Brian, just as if there was nothing in it, you know."

"There is nothing like adhering to the strict truth," says Brian. "There shall be nothing in my roses, I promise you,—except perfume." [Pg 203]

CHAPTER XX.

How gossip grows rife at Aghyohillbeg—How Hermia parries the question, and how Olga proves unkind.

"She's *disgracefully* ugly!—I saw her quite close," says Mr. Kelly, in an injured tone. "I wonder what on earth Madam O'Connor means by asking her here, where she can be nothing but a blot upon a perfect landscape; all the rest of us are so lovely."

It is four o'clock, and hopelessly wet. The soft rain patters on the leaves outside, the grass and all the gardens are drowned in Nature's tears. There can be no lounging on sunny terraces, no delicious dreaming under shady beech-trees, this lost afternoon.

Giving in to the inevitable with a cheerful resignation worthy of record, they have all congregated in the grand old hall, one of the chief glories of Aghyohillbeg.

Through a vague but mistaken notion that it will add to their comfort and make them cosier and more forgetful of—or at least more indifferent to—the sunshine of yesterday, they have had an enormous fire of pine logs kindled upon the hearth. When too late, they discover it to be a discomfort; but, with a stoicism worthy a better cause, they decline to acknowledge their error, and stand in groups round the aggressive logs, pretending to enjoy them, but in reality dying of heat.

Meanwhile, the fragrant pieces of pine roar and crackle merrily, throwing shadows up the huge chimney, and casting bright gleams of light upon the exquisite oaken carving of the ancient chimney-piece that reaches almost to the lofty ceiling and is now blackened by age and beautiful beyond description.

Olga, in a sage-green gown, is lying back listlessly in a deep arm-chair; she has placed an elbow on either arm of it, and has brought her fingers so far towards each other that their tips touch.

Hermia Herrick, in a gown of copper-red, is knitting languidly a little silk sock for the child nestling silently at her knee.

Monica, in plain white India muslin, is doing nothing, unless smiling now and then at Brian Desmond be anything, who is lying on a bear-skin rug, looking supremely happy and full of life and spirits. He has come over from Coole very early, being generously urged so to do by Madam [Pg 204] O'Connor when parting with him last night. Ryde is not on the field, so the day is his own.

Miss Fitzgerald is looking rather handsome, in a dress of the very tiniest check, that is meant for a small woman only, or a child, and so makes her appear several sizes larger than she really is. Ulic Ronayne, standing leaning against the chimney-piece as close to Olga as circumstances will permit, is silent to a fault; and, indeed, every one but Mr. Kelly has succumbed to the damp depression of the air.

They have had only one distraction all day,—the arrival of another guest, a distant cousin of their hostess, who has been lauding her for a week or so. On inspection she proves to be a girl of nineteen, decidedly unprepossessing in appearance,—in fact, as Mr. Murphy, the butler, says to Mrs. Collins, the housekeeper, "as ugly as if she was bespoke."

A tall girl oppressed by freckles and with hair of a deep—well, let us emulate our polite French neighbors and call it *blond ardent*.

"Who is she?" asks Lord Rossmoyne, who arrived about an hour ago, to Ulic Ronayne's discomfiture.

"She's a fraud!" says Mr. Kelly, indignantly,—"a swindle! Madam assured us, last night, a charming girl was coming, to turn all heads and storm all hearts; and to-day, when we rushed in a body to the window and flattened our noses against the panes to see her, lo! a creature with red hair and pimples——"

"No, no; freckled, my dear Owen," interrupts Olga, indolently.

"It is all the same at a distance! general effect fatal in both cases," says Mr. Kelly, airily. "It makes one positively uncomfortable to look at her. I consider her being thrust upon us like this a deliberate insult. I think if she continues I shall leave."

"Oh, *don't*," says Desmond, in a tone of agonized entreaty. "How *should* we manage to get on without you?"

"Badly, badly, I know that," regretfully. "But it is a question of breaking either your hearts or mine. Some of us must go to the wall; it would be unfair to the world to make it me."

"I don't believe you will go far," says Mrs. Herrick, slowly. Kelly glances at her quickly, but she does not lift her eyes from the little sock, and her fingers move rapidly, easily as ever. [Pg 205]

"London or Paris," he says,—"the city of fogs or the city of frogs. I don't know which I prefer."

"Better stay where you are," says Brian.

"Well, I really didn't think her so very plain," says Bella Fitzgerald, who thinks it pretty to say the kind thing always. "A large mouth *is* an affliction, certainly; and as for her complexion—but really, after all, it is better to see it as it is than painted and powdered, as one sees other people."

This is a faint cut at Olga, who is fond of powder, and who has not scrupled to add to her charms by a little touch of rouge now and then when she felt pallor demanded it.

"I think a little artificial aid might improve poor Miss Browne," says Hermia Herrick. Miss Browne is the new arrival.

"I don't. I think it is an abominable thing to cheat the public like that," says Miss Fitzgerald, doggedly: "nobody respectable would do it. The *demi-monde* paint and powder."

"*Do* they? how do you know, dear?" asks Olga Bohun, sweetly.

Miss Fitzgerald, feeling she has made a *faux-pas*, colors violently, tries to get herself out of it, and flounders helplessly. Lord Rossmoyne is looking surprised, Ulic Ronayne and Desmond amused.

"Every one says so," says the fair Bella, at last, in a voice that trembles with anger: "you know very well they do."

"I don't, indeed, my dear Bella. My acquaintance with—er—that sort of person has been limited: I quite envy you your superior knowledge."

Here Olga laughs a little, low, rippling laugh that completes her enemy's defeat. After the laugh there is a dead silence.

"I think somebody ought to remove the poor little child," says Mr. Kelly, in a low, impressive tone, pointing to Mrs. Herrick's little girl. At which everybody laughs heartily, and awkwardness is banished.

"Browne?—I knew an Archibald Browne once: anything to this girl?" asks Lord Rossmoyne, hurriedly, unwilling to let silence settle down on them again.

"Big man with a loose tie?" asks Ulic.

"Ye-es. There was something odd about his neck, now I remember," says Rossmoyne.

"That was her father. He had an idea he was like Lord Byron, and always wore his necktie flying in the wind." [Pg 206]

"He couldn't manage it, though," says Mr. Kelly, with as near an attempt at mirth as he ever permits himself. "It always flew the wrong way. Byron's, if you call to mind his many portraits, always flew over his left shoulder; old Browne's wouldn't. By the bye," thoughtfully, "Byron must have had a wind of his own, mustn't he? our ordinary winds don't always blow in the same direction, do they?"

"I would that a wind could arise to blow you in some direction, when you are in such an idle mood as now," says Mrs. Herrick, in a low tone.

"If it would blow me in *your* direction, I should say amen to that," in a voice as subdued as her own.

"May the Fates avert from me a calamity so great!"

"You will have to entreat them very diligently, if you hope to escape it."

"Are you so very determined, then?"

"Yes. Although I feel I am mocked by the hope within me, still I shall persist."

"You waste your time."

"I am content to waste it in such a cause. Yet I am sorry I am so distasteful to you."

"That is not your fault. I forgive you that."

"What is it, then, you can't forgive in me?"

"Not more than I can't forgive in another. 'God made you all, therefore let you all pass for men.' I don't deal more hardly with you than with the rest, you see. You are only one of many."

"That is the unkindest thing you ever said to me. And that is saying much. Yet I, too, will beseech the Fates in my turn."

"To grant you what?"

"The finding of you in a gentler mind."

The faintest flicker of a smile crosses her lips. She lays her knitting on her knee for an instant, that she may the more readily let her tapered fingers droop until they touch the pale brow of the child at her feet; then she resumes it again, with a face calm and emotionless as usual.

"Old Browne's girl can't owe her father much," Desmond is saying *apropos* of something both lost and gone before, so far as Kelly and Mrs. Herrick are concerned.

"About a hundred thousand pounds," says Ronayne. "She is quite a catch, you know. No end of money. The old fellow died a year ago."

"No, he didn't; he demised," says Kelly, emerging from obscurity into the light of conversation once more. "At least, so the papers said. There is a tremendous difference, you know. A poor man dies, a rich man demises. One should always bear in mind that important social distinction." [Pg 207]

"And the good man! What of him?" says Desmond, looking at his friend. "What does Montgomery say?"

"Yes, that is very mysterious," says Kelly, with bated breath. "According to Montgomery, 'the good man *never* dies.' Think of that! *Never* dies. He walks the earth forever, like a superannuated ghost, only awfuller."

"Have you ever seen one?" asks Olga, leaning forward.

"What? a man that never died? Yes, lots of 'em. Here's one," laying his hand upon his breast.

"No. A man that never will die?"

"How can I answer such a question as that? Perhaps Ronayne, there, may be such a one."

"How stupid you are! I mean, did you ever meet a man who *couldn't* die?"

"Never,—if he went the right way about it."

"Then, according to your showing, you have never seen a good man." She leans back again in her chair, fatigued but satisfied.

"I'm afraid they are few and far between," says Hermia.

"Now and again they *have* appeared," says Mr. Kelly, with a modest glance. "Perhaps I shall never die."

"Don't make us more unhappy than we need be," says Mrs. Herrick, plaintively.

"How sad that good men should be so scarce!" says Miss Fitzgerald, with a glance she means to be funny, but which is only dull.

"Don't make trite remarks, Bella," says Mrs. Bohun, languidly. "You know if you did meet one he would bore you to death. The orthodox good man, the oppressive being we read about, but never see, is unknown to me or you, for which I, at least, am devoutly grateful."

"To return to old Browne," says Ulic: "he wasn't good, if you like. He was a horrid ill-tempered, common old fellow, thoroughly without education of any kind."

"He went through college, however, as he was fond of boasting whenever he got the chance."

"And when he didn't get it he made it."

"In at one door and out at the other, that's how he went through Trinity," says Mr. Kelly. "Oh, how I hated that dear old man, and *how* he hated me!" [Pg 208]

"You admit, then, the possibility of your being hated?" says Mrs. Herrick.

"I have admitted that ever since—I met—*you*! But old Browne bore me a special grudge."

"And your sin against him?"

"I never fathomed it. 'The atrocious crime of being a young man,' principally, I think. Once, I certainly locked him up in his own wine-cellar, and left him there for six hours, under the pretence that I believed him to be a burglar, but nothing more. He quite disliked being locked in the cellar, I think. It was very dark, I must admit. But I'm not afraid of the dark."

"That's a good thing," says Madam O'Connor, entering, "because it will soon envelop you. Did any one ever see so dark an evening for the time of year? Well, I do think that fire looks cheerful, though it *is* warm. Has Mary Browne come down yet?"

"No. Come here, Madam; here's a cosey seat I have been keeping sacred for you for the past hour. Why have you denied us the light of your countenance all this weary time?"

"Get out with you now, and your fine compliments to an old woman!" says Madam, laughing. "If I were *your* sweetheart, Owen, I'd never believe a word out of your lips."

Mrs. Herrick, laying down her knitting, raises her head, and looks full into Kelly's eyes. As she does so, a smile, lovely as it is unexpected, warms all her statuesque face into perfect beauty.

"And this to me!" says Kelly, addressing his hostess, and pretending to be blind to Mrs. Herrick's glance. "All the afternoon I have been treated by your sex with the most consummate cruelty. With their tongues they have been stabbing me as with so many knives. But yours is the unkindest cut of all. It is, in fact, the—er—carving-knife!"

"Oh! here's the tea," says Olga, in a pleased tone. "Madam, *please* let me pour it out to-night?"

"Of course, my love, and thank you too."

"And may I to-morrow evening?" asks Monica, with childish eagerness and a quick warm blush.

"You may, indeed, my pretty one; and I hope it won't be long before you pour me out my tea in your own house."

Monica laughs, and kisses her, and Desmond, who is standing near them, stoops over Madam O'Connor and tells her he would like to kiss her too,—first, for her own sake, and secondly, for that sweet hope of hers just uttered. [Pg 209]

"Not a bit of it," says she, in return, in a tone as sprightly as it was twenty years ago, though too low for Monica to hear. "Your first and second reasons are all humbug. Say at once you want to kiss me because you think this child's caress still lingers on my lips. Ah ha!—you see I know more than you think, my lad. And hark you, Brian, come here till I whisper a word in your ear; I'm your friend, boy, in the matter, and I wish you luck, though Priscilla Blake kill me for it; that's what I want to say."

"I couldn't desire a better friend," says Brian gratefully.

"And where on earth *is* Mary Browne?" says Madam O'Connor. "She is such a nice girl, though hardly a Venus. Owen, my dear, I want you to take her down to dinner, and to make yourself charming to her."

"I shall be only too pleased," says Mr. Kelly, faintly; and then he sinks back in his chair and covers his face with his hands.

"We were talking about Miss Browne's father; he was quite a millionaire, wasn't he?" says Lord Rossmoyne, who is standing at the tea-table beside Olga. He is a very rich man himself, and has, therefore, a due regard for riches in others.

"He was,—and the most unpleasant person I ever met in my life, into the bargain," says Madam O'Connor. "I'm sure the life he led that poor Mary!—I never felt more relieved at anything than at the news of his death."

"I feel as if I could weep for Mary," says Mr. Kelly, in an aside to Mrs. Herrick, who takes no

notice of him. "I wonder if she has got a little lamb," he goes on, unrebuked.

"What about the lamb?" says Madam, whose ears are young as ever.

"I was only conjecturing as to whether your cousin Mary had a little lamb," says Mr. Kelly, genially. "The old Mary had, you know. A dear little animal with its

> 'Fleece as white as snow;
> And everywhere that Mary went
> The lamb was sure to go.'

You recollect, don't you? What does Miss Browne do with hers? Has she got it upstairs in her room, now? After all,—though the idea is sweetly pretty,—I think there might be certain places into which it would be awkward to have even the whitest lamb trotting after one. Eh?"

"I suppose Miss Browne is rich enough to indulge in any vagaries that may occur to her," says Bella Fitzgerald. [Pg 210]

"There's nothing like money," says Olga, with a sigh; at which Lord Rossmoyne looks hopeful, and young Ronayne despondent.

"Like leather, you mean," says Owen Kelly: "that's the real thing to get hold of."

"Some people would do *anything* for money," says Miss Fitzgerald, with a spiteful glance in Olga's direction. "They would sell themselves for it." Here she turns her cold eyes upon Ronayne, who is standing erect, handsome, but unmistakably miserable.

"They could hardly sell themselves for a more profitable article," says Olga, with a fine shrug of her soft shoulders.

"So *they* think. Crœsus, we know, was, and is, allpowerful."

"Oh, no," says Olga, with a little silvery laugh; "you forget my dear Bella. Read it up again, and you will see that Crœsus was once conquered by Cyrus. What became of his power then?"

Her lashes cover her eyes for a moment, and when she lifts them again they are fixed on Ronayne. By some coquettish art she gives him to understand in this single glance that he is Cyrus, Lord Rossmoyne Crœsus. He can conquer the rich lord if he will.

"How idle you are, Mr. Ronayne!" she says aloud. "Come here directly and help me. You know I cannot do without *your* help." There is the most delicate emphasis possible upon the pronoun. Obedient to her command, he comes, as Rossmoyne, armed with the cups, crosses the hall to Hermia and Miss Fitzgerald.

"Did your eyes speak true just now?" he asks, bending over her under pretext of helping her with the cups.

"What is truth?" asks she, in turn, with a swift upward glance. "Who knows aught of her? She lies buried in a deep well, does she not? Who shall drag her forth?"

She smiles, yet in a somewhat constrained fashion, that assorts ill with the inborn self-possession that as a rule characterizes her. She glances at him hurriedly. How young and handsome and earnest he looks! How full of tenderest entreaty! There is, too, a touch of melancholy in his dark eyes that never came to the birth (she is fain to acknowledge to herself with a pang of remorse) until that day when first they look on her.

He loves her,—that she knows; but Rossmoyne loves her too; and though Ronayne's rent-roll is by no means to be despised, still it counts but as a small one beside that of Rossmoyne's. [Pg 211]

And Hermia is right! a title *is* of use in the world; and nothing is so lasting or so satisfactory as a respectable book at one's banker's. A good match (Hermia again) is the one thing to be desired; it covers all sins. Advice such as this coming from Mrs. Herrick is thoroughly disinterested, as the late lamented Mr. Herrick, having behaved to her like a brute during their mercifully short married life, had died in the odor of sanctity, leaving her complete mistress of all his enormous wealth, and quite free to make a second marriage of her *own* choosing.

With her (Olga), however, the case is widely different; she is indeed without encumbrances so far as children may so be termed, and she has sufficient means to enable her to get her gowns and things from Paris, but there her independence ends.

As she runs over all this hurriedly in her mind, the desire for riches grows upon her. Yes, there is certainly a great deal of good in Rossmoyne, besides his income; and perhaps a solid sternness is preferable to an airy gayety of manner (this with an irrepressible leaning towards the "airy gayety"); and—and—what a *pity* it is that Rossmoyne is not Ulic!——

"I will," says Ronayne, alluding to her last remark, in a low but determined tone. "Olga, tell me I am more to you than Rossmoyne."

"The boy you are!" says Olga, with an adorable smile that reaches him through the flickering flashes of the firelight. "The baby!" He is bending over her, and with a light caressing touch she brushes back the hair from his temples. "In a year, nay, in a month, once we are separated, you will see some other face, newer, more desirable, and forget you ever cared for mine."

"If I could believe that, I might find peace. Yet, for all that peace could give me, I would not so believe it. I am yours forever, boy though you deem me; and, yet, is one ever a boy again when one has once truly loved?"

"How often have you truly loved?" with an attempt at lightness that is down-trodden by the intensity of her regard.

"As often as I have seen you. Nay, more than that, every moment since I first saw you; because night and day, whether absent or present, I have been yours in heart and soul."

"You have fatigued yourself!—A long two months!" laughingly.

"A short two months." [Pg 212]

"There has been no time for fickleness."

"There never will be, so far as I am concerned. So sure am I of that, that I do not mind praying that Cupid's curse may light upon me if ever I prove unfaithful. You know it?"

"I have but small acquaintance with cursing of any sort."

"Then learn this one,—

> 'They that do change old love for new,
> Pray gods they change for worse!'

Will you repeat that after me?"

"Wait until I finish my tea; and—unkind as you are—you will give me a little bit of cake, won't you?"

"I would give you everything I possess, if I could."

"You don't possess this cake, you know: it is Madam O'Connor's."

"Oh, Olga, why will you always press me backwards? Am I never to be nearer to you than I am now?"

"I don't see how you could conveniently be very much nearer," says Mrs. Bohun, with a soft laugh.

"After all, I suppose I come under the head of either madman or fool," says Ronayne, sadly. "You are everything to me; I am less than nothing to you."

"Is Lord Rossmoyne to come under the head of 'nothing'? How rude!" says Olga.

"I never thought of him. I was thinking only of how hopelessly I love you."

"Love! How should such a baby as you grasp even the meaning of that word?" says Olga, letting her white lids droop until their long lashes lie upon her cheeks like shadows, while she raises her cup with indolent care to her lips. "Do you really think you know what it means?"

> "'The dredeful joy, alway that flit so yerne,
> All this mene I by Love,'"

quotes he, very gently; after which he turns away, and, going over to the fireplace again, flings himself down dejectedly at Monica's feet.

"Are you tired, Mr. Ronayne?" says Monica, very gently. Something in his beautiful face tells her that matters are not going well with him.

"Tired? no," lifting his eyes to her with a smile that belies his words. "It is good of you to ask, though. I wish," earnestly, "you would not call me 'Mr. Ronayne.' I can't bear it from any one I like. Desmond tell her to call me Ulic." [Pg 213]

It strikes both Monica and Brian as peculiar that he should appeal to the latter as to one possessed of a certain influence over the former. It strikes Miss Fitzgerald in the same light too, who has been listening to his impetuous entreaty.

Seeing there is something wrong with him, something that might be termed excitement in his manner, Desmond whispers to Monica to do as he desires.

"He is unhappy about something; let him feel you are his friend," he says, in a low tone.

"Come a little farther from the fire, Ulic,—a little nearer to me," says Monica, in a tone of shy friendliness, "and I think you will be more comfortable."

He is more than grateful, I think, though he says nothing only he moves a good deal closer to her, and lays his head against her knee in a brotherly fashion,—need I say unrebuked?

Something in this little scene sends the blood rushing with impatient fervor through Olga's veins. But that she knows Monica well, and that the girl is dear to her, she could have hated her heartily at this moment, without waiting to analyze the motive for her dislike. As it is, she gives the reins to her angry spirit, and lets it drive her where it will. She laughs quite merrily, and says some pretty playful thing to Lord Rossmoyne that all the world can hear,—and Ronayne, be

assured, the first of all.

Desmond, with a subdued touch of surprise in his eyes, turns to look at her. But the night has darkened with sullen haste—tired, perhaps, of the day's ill temper—and standing as he does within the magic circle of the firelight, he finds a difficulty in conquering the gloom beyond. This makes his gaze in her direction the more concentrated; and, indeed, when he has separated her features from the mist of the falling night, he still finds it impossible to pierce the impenetrable veil of indifference that covers her every feature.

His gaze thus necessarily prolonged is distasteful to her.

"Brian, don't keep staring at the teapot in that mean fashion," she says, playfully, yet with a latent sense of impatience in her tone. "It is unworthy of you. Go up to Madam O'Connor *nobly*, cup in hand, and I daresay—if you ask her prettily—she will grant me permission to give you a cup of tea." [Pg 214]

Desmond, recovering from his revery with a start accepts the situation literally.

"Will you, Madam?" he says, meekly. "*Do.*" His tone is of the most abject. There is a perceptible trembling about his knee-joints. "Is *this* the 'air noble'?" he says to Olga, in an undertone. "Have I caught it?"

"You'll catch it in a minute in real earnest, if you don't mend your manners," says Madam, with a laugh. "Give him his tea, Olga, my dear, though he doesn't deserve it."

"Sugar?" says Olga, laconically.

"Yes, please," mendaciously.

"Then you shan't have even one lump, if only to punish you for all your misconduct."

"I thought as much," says Brian, taking his cup thankfully. "Fact is, I can't bear sugar but I knew you would drop it in, in an unlimited degree, if I said the other thing. Not that I have the vaguest notion as to how I have misconducted myself. If I knew, I might set a watch upon my lips."

"Set it on your *eyes*," says Olga, with meaning.

At this moment a light footfall is heard, and somebody comes slowly across the hall. A merry tongue of fire, flaming upwards, declares it to be the plain Miss Browne.

Mrs. O'Connor has just passed into an adjoining room. Olga is busy with her tray and with her thoughts. Mrs. Herrick, partly turned aside, and oblivious of the approaching guest, is conversing in low tones with Lord Rossmoyne.

No one, therefore, is ready to give the stranger welcome and put her through the ceremony of introduction. Awkwardness is impending, when Monica comes to the rescue. Her innate sense of kindly courtesy conquering her shyness, she rises from her seat, and going up to Miss Browne, who has come to a standstill, lays her hand softly upon hers.

"Come over here and sit by me," she says, nervously, yet with such a gracious sweetness that the stranger's heart goes out to her on the spot, and Brian Desmond, if it be possible, falls more in love with her than ever.

"Thank you," says Miss Browne, pressing gratefully the little hand that lies on hers; and then every one wakes into life and says something civil to her.

Five minutes later the dressing-bell rings, and the scene is at an end. [Pg 215]

CHAPTER XXI.

How Mrs. Herrick grows worldly-wise and Olga frivolous—How Mr. Kelly tells a little story; and how, beneath the moonlight, many things are made clear.

Dinner has come to an end. The men are still dallying with their wine. The women are assembled in the drawing-room.

Olga, having drawn back the curtains from the central window, is standing in its embrasure, looking out silently upon the glories of the night. For the storm has died away; the wind is gone to sleep; the rain has sobbed itself to death; and now a lovely moon is rising slowly—slowly—from behind a rippled mass of grayest cloud. From out the dark spaces in the vault above a few stars are shining,—the more brilliantly because of the blackness that surrounds them. The air is sultry almost to oppressiveness, and the breath of the roses that have twined themselves around the railings of the balcony renders the calm night full of sweetest fragrance.

Even as she gazes, spellbound, the clouds roll backward, and stars grow and multiply exceedingly, until all

"the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold."

Madam O'Connor is talking to Miss Browne of certain family matters interesting to both. Miss Fitzgerald has gone upstairs, either to put on another coating of powder, or else to scold her long-suffering maid. Her mother has fallen into a gentle, somewhat noisy snooze.

A sudden similar thought striking both Monica and Mrs. Herrick at the same moment, they rise, and make a step towards the window where Olga is standing all alone.

Hermia, laying her hand on Monica's arm, entreats her by a gesture to change her purpose; whereon Monica falls back again, and Hermia, going on, parts the curtains, and, stepping in to where Olga is, joins her uninvited.

"Dreaming?" she says, lightly.

"Who would not dream on such a night as this? the more beautiful because of the miserable day to which it is a glorious termination. See, Hermia, how those planets gleam and glitter, as though in mockery of us poor foolish mortals down below." [Pg 216]

"I don't feel a bit more foolish than I did this morning," says Hermia. "Do you, dear? You were giving yourself a great deal of credit for your common sense then."

"'Common sense,'—worldly wisdom,—how I hate the sound of all that jargon!" says Olga, petulantly. "Let us forget we *must* be wise, if only for one night. The beauty of that silent world of flowers beyond has somehow entered into me. Let me enjoy it. 'How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon that bank' down there! Watch it. Can you see how the roses quiver beneath its touch, as though stirred by some happy dream?"

"It is indeed a perfect night!" says Hermia, looking at her in some surprise. There is a suspicion of excitement in Olga's manner—arising, as it were, from the desire to hide one emotion by the betrayal of another—that strikes her listener as strange.

"How softly the air beats upon one's face!" says Mrs. Bohun, leaning a little forward. "The night is, as you say, perfect. Yet I don't know what is the matter with me: the more I feel the loveliness of all around, the sadder my heart seems to grow."

"What!" says Hermia, lifting her brows, "am I to learn now that you—the gayest of all mortals—have at last succumbed to the insufferable dreariness of this merry world?"

"You run too fast. I am a little perplexed, perhaps; but I have not succumbed to anything."

"Or any *one*, I hope, unless it be to your advantage. You are playing a silly game, Olga."

"The world would be lost unless it had a fool to sport with now and then."

"But why should *you* be the one to pander to its pleasures?"

"Who more fitting? I am tired of hearing you apply that word 'silly' to me, morning, noon, and night."

"It is too late to believe it possible that you and I should quarrel," says Mrs. Herrick, in a perfectly even tone: "so don't try to get up an imaginary grievance. You know you are dearer to me than anything on earth, after the children."

"Well, don't scold me any more," says Olga, coaxingly.

"I never scold; I only reason."

"Oh! but that is so much worse," says Olga. "It means the scolding, and a lot more besides. Do anything but reason with me, my dear Hermia."

"I *will* say that I think you are throwing yourself away." [Pg 217]

"Where? Over the balcony?"—wilfully. "I assure you, you misjudge me: I am far too great a coward."

"You are not too great a coward to contemplate the committing of a much more serious *betise*. To-night his attentions were specially marked, and you allowed them."

"I can't think what you mean."

"Will you deny that Mr. Ronayne paid you very marked attention to-night?"

"Marked! Where did he make his impression, then? He didn't *pinch* me, if you mean that."

"Of course you can follow your own wishes, dearest, and I shall neither gain nor lose; but it does seem a pity, when you might be a countess and have the world at your feet. I know few so altogether fitted to fill the position, and still you reject it. You are pretty, clever, charming,—everything of the most desirable."

"Am I?" She steps into the drawing-room, and brings herself by a swift step or two opposite a huge mirror let into one of the walls. Standing before it, she surveys herself leisurely from head to foot, and then she smiles.

"I don't know about the 'clever,'" she says; "but I am *sure* I am pretty. In town last season—do you remember?—my hair created quite a furore, it is so peculiarly light. Ever so many people wanted to paint me. Yes, it was all very pleasant."

"Do you think it will be as pleasant to live *here* all your days, and find no higher ambition than the hope that your ponies may be prettier than Mrs. So-and-so's?"

"Do you remember that fancy ball, and how the prince asked who I was, and all the rest of it? He said one or two very pretty things to me. He, like you, said I was charming. Do you know," naively, "I have never got over the feeling of being *obliged* to any one who pays me a compliment? I am obliged to *you* now."

"And to the prince *then*. But you won't see many princes if you stay in Ireland, I fancy: they don't hanker after the soil."

"Poor Ireland!" says Mrs. Bohun.

"And compliments, I should say, will be almost as scarce."

"Ah! now, *there* you are wrong: *they* fly beneath these murky skies. We absolutely revel in them. What true Irishman but has one ripping freely from his mouth on the very smallest chance? And then, my dear Hermia, consider, are we not the proud possessors of the blarney-stone?" [Pg 218]

"I wish, dearest, you would bring yourself to think seriously of Rossmoyne."

"I do think seriously of him. It would be impossible to think of him in any other way, he is so dull and pompous."

"He would make an excellent husband!"

"I have had enough of husbands. They are very unsatisfactory people. And besides——"

"Well?"

"Rossmoyne has a temper."

"And forty thousand a year."

"Not good enough."

"If you are waiting for an angel, you will wait forever. All men are——"

"Oh, Hermia! really, I *can't* listen to such naughty words, you know. I really wonder at you!"

"I wasn't going to say anything of the kind," says Hermia, with great haste, not seeing the laughter lurking in Olga's dark eyes. "I merely meant that——"

"Don't explain!—*don't!*" says Olga; "I couldn't endure any more of it." And she laughs aloud.

"Rossmoyne is very devoted to you. Is there anything against him, except his temper?"

"Yes, his beard. *Nothing* would induce me to marry a man with hair all over his face. It isn't *clean*."

"Give him five minutes and a razor, and he might do away with it."

"Give him five minutes and a razor, and he might do away with himself too," says Olga, provokingly. "Really. I think one thing would please me just as much as the other."

"Oh, then, you are bent on refusing him?" says Hermia, calmly. With very few people does she ever lose her temper; with Olga—never.

"I am not so sure of that, at all," says Olga, airily. "It is quite within the possibilities that I may marry him some time or other,—sooner or later. There is a delightful vagueness about those two dates that gives me the warmest encouragement."

"It is a pity you cannot be serious *sometimes*," says Mrs. Herrick, mildly.

A little hand upon her gown saves further expostulation. A little face looking up with a certainty of welcome into hers brings again that wonderful softness into Hermia's eyes.

"Is it you, my sweetest?" she says, fondly. "And where have you been? I have watched in vain for you for the last half-hour, my Fay." [Pg 219]

"I was in the dining-room. But nurse called me; and now I have come to say good-night," says the child.

"Good-night, then, and God bless you, my chick. But where is my Georgie?"

"I'm here," says Georgie, gleefully, springing upon her in a violent fashion, that one would have believed hateful to the calm Hermia, yet that is evidently most grateful to her. She embraces the boy warmly, and lets her eyes follow him until he is out of sight. Then she turns again to the little maiden at her side.

"I must go with Georgie," says the child.

"So you shall. But first tell me, what have you got in your hand?"

"Something to go to bed with. See, mammy! It is a pretty red plum," opening her delicate pink fist, for her mother's admiration.

"Where did you get it, darling?"

"In the dining-room."

"From Lord Rossmoyne?"

"No. From Mr. Kelly. I would not have the one Lord Rossmoyne gave me."

Olga laughs mischievously, and Mrs. Herrick colors.

"Why?" she says.

"Because I like Mr. Kelly best."

"And what did you give him?"

"Nothing."

"Not even a kiss?" says Olga.

"No," somewhat shamefacedly.

"Her mother's own daughter!" says Olga, caressing the child tenderly, but laughing still. "A chilly mortal."

"Good-night, my own," says Hermia, and the child, having kissed them both again, runs away.

Olga follows her with wistful eyes.

"I almost wish I had a baby!" she says.

"*You?* Why, you can't take care of yourself! You are the least fitted to have a child of any woman that I know. Leave all such charges to staid people like me. Why, you are a baby at heart, yourself, this moment."

"That would be no drawback. It would only have created sympathy between me and my baby. I would have understood all her bad moods and condoned all her crimes." [Pg 220]

"If you had been a mother, you would have had a very naughty child."

"I should have had a very happy child, at least." Then she laughs. "Fancy me with a dear little baby!" she says,—"a thing all my own, that would rub its soft cheek against mine and love me better than anything!"

"And rumple all your choicest Parisian gowns, and pull your hair to pieces. I couldn't fancy it at all."

Here the door opens to admit the men, the celestial half-hour after dinner having come to an end. With one consent they all converge towards the window, where Olga and Hermia are standing with Monica, who had joined them to bid good-night to little Fay. Miss Fitzgerald, who had returned to the drawing-room freshly powdered, seeing how the tide runs, crosses the room too, and mingles with the group in the window.

"How long you have been! We feared you dead and buried," she says to Kelly, with elephantine playfulness.

"We have, indeed. I thought the other men would never stir. Why did you not give me the chance of leaving them? The faintest suggestion that *you* wanted me would have brought me here *hours* ago."

"If I had been sure of that, I should have sent you a message; it would have saved me a lecture," says Olga, flashing a smile at Hermia.

"I should disdain to send a message," says the proud Bella, "I would not *compel* any man's presence. 'Come if you will; stay away if you won't,' is *my* motto; and I cannot help thinking I am right."

"You are, indeed, quite right. Coercion is of small avail in *some* cases," says Olga, regarding her with the calm dignity of one who plainly considers the person addressed of very inferior quality indeed.

"A woman can scarcely be too jealous of her rights nowadays," says Miss Fitzgerald. "If she has a proper knowledge of her position, she ought to guard it carefully."

"A fine idea finely expressed!" says Kelly, as though smitten into reverence by the grandeur of her manner.

"I wonder what is a man's proper position?" says Olga lazily.

"He will always find it at a woman's feet," says Miss Fitzgerald, grandly, elated by Kelly's apparent subjection.

That young man looks blankly round him. Under tables and chairs and lounges his eyes penetrate, but without the desired result. [Pg 221]

"So sorry I can't see a footstool anywhere!" he says, lifting regretful eyes to Miss Fitzgerald; "but

for that I should be at your feet from this until you bid me rise."

"Hypocrite!" says Olga in his ear; after which conversation becomes more general; and presently Miss Fitzgerald goes back to the fire under the mistaken impression that probably one of the men will follow her there.

The *one*—whoever he is—*doesn't*.

"Do you know," says Mr. Kelly, in a low tone, to the others, "the ugly girl's awfully nice! She is a pleasant deceit. 'She has no winsome looks, no pretty frowning,' I grant you; but she can hold her own, and is *so* good-humored."

"What a lovely night!" says Monica, gazing wistfully into the misty depths of the illuminated darkness beyond. "I want to step into it, and—we have not been out all day."

"Then why not go now?" says Hermia, answering her glance in a kindly spirit.

"Ah! *will* you come?" says Monica, brightening into glad excitement.

"Let us go as far as the fountain in the lower garden," says Olga: "it is always beautiful there when the moon is up."

"Avoid the grass, however; wet feet are dangerous," says Lord Rossmoyne, carefully.

"You will die an old bachelor," retorts Olga, saucily, "if you take so much 'thought for the morrow.'"

"It will certainly not be my fault if I do," returns Rossmoyne, calmly, but with evident meaning.

"Mrs. Bohun, bring your guitar," says Desmond, "and we will make Ronayne sing to it, and so imagine ourselves presently in the land of the olive and the palm."

"Shall we ask the others to come with us?" says Monica, kindly, glancing back into the drawing-room.

"Miss Browne, for example," suggests Owen Kelly. If he hopes by this speech to arouse jealousy in anybody present, he finds himself, later on, mightily mistaken.

"If she is as good a sort as you say, I daresay she would like it," says Olga. "And, besides, if we leave her to Bella's tender mercies she will undoubtedly be done to death by the time we return."

"Oh, do go and rescue her," says Mrs. Herrick, turning to Kelly. Her tone is almost appealing. [Pg 222]

"Perhaps Miss Fitzgerald will come too," says Monica, somewhat fearfully.

"Don't be afraid," says Olga. "*Fancy* Bella running the risk of having a bad eye or a pink nose in the morning! She knows much better than that."

"Tell Miss Browne to make haste," says Mrs. Herrick, turning to Kelly. "Because we are impatient,—we are longing to precipitate ourselves into the moonlight. Come, Olga; come, Monica; they can follow."

Miss Browne, however, on being appealed to, shows so honest a disregard for covering of any sort, beyond what decency had already clothed her with, that she and Kelly catch up with the others even before the fountain is reached.

It is, indeed, a fairy dell to which they have been summoned,—a magic circle, closed in by evergreens with glistening leaves. "Dark with excessive light" appears the scene; the marble basin of the fountain, standing out from the deep background, gleams snow-white beneath Diana's touch. "The moon's an arrant thief." Perchance she snatches from great Sol some beauties even rarer than that "pale fire" he grants her—it may be, against his will. So it may well be thought, for what fairest day can be compared with a moonlit night in languorous July?

The water of the fountain, bubbling ever upwards, makes sweet music on the silent air; but, even as they hark to it, a clearer, sweeter music makes the night doubly melodious. From bough to bough it comes and goes,—a heavenly harmony, not to be reproduced by anything of earthly mould.

> "O nightingale, that on yon gloomy spray
> Warbles at eve, when all the woods are still,
> Thou with fresh hope the lover's heart dost fill."

Clear from the depths of the pine woods beyond, the notes ascend, softly, tenderly. Not often do they enrich our Irish air, but sometimes they come to gladden us with a music that can hardly be termed of earth. The notes rise and swell and die, only to rise and to slowly fade again, like "linked sweetness long drawn out."

Seating themselves on the edge of the fountain, they acknowledge silently the beauty of the hour. Olga's hand, moving through the water, breaks it into little wavelets on which the riotous moonbeams dance.

"Where are your bangles, Olga? you used to be famous for them?" asks Desmond, idly. [Pg 223]

"I have tired of them."

"Poor bangles!" says Ulic Ronayne, in a low tone heard only by her.

"What a heavy sigh!"

"A selfish one, too. More for myself than for the discarded bangles. Yet their grievance is mine."

"I thought they suited you," says Desmond.

"Did you? Well, but they had grown so common; every one used to go about laden with them. And then they made such a tiresome tinkle-tinkle all over the place."

"What place?" says Lord Rossmoyne, who objects to slang of even the mildest description from any woman's lips, most of all from the lips of her whom he hopes to call his wife.

"Don't be stupid!" says this prospective wife, with considerable petulance.

"You are fickle, I doubt," goes on Rossmoyne, unmoved. "A few months ago you raved about your bangles, and had the prettiest assortment I think I ever saw. Thirty-six on each arm, or something like it. We used to call them your armor. You said you were obliged to wear the same amount exactly on each arm, lest you might grow crooked."

"I know few things more unpleasant than having one's silly remarks brought up to one years afterwards," says Olga, with increasing temper.

"*Months* not *years*," says Rossmoyne, carefully. Whereupon Mrs. Bohun turns her back upon him, and Mrs. Herrick tells herself she would like to give him a good shake for so stupidly trying to ruin his own game, and Ulic Ronayne feels he is on the brink of swearing with him an eternal friendship.

"Bangles?" breaks in Owen Kelly, musingly. "Harmless little circular things women wear on their wrists, aren't they? But awkward too at times,—amazingly awkward. As Olga has feelingly remarked, they *can* make a marvellously loud tinkle-tinkle at times. I know a little story about bangles, that ought to be a warning against the use of them. Would any one like to hear my little story? It is short, but very sweet."

Every one instantly says "Yes," except Olga, who has drawn herself together and is regarding him with a stony glare.

"Well, there was once on a time a young woman, who had some bangles, and a young man; she had other things too, such as youth and beauty, but they weren't half so important as the first two items; and wherever she and her bangles went, there went the young man too. And for a long [Pg 224] time nobody knew which he loved best, the beauteous maiden or the gleaming bangles. Do I make myself clear?"

"Wonderfully so, for *you*," says Mrs. Herrick.

"Well one day the young man's preference was made 'wonderfully so' too. And it was in this wise. On a certain sunny afternoon, the young woman found herself in a conservatory that opened off a drawing-room, being divided from it only by a hanging Indian curtain; a *hanged* Indian curtain she used to call it ever afterwards; but that was bad grammar, and bad manners too."

"I feel I'm going to sleep," says Desmond, drowsily. "I hope somebody will rouse me when he has done, or pick me out of the water if I drop into it. Such a rigmarole of a story I never heard in my life."

"Caviare can't be appreciated by the general; it is too strong for you," says Mr. Kelly, severely. "But to continue——Anything wrong with you, my dear Olga?"

"Nothing!" says Mrs. Bohun, with icy indignation.

"Well. In this conservatory my heroine of the bangles found herself; and here, too, as a natural consequence, was found the young man. There was near them a lounge,—skimpy enough for one, but *they* found it amply large for *two*. Curious fact in itself, wasn't it? And I think the young man so far forgot himself as to begin to make violent——and just as he was about to emb——the young woman, whose name was——, she very properly, but with somewhat mistaken haste, moved away from him, and in so doing set all her bangles a-tinkling. Into full cry they burst, whereupon the curtain was suddenly drawn back from the drawing-room side, giving the people there a full view of the conservatory *and* its—contents! The *denouement* was full of interest,—positively thrilling! I should advise all true lovers of a really good novel to obtain this book from their libraries and discover it for themselves."

Here Mr. Kelly stops, and looks genially around.

"I think I shall take to writing reviews," he says, sweetly. "I like my own style."

A dead silence follows his "little story," and then Mrs. Herrick lifts her eyes to his.

"'I wonder that you will still be talking, Signor Benedick: nobody marks you,'" she quotes, with a touch of scorn.

"*You* do, my dear Lady Disdain, or else you would not have addressed me that contemptuous remark." [Pg 225]

"An absurd story, altogether!" says Olga, throwing up her head, a smile lightening her eyes as they meet Kelly's. At her tone, which is more amused than annoyed, Ronayne lets his hand fall into the water close to hers, and doubtless finds its cool touch (the water's, I mean, of course) very refreshing, as it is fully five minutes before he brings it to the surface again.

"True, nevertheless," says Kelly. "Both the principals in my story were friends of mine. I knew—indeed, I may safely say I *know*—them well."

"I am glad you said '*were*,'" says Olga, shaking her blonde head at him. Lord Rossmoyne, by this time, is looking as black as a thunder-cloud.

"A questionable friend you must be, to tell tales out of school," says Mrs. Herrick.

"I defy any one to say I have told anything," says Kelly, with much-injured innocence. "But I am quite prepared to hear my actions, as usual, grossly maligned. I am accustomed to it now. The benefit of the doubt is not for *me*."

"There isn't a doubt," says Hermia.

"Go on. I must try to bear it,"—meekly. "I know I am considered incapable of a pure motive."

"Was it you drew back the curtain?"

"Well, really, yes, I believe it was. I wanted my friend, you see, and I knew I should find him with the bangles. Yes; it was I drew the curtain."

"Just what I should have expected from you," says Mrs. Herrick.

"Ah! Thank you! Now at last you are beginning to see things in their true light, and to take my part," says Mr. Kelly, with exaggerated gratitude. "Now, indeed, I feel I have not lived in vain! You have, though at a late hour, recognized the extraordinary promptitude that characterizes my every action. While another might have been hesitating, I drew the curtain. I am seldom to be found wanting, I may, indeed, always be discovered just where——"

"You *aren't* wanting," interrupts Mrs. Herrick, with a sudden smile.

"How can *that* be," says Kelly, with reproachful sadness, "when I am generally to be found near you?"

At this Hermia gives in, and breaks into a low soft laugh.

"But I wish you had not told that story of Olga and Mr. Ronayne," she says, in a whisper, and with some regret. "You saw how badly Rossmoyne took it." [Pg 226]

"That is partly why I told it. I think you are wrong in trying to make that marriage: she would be happier with Ronayne."

"For a month or two, perhaps."

"Oh, make it *three*," says Kelly, satirically. "Surely the little winged god has so much staying power."

"A few weeks ago you told me you did not believe in him at all."

"I have changed all that."

"Ah! *you* can be fickle too."

"A man is not necessarily fickle because when he discovers the only true good he leaves the bad and presses towards it. I think, too, his mentor," in a lowered tone, "should be the last to misjudge him."

"Nothing is so lasting, at least, as riches," says Mrs. Herrick, with a chastened but unmistakable desire to change his mood. "Olga with unlimited means and an undeniable place in the world of society would be a happier Olga than as the wife of a country gentleman."

"I don't agree with you; but you know best—*perhaps*. You speak your own sentiments, of course. A title is indispensable to you too, as well as to her?"

His tone is half a question.

"It counts," she says, slowly, trifling with firm though slender fingers with the grasses that are growing in the interstices of the marble.

"Pshaw!" says Kelly. Rising with a vehemence foreign to him, he crosses to where Ulic Ronayne is standing alone.

CHAPTER XXII.

How Olga drowns a faithful servant—How Mr. Kelly conjures up a ghost—And how Monica, beneath the mystic moonbeams, grants

the gift she first denies.

"Why so pale and wan, fond lover?" he says, lightly, laying his hand on Ulic's shoulder. The latter turns to him with a bright smile that renders his handsome face quite beautiful. Seeing its charm, Kelly asks himself, in half-angry fashion, how Olga can possibly hesitate for one moment between him and Rossmoyne. "But they are all alike heartless," he decides, bitterly. [Pg 227]

"I am feeling neither pale nor wan," says Ronayne, still smiling. "It must be the moon, if anything. Look here, Kelly, something to-night has told me that it will all come right in the end. I shall gain her against the heaviest odds."

"If you mean Rossmoyne, he's the heaviest mortal I know," says Kelly.

"Well, he *isn't* suited to her, is he?" There is a strange excitement in Ronayne's manner. "Putting me out of the question altogether, I don't believe he could make her happy. If I thought he could, of course I should then go away somewhere, and find contentment in the thought of hers; but ——*you* don't think she would do well to marry him do you Kelly?" He has controlled his features to an almost marvellous calm, but the agony of his question in his eyes cannot be hid.

"I think the woman who could even *hesitate* between you and him must be a fool and worse," says Kelly, whose temper is not his own to-night. "He is a pedantic ass, more in love with himself than he can ever be with anything else. While you——Look here, Ronayne; I wonder if any woman is *worth* it."

"Oh, *she* is," says Ronayne, with tender conviction. "I don't think she is at all like other people; do you? There's something different—something *special*—about her."

"I daresay," says Kelly, gently, which is rather good of him, considering his frame of mind.

"You're an awfully kind sort of fellow, Kelly, do you know?" says Ronayne, slipping his arm through his. "You are the only one I ever talk to about *her*. And I suppose I must bore you, though you don't say it. It's the most generous thing I know, your sympathizing with me as you do. If you were in love yourself, I could understand it. But you are not, you know."

"Oh, no; of course not," says Mr. Kelly.

"Is that your guitar, Mrs. Bohun? I wish you would sing us something," says Miss Browne at this moment.

"I don't sing much,—and never out of doors, it hurts my throat so," says Olga, smiling at her; "but if any else will sing, I will gladly play to them."

"Mr. Ronayne,—Ulic,—come here," says Monica, half shyly, but very sweetly. "You can sing, I know."

"Yes come here," says Olga, turning to him, and away from Lord Rossmoyne, who is talking to her in low, short, angry tones. But the latter, laying his hand on her arm, half compels her to turn to him again. [Pg 228]

"Let some one else accompany him if he *must* sing," he says; "*any* one but you."

"No one else can."

"I object to your doing it."

"You won't when you hear him; he sings *so* sweetly," with the prettiest, most enthusiastic smile. "You really should hear him."

"You persist, then? you compel me to believe the worst,—to regard you as implicated in that story of Kelly's."

"I compel you to nothing. And as for the story, I thought it very amusing: didn't you?"

"*No!*" says Rossmoyne, with subdued fury.

"Do you know, I often said you lacked humor?" says Mrs. Bohun, with a little airy laugh; "and now I am sure of it. I thought it intensely comic; such a situation! I should like to have seen your face when the curtain was drawn, if *you* had been the young man."

"I must beg you to understand that such a situation would be *impossible* to *me*."

"I am to understand, then, that you would not 'emb——' that was what he said, wasn't it?—a woman if you loved her?"

"Not without permission, certainly," very stiffly.

"Oh, dear!" says Olga; "what a stupid man! Well, I shouldn't think you would do it *often*. And so you wouldn't have liked to be that particular young man?"

This is a poser; Lord Rossmoyne parries the thrust.

"Would *you* have liked to be that young woman,—who, as it appears to me, wasn't at all particular?" he asks, in turn.

"That is no answer to my question," says Olga, who is angry with his last remark. "Are you afraid

to say what you mean?"

"Afraid! No. To give publicity to a thing means always to vulgarize it: therefore, on consideration, I should not have cared to be that young man."

"Ah! I should have thought otherwise," says Olga, in an indescribable tone. "Well, there must be consolation for you in the thought that you never can be.—Mr. Ronayne," calling to Ulic lightly, "are you coming, or must I sit fingering my lyre in vain?"

Ulic, coming slowly up to her, stands beside her, as she seats herself again upon the marble edge of the fountain, and runs her fingers gracefully over its strings. [Pg 229]

His voice, a rich sweet tenor, breaks upon the air, blends with the beauty of the night, and sinks into it until all seems one great harmony. "'Tis I" is the song he has chosen, and a wonderful pathos that borders on despair enriches every note. He has forgotten every one but her, the pretty dainty creature who holds his heart in the hollow of her small hand. She must hear the melancholy that is desolating and thereby perfecting his voice; but, if so, she gives no sign. Once only her fingers tremble, but she corrects herself almost before her error is committed, and never after gives way to even the faintest suspicion of feeling.

Through the glade the music swells and throbs. Mary Browne, drawing instinctively nearer, seems lost in its enchantment. Monica, looking up with eyes full of tears into Desmond's face, finds his eyes fixed on her, and, with a soft, childish desire for sympathy, slips her hand unseen into his. How gladly he takes and holds it need not here be told.

As he comes to the last verse, Ronayne's voice grows lower; it doesn't tremble, yet there is in it something suggestive of the idea that he is putting a terrible constraint upon himself:

"If regret some time assail thee
For the days when first we met,
And thy weary spirit fail thee,
And thine eyes grow dim and wet,
Oh, 'tis I, love,
At thy heart, love,
Murmuring, 'How couldst thou forget?'"

The music lingers still for a moment, ebbs, and then dies away. Ronayne steps back, and all seems over. How Olga has proved so utterly unmoved by the passionate protest is exercising more minds than one, when suddenly she rises and with a swift movement bends over the fountain. Another moment, and she has dropped the guitar into the water. Some little silver ornament upon its neck flashes for an instant in the moonlight, and then it is gone.

"Oh, Olga!" says Hermia, making an involuntary step towards her.

"I shall never play on it again," says Olga, with a gesture that is almost impassioned. An instant, and it is all over,—her little burst of passion, the thought that led to it,—everything! [Pg 230]

"I hate it!" she says, with a petulant laugh. "I am glad to be rid of it. Somebody made me a present of it whom I learned to detest afterwards. No, Owen, do not try to bring it to life again: let it lie down there out of sight where I may learn to forget it."

"As you will, madame," says Owen Kelly, who has been fruitlessly fishing for the drowned guitar.

"It is curious how hateful anything, however pretty, can become to us if we dislike the giver of it," says Mary Browne, pleasantly.

"Yes," says Hermia, quickly, glancing at her with a sudden gleam in her eyes,—of gratitude, perhaps. A moment ago there had been a certain awkwardness following on Olga's capricious action; now these few careless, kindly words from this ugly stranger have dispelled it. And is she so plain, after all? The fastidious Hermia, gazing at her intently, asks herself this question. Surely before that bright and generous gleam in her eyes her freckles sink into insignificance.

"I knew you would like her," says Mr. Kelly, at this moment, speaking low in Hermia's ear.

When a woman is startled she is generally angry. Mrs. Herrick is angry now, whether because of his words, or the fact that she did not know he was so close to her, let who will decide.

"You are very, very clever," she says, glancing at him from under drooping lids, and then turning away.

"So they all tell me," returns he, modestly.

Rossmoyne, crossing the brilliant moonlit path that divides him from the group round Hermia, seats himself beside her, thereby leaving Olga and Ulic Ronayne virtually alone.

"You will regret that guitar to-morrow," says Ronayne,—"at least not the thing itself (I can replace that), but——"

"I regret nothing," says Mrs. Bohun, carelessly,—"unless I regret that you have taken an absurdly ill-tempered action so much to heart. I am ill-tempered, you know."

"I don't," says Ronayne.

"So courteous a liar must needs obtain pardon. But let us forget everything but this lovely night.

Was there ever so serene a sky? see how the stars shine and glimmer through the dark interstices of the blue-gray clouds!"

"They remind me of something,—of some words," says Ronayne, in a low voice. "They come to me now, I hardly know why, perhaps because of the night itself, and perhaps because—" he hesitates. [Pg 231]

Olga is staring dreamily at the studded vault above her.

"About the stars?" she asks, without looking at him.

"Yes:—

'A poet loved a star,
And to it whispered nightly,
Being so fair, why art thou, love, so far,
Or why so coldly shine who shin'st so brightly?'

The poet was presumptuous, it seems to me."

"Was he? I don't know. All things come to him who knows how to wait."

"Who's waiting?" says Kelly's voice from the other side of the fountain; "and for what?"

"*Toujours* Owen," says Mrs. Bohun, with a shrug of her pretty shoulders. "Well, no one even in this life is altogether without a taste of purgatory: mine (this is a delicate compliment to you, Owen, so listen to it) might have been worse. Do you know I have sometimes thought——"

"She has really!" interrupts Mr. Kelly, turning with cheerful encouragement to the others. "You wouldn't think it to look at her, would you? but I know her intimately, and can vouch for the truth of her words. Go on, my dear Olga."

But "my dear Olga" has turned aside, and declines to take any notice of his remark beyond a faint grimace.

"She's very shy," says Mr. Kelly, in an explanatory aside, "and *so* retiring. Can't bear to hear herself publicly praised, or feel herself the centre of attraction. Let us haste to change the subject." This with many becks, and nods, and wreathed smiles, meant to explain the delicacy of the feeling that prompts him to this course. "By the by, Desmond, doesn't this fairy-like spot, and the moonlight, and the pathos of the silent night, and everything, remind you forcibly of old O'Connor?"

"But I always heard——" begins Monica, in a voice of much amazement; then she stops confusedly and presently goes on again, but in a different key. "Was The O'Connor, then, æsthetic?" she says.

At this even Lord Rossmoyne, who was in the lowest depths of despair, gives way to open mirth.

"Well, no, not exactly," says Ulic Ronayne. "There was a fatal healthiness about his appearance that disagreed with that idea. But he certainly was fond of this little place; he put up the fountain himself, had it brought all the way from Florence for the purpose; and he had a trick of lying here on his face and hands for hours together, grubbing for worms,—or studying the insect world I think he used to call it." [Pg 232]

"I have always thought," says Mr. Kelly, in a tone of reflective sadness, "what an uncomfortable position that must be."

"What must be?"

"Lying on one's face and hands. What becomes of the rest of one? Does one keep one's heels in the air whilst doing it? To me it sounds awful! Yet only last week I read in the papers of a fellow who was found on a road on his face and hands, and the doctors said he must have been in that position *for hours!* Fancy—*your* nose, for instance, Rossmoyne, in the mud, and your heels in the air, *for hours*!"

Lord Rossmoyne, having vainly tried to imagine his dignified body in such a position, looks distinctly offended.

"No, *nobody* would like it," says Kelly, pathetically, answering his disgusted look exactly as if it had been put into words. "There is a shameful frivolity about it not to be countenanced for a moment. Yet good and wise men have been said to do it. Fancy the Archbishop of Canterbury, now, balancing himself on his nose and his palms! Oh! it *can't* be true!"

His voice by this time is positively piteous, and he looks earnestly around, as though longing for some one to support his disbelief.

"You are really excelling yourself to-night," says Mrs. Herrick, in a delicately disdainful tone.

"Am I? I am glad," humbly, "that *you* have had an opportunity of seeing me at my poor best."

"I wonder," says Desmond, suddenly, "if, when old O'Connor revisits the earth at the witching hour, he comes in the attitude so graphically described by Kelly? In acrobat fashion, I mean."

At this Monica breaks into laughter so merry, so full of utterly childish *abandon* and enjoyment,

that all the others perforce join in it.

"Oh! fancy a ghost standing on his head!" she says, when she can speak.

"I shouldn't fancy it at all," says Mr. Kelly, gloomily. "I *won't*. Far from it. And I should advise you, Miss Beresford, to treat with less frivolity a subject so fraught with terror,—especially at this time of night. If that 'grand old man' were to appear now," with a shuddering glance behind him, "what *would* become of us all?" [Pg 233]

"An unpleasant idea!" says Miss Browne,—"so unpleasant, indeed, that I think I should like to go for a little walk somewhere,—*any*where, away from the scene of the late Mr. O'Connor's nightly visitations."

"Come to the end of the shrubbery, then," says Desmond, "and look at the sea. It should be worth the trouble on such a night as this. Come you too, Olga."

"I should like it, but my head aches so," says Mrs. Bohun, plaintively. And, indeed, she is very pale. "It is either the moonlight which oppresses me, or—I don't know what. No! I shall go indoors, I think."

"Then I shall go with you," says Mrs. Herrick, regarding her with a certain anxiety. "But you," turning to Mary Browne, "must not miss a glimpse of the coast by moonlight. Mr. Kelly will show it to you."

She slips her arm through Olga's, and turns towards the house; Ulic Ronayne accompanies them; but Lord Rossmoyne and Owen Kelly move in the contrary direction with Miss Browne. Monica and Desmond have gone on before; and even when the others arrive at the point in the shrubbery from which a glimpse of the ocean can be distinctly seen, these last two people are not to be discovered anywhere.

Yet they are not so distant as they seem. Desmond has led Monica to a rather higher spot, where the desired scene can be more vividly beheld, and where too they can be—oh, blessed thought! —*alone*.

Through a belt of dark-green fir-trees, whose pale tips are touched with silver by the moon, can be seen the limitless ocean, lying in restless waiting in the bay below.

A sort of enforced tranquillity has fallen upon it,—a troubled calm,—belied by the hoarse, sullen roar that rises now and again from its depths, as when some larger death-wave breaks its bounds, and, rushing inland, rolls with angry violence up the beach. Soft white crests lie upon the great sea's bosom, tossing idly hither and thither, glinting and trembling beneath the moon's rays, as though reluctantly subdued by its cold influence.

Across the whole expanse of the water a bright path is flung, that has its birth in heaven, yet deigns to accept a resting-place on earth,—a transitory rest, for there in the far distance on the horizon, where the dull grays of sea and sky have mingled, it has joined them, and seems again to have laid hold of its earliest home.

The birds are asleep in their sea-bound nests; the wind has died away. There is nothing to break [Pg 234] the exquisite stillness of the night, save the monotonous beating of the waves against the rocks, and the faint rippling murmur of a streamlet in the ash-grove.

The whole scene is so rich with a beauty mystical and idealistic that Monica draws instinctively nearer to Desmond, with that desire for sympathy common to the satisfied soul, and stirs her hand in his.

Here, perhaps, it will be as well to mention, once for all, that whenever I give you to understand that Desmond is alone with Monica you are also to understand, without the telling, that he has her hand in his. What pleasure there can be for two people in standing, or sitting, or driving, as the case may be, for *hours*, palm to palm (this is how the poetical one expresses it), I leave all true lovers to declare. I only know for certain that it is a trick common to every one of them, rich and poor, high and low. I suppose there is consolation in the touch,—a sensation of nearness. I know, indeed, one young woman who assured me her principal reason for marrying Fred in a hurry (Fred was her husband) lay in the fact that she feared if she didn't she would grow left-handed, as he was always in possession of the right during their engagement.

"Ah! you like it," says Desmond, looking down upon her tenderly,—alluding to the charming view spread out before them,—the dark firs, the floating moon, the tranquil stars, the illimitable ocean, "of Almightiness itself the immense and glorious mirror."

Monica makes no verbal answer, but a sigh of intensest satisfaction escapes her, and she turns up to his a lovely face full of youth and heaven and content. Her eyes are shining, her lips parted by a glad, tremulous smile. She is altogether so unconsciously sweet that it would be beyond the power of even a Sir Percivale to resist her.

"My heart of hearts!" says Desmond, in a low, impassioned tone.

Her smile changes. Without losing beauty, it loses something ethereal and gains a touch of earth. It is more pronounced; it is, in fact, amused.

"I wonder where you learned all your terms of endearment," she says, slowly, looking at him from under her curling lashes.

"I learned them when I saw you. They had their birth then and there."

An eloquent silence follows this earnest speech. The smile dies from Monica's lips, and a sudden thoughtfulness replaces it. [Pg 235]

"You never called any one your 'heart of hearts' before, then?" she asks, somewhat wistfully.

"Never—*never*. You believe me?"

"Yes." Her lids drop. Some inward thought possesses her, and then—with a sudden accession of tenderness very rare with her—she lifts her head, and lays her soft, cool cheek fondly against his.

"My beloved!" says the young man, in a tone broken by emotion.

For a moment he does not take her in his arms; some fear lest she may change her mind and withdraw her expression of affection deters him; and when at last he does press her to his heart, it is gently and with a careful suppression of all vehemence.

Perhaps no man in all the world is so calculated to woo and win this girl as Desmond. Perhaps there is no woman so formed to gain and keep him as Monica.

Holding her now in a light but warm clasp, he knows he has his heaven in his arms; and she, though hardly yet awake to the full sweetness of "Love's young dream," understands at least the sense of perfect rest and glad content that overfills her when with him.

"What are you thinking of?" she says, presently.

"'Myn alderlevest ladye deare,'" quotes he, softly.

"And what of her?"

"'That to the deth myn herte is to her holde,'—yes, for ever and ever," says Desmond, solemnly.

"I am very glad of that," says Monica, simply; and then she raises herself from his embrace and looks straight down to the sea again.

At this moment voices, not approaching but passing near them, reach their ears.

"They are going in," says Monica, hurriedly, and with a regret that is very grateful to him. "We must go too."

"Must we?" reluctantly. "Perhaps," brightening, "they are only going to try the effect higher up."

"No. They are crossing the gravel to the hall door."

"They are devoid of souls, to be able to quit so divine a view in such hot haste. Besides, it is absurdly early to think of going indoors yet. By Jove, though!" looking at his watch, "I'm wrong: it is well after eleven. Now, who would have thought it?" [Pg 236]

"Are you sure you mean *eleven*?" with flattering incredulity.

"Only too sure. *Hasn't* the time gone by quickly? Well, I suppose I must take you in, which means candles and bed for you, and a dreary drive home for Kelly and me, and not a chance of seeing you alone again."

"This time last week you couldn't have seen me at all," says Miss Beresford.

"True. I am ungrateful. And altogether this has been such a delightful evening,—to me at least: were," doubtfully, "*you* happy?"

"Very, *very* happy," with earnest, uplifted eyes.

"Darling love!—I am afraid I must give you up to Mrs. O'Connor now," he goes on, presently, when an ecstatic thought or two has had time to come and go. "But, before going, say good-night to me here."

"Good-night, Brian."

He has never attempted to kiss her since that first time (and last, *so far*) in the orchard; and even now, though her pretty head is pressed against him, and her face is dangerously close to his, he still refrains. He has given her his word and will not break it; but perhaps he cannot altogether repress the desire to expostulate with her on her cruelty, because he gives voice to the gentle protest that rises to his lips.

"That is very cold good-night," he says. "You would say quite as much as that to Kelly or any of the others."

"I shouldn't call Mr. Kelly by his Christian name."

"No; but you would, Ronayne."

"Well, I shan't again, if you don't like it."

"That has nothing at all to do with what I mean. I only think you might show me a little more favor than the rest."

"Good-night, then, *dear* Brian. Now, I certainly shouldn't dream of calling Mr. Ronayne dear Ulic."

"Of course not. I should hope not, indeed! But still——there is something else that you might do for *me*."

Miss Beresford draws herself a little—*a very* little—away from him, and, raising her head, bestows upon him a glance that is a charming combination of mischief and coquetry. A badly-suppressed smile is curving the corner of her delicate lips.

"What a long time it takes you to *say* it!" she says, wickedly.

At this they both break into low, soft laughter,—*delicious* laughter!—that must not be overheard, and is suggestive of a little secret existing between them, that no one else may share. [Pg 237]

"That is an invitation," says Desmond, with decision. "I consider you have now restored to me that paltry promise I made to you the other day in the orchard. And here I distinctly decline ever to renew it again. No, there is no use in appealing to me: I am not to be either softened or coerced."

"Well," says Miss Beresford, "listen to me." She stands well back from him this time, and, catching up the tail of her white gown, throws it negligently over her arm. "If you *must* have—you know what!—at least you shall earn it. I will race you for it, but you must give me long odds, and then, if you catch me before I reach that laurel down there, you shall have it. Is that fair?"

Plainly, from her exultant look, she thinks she can win.

"A bargain!" says Desmond. "And, were you Atalanta herself, I feel I shall outrun you."

"*So* presumptuous! Take care. 'Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall,' and you may trip."

"I may not, too."

"Well," moving cautiously away from him, "when I come to that branch there, and say one, two, three, you—will——*Now!*"

At this, before he is half prepared, she cries, "one, two, three," with scandalous haste, and rushes away from him down the moonlit path. Swift and straight as a deer she flies, but, alas! just as the goal is all but reached, she finds the race is not to her, and that she is a prisoner in two strong arms!

"Now, who was presumptuous?" says Desmond, gazing into her lovely face. Her head, with a touch of exhaustion about it, is thrown back against his chest; through her parted lips her breath is coming with a panting haste, born of excitement and her fruitless flight. He bends over her, lower, and lower still. She feels herself altogether in his power.

"As you are strong, be merciful," she whispers, faintly. A warm flood of crimson has dyed her cheeks; her smile has faded; she struggles slightly, and then all in one moment Desmond becomes aware that tears have sprung into her eyes.

Instantly he releases her.

"Darling, forgive me," he says, anxiously. "See how your heart is beating now, and all for nothing! Of course I shall let you off your bargain. What do you take me for? Do you think I should make you unhappy for all the world could offer? Take those tears out of your eyes this instant, or I shall be seriously angry with you." [Pg 238]

Monica laughs, but in a rather nervous fashion, and lets her lover dry her eyes with his own handkerchief. Then she sits down with him upon a rustic seat close by, wishing to be quite mistress of herself again before encountering the glare of the drawing-room lamps and the still more searching light of her friends' eyes.

For a full minute not a word is spoken by either of them She is inwardly troubled; he is downcast. Presently she rises with a little restless movement.

"No, do not stir just yet," she says. "I only want to pick some of that syringa behind you, it is so sweet."

Disinclined for action of any sort, he obeys her. She slips away behind him, and he sits there waiting listlessly for her return, and thinking, somewhat sadly, how small a way he has made with her, and that she is almost as shy with him now as on that day by the river when first they met.

And then something marvellous happens that puts all his theories and regrets and fears to flight forever. Two soft arms—surely the softest in this wide glad world—steal round his neck; a gold-brown head is laid against his; a whisper reaches him.

"You were very good to me about *that*!" says somebody, tremulously; and then two warm childish lips are laid on his, and Monica is in his arms.

"I wonder what it was that frightened you?" says Desmond, in a tender whisper, drawing her down on his knees and enfolding her closely as though she were in form the child that verily at heart she still is. "Tell me."

"I don't know." She has twined her bare beautiful arms around him, and is rubbing her cheek softly up and down against his in a fresh access of shyness.

"I think you do, my dearest."

"It was only this; that when I found I couldn't get away from you, I was frightened. It was very foolish of me, but whenever I read those stories about prisoners of war, and people being confined in dungeons, and that, I always know that if I were made a captive I should *die*."

"But surely your lover's arms cannot be counted a prison, my life!"

"Yes, if they held me when I wanted to get away."

"But," reproachfully, "would you want to get away?" [Pg 239]

She hesitates, and, lifting one arm, runs her fingers coaxingly through the hair fashion has left him.

"I don't want to go away now, at all events," she temporizes sweetly. Then, a moment later, "But I *must*, nevertheless. Come," nervously, "we have been here a long time, and Madam O'Connor will be angry with me; and besides," pityingly, "you have all that long drive home still before you."

"I forgot all about the time," says Desmond, truthfully. "You are right: we must go in. Good-night again, my own."

Without waiting for permission this time, he stoops and presses his lips to hers. An instant later he knows with a thrill of rapture that his kiss has been returned.

CHAPTER XXIII.

How Mary Browne makes confession, though not by creed a Romanist; and how those who receive it are far removed from being holy fathers!—Moreover, I would have you see there is more acting off the stage than on it.

Monica's week at Aghyohillbeg is drawing to a close. The day has dawned that is to usher in at even the famous representation of "The School for Scandal," as given by Miss Fitzgerald, Captain Cobbett, etc.

The whole house is topsy-turvy, no room being sacred from the actors and actresses (save the mark!), and all the servants are at their wit's end. There have been men down from the Gayety Theatre, Dublin, who have seen about the stage, and there have been other men from the village of Rossmoyne to help in the decoration of the ballroom, and between these two different sets of men an incessant war has been raging for many days.

Now at last the house is comparatively quiet, and, as four o'clock strikes, Madam O'Connor finds herself in her own special den (the only spot that has not been disturbed), with a tea-equipage before her, and all her ladies-in-waiting round her.

These ladies, for the most part, are looking full of suppressed excitement, and are in excellent spirits and irreproachable tea-gowns. Mary Browne, who has developed into a general favorite, is making some laughing remark about Lord Rossmoyne, who, with all the other men, is absent.

"D'ye know what it is, Mary?" says Madam O'Connor, in her unchecked brogue; "you might do [Pg 240] something else with Rossmoyne besides making game of him."

"What?" says Mary Browne.

"Marry him, to be sure. A young woman like you, with more money than you know what to do with, ought to have a protector. Faith, you needn't laugh, for it's only common sense I'm talking. Tenants, and the new laws, will play the mischief with your soft heart and your estate, if you don't get some one to look after them both."

"Well?" says Mary Browne.

"Well, there's Rossmoyne, as I said before, actually going a begging for a wife. Why not take him?"

"I don't care about beggars," says Miss Browne, with a slight smile. "I am not one of those who think them picturesque."

"He isn't a beggar in any other sense than the one I have mentioned. He is a very good match. Think of it, now."

"I am thinking. Indeed, ever since my first day here I been thinking how deeply attached he is to Mrs. Bohun. Forgive me, Mrs. Bohun."

Olga laughs lightly. There is something about this plain girl that repels the idea of offence.

"What on earth put that idea into your head?" says her hostess, opening her eyes, who talks too

much both in season and out of it to be able to see all the by-play going on around her. "You aren't setting your cap at him, are you, Olga my dear?"

"Indeed, no," says Olga, still laughing. "How could so absurd a notion have got into *any*body's head?"

"How, indeed?" says Monica, gayly.

"There's Owen Kelly, then; though he isn't as well off as Rossmoyne, still he will be worth looking after by and by, when the old man drops off. He's as good hearted a fellow as ever lived, when you know what he's at,—which isn't often, to do him justice. It struck me he was very civil to you last night."

"He was," says Miss Browne, whose merriment is on the increase. "But I never met any one who wasn't civil to me: so I found him commonplace enough. Ah! if he had only been uncivil, now!"

"Well, there he is, at all events," says Madam O'Connor, sententiously.

"I hope he's comfortable," says Miss Browne, kindly, "I shan't try to make him less so, at least. Why don't you recommend Mr. Desmond or Mr. Ronayne to my notice?" with a mischievous glance at Monica and Olga Bohun. [Pg 241]

"I'm afraid they are done for," says Madam, laughing now herself. "And I only hope that handsome boy Ronayne isn't laying up sorrow for himself and living in a fool's paradise. Indeed, Olga, pretty as you are, I'll be very angry with you if I hear you have been playing fast and loose with him."

The old lady shakes her head grimly at Mrs. Bohun, who pretends to be crushed beneath her glance.

"To prevent you offering me any more suitors," says Mary Browne, steadily, but with a rising blush, "I may as well tell you that I am engaged to be married."

"Good gracious, my dear! then why didn't you say so before?" says Madam, sitting bolt upright and letting her *pince-nez* fall unheeded into her lap.

"I really don't know; but I daresay because you took it for granted I wasn't."

"Mary," says Mrs. Herrick, speaking for the first time, and for the first time, too, calling Miss Browne by her Christian name, "tell us all about it."

"Yes, *do*," says Monica, and all the women draw their chairs instinctively a degree closer to the heroine of the hour, and betray in her a warm interest. After all, what can equal a really good love-affair?

"Go on, my dear," says Madam O'Connor, who is always full of life where romance is concerned. "I hope it is a good marriage."

"The best in the world, for me," says Mary Browne, simply, "though he hasn't a penny in the world but what he earns."

As she makes this awful confession, she isn't in the least confused, but smiles brightly.

"Well, Mary, I must say I wouldn't have believed it of you," says Madam.

"I would," says Monica, hastily laying her hand on one of Mary's. "It is just like her. After all, what has money got to do with it? Is he *nice*, Mary?"

"So nice!" says Mary, who seems quite glad to talk about him, "and as ugly as myself," with a little enjoyable laugh, "so we can't call each other bad names; and his name is Peter, which of course will be considered another drawback, though I like the name myself. And we are very fond of each other—I have no doubt about that: and that is all, I think." [Pg 242]

"No, it is not all," says Madam O'Connor, severely. "May I ask when you met this young man?"

"I must take the sting out of your tone at once, Gertrude," says her cousin, pleasantly, "by telling you that we were engaged long *before* poor Richard died." (Richard was the scampish brother by whose death she inherited all.)

"Then why didn't you marry him?" says Madam.

"I was going to,—in fact, we were going to run away," says Miss Browne, with intense enjoyment at the now remote thought,—"doesn't it sound absurd?—when—when the news about Dick reached us, and then I could not bring myself to leave my father, no matter how unpleasant my home be."

"What is he?" asks Olga, with a friendly desire to know.

"A doctor. In rather good practice, too, in Dublin. He is very clever," says Miss Browne, telling her story so genially, so comfortably, that all their hearts go out to her, and Madam O'Connor grows lost in a revery about what will be the handsomest and most suitable thing to give "Peter" as a wedding-present. As she cannot get beyond a case of dissecting-knives, this revery is short.

"Perhaps if you saw some one else you might change your mind," she says, a new thought

entering her head (of course there would be a difficulty about offering dissecting-knives to a barrister or quiet country gentleman).

"I have had five proposals this year already," says Miss Browne, quietly, "but, if I could be a princess by doing so, I would not give up Peter."

"Mary Browne, come here and give me a kiss," says Madam O'Connor, with tears in her eyes. "You are the best girl I know, and I always said it. I only hope your Peter knows the extent of his luck."

Miss Browne having to leave the room some few minutes later Olga raises herself from the lounging position she has been in, with her hands clasped behind her head, and says, slowly,—

"I don't think she is so plain, after all."

"Neither do I," says Monica, eagerly, "there is something so sweet about her expression."

"I am perfectly certain that man Peter is awfully in love with her," says Mrs. Herrick solemnly, "and that without the slightest thought of her money."

"What would he think of her money for?" says Madam O'Connor, testily, who had firmly believed him a fortune-hunter only two minutes ago. "Isn't she a jewel in herself?"

"By the bye, where is our Bella all this time?" says Olga, suddenly. "It now occurs to me that of course we have been missing her all this time." [Pg 243]

"I know," says Monica, mysteriously: "she is *asleep*,—getting herself up for her Lady Teazle. I was running along the corridor, outside her room, half an hour ago, when her mother came out on tiptoe and implored me to go gently, lest I should wake her."

"Gentle dove," says Mrs. Herrick.

"I shall go and dance the *can-can* up and down that corridor this moment," says Mrs. Bohun, rising to her feet with fell determination in her eye.

"I think you had all better go to your rooms and get ready for dinner. It is painfully early to-night," says Madam, "on account of all this nonsense of Olga's. But no dressing mind, as I have told the men to come as they are. There will be plenty of that by and by."

One by one they all dwindle away at the word of command, Olga, true to her word, making such a clatter as she passes Miss Fitzgerald's door as might readily be classed with those noises popularly supposed to be able to wake the silent dead. Whether it wakes Miss Fitzgerald is unknown to all save her mother and her maid.

It makes Monica laugh, however who, sitting in her own room, is gazing with dreamy delight at the pretty gown Miss Priscilla has ordered from Mrs. Sim's for her all the way from Dublin, and which has been spread upon her bed by Olga's maid, Mrs. Bohun having insisted on sharing that delightful young person with her ever since her first night at Aghyohillbeg.

Yet Aunt Priscilla will not be here to-night to see her favorite niece dressed in her charming present.

At the last moment, not two hours agone, had come a letter from Moyne to Madame O'Connor telling how Miss Penelope had been seized by a bad neuralgic headache and was in such pain that Miss Priscilla could not find it in her heart to leave her. Kit, escorted by Terence, would arrive, however, in time for the opening act; and it would be impossible to say how disappointed the two old ladies were (which indeed was the strict truth), and they hoped all would be successful, etc., etc.

With a remorseful pang, Monica acknowledges to herself now that she had felt a secret gladness when first the news had been retailed to her by Madame O'Connor. A sense of being under an obligation to that dire neuralgic headache, is oppressing her. It is wicked of her, and most cruel, but the secret exultation cannot be denied. [Pg 244]

And see how the case stands. Poor Aunt Penelope in vile suffering, Aunt Priscilla enduring bitter disappointment,—for she had, as Monica well knew, set her heart on witnessing these theatricals,—and Monica herself actually glad and light at heart *because* of the misfortunes that have befallen them. Alas! how fiendish it all sounds!

And again, to add to the iniquity of it, for how slight a cause has she welcomed the discomfiture of her best friends! For a few dances with their enemy, a freedom for happy smiles and unrestrained glances,—*all* to be made over to the enemy. For how, with Miss Priscilla's reproachful angry eyes upon her, could she have waltzed or smiled or talked with a Desmond?

And what is to be the end of it all? A vague feeling of terror compasses her round about as she dwells on her forbidden lover. Will she have to give him up at the last?—it must be either him or Aunt Priscilla; and she owes so much to Aunt Priscilla; while to him—oh, no! she owes him nothing; of course he is only—only—and yet——

A bell sounds in the distance; she starts and glances at the tiny clock upon her chimney-piece. Yes, it is almost six, and dinner will be ready in ten minutes. And afterwards comes "The School for Scandal," and after that the tableaux, and after that again dancing,—delights threefold for

happy eighteen. Her spirits rise; her fears fall; self-contempt, remorse, regret, all sink into insignificance, and with a beating heart she coils afresh her tinted hair, and twines some foreign beads about her slender throat to make herself a shade more lovable in the eyes of the man she must not encourage, and whose very existence she has been forbidden to acknowledge.

The curtain has risen, has fallen and risen again, and now has descended for the last time. A flutter—is it rapture or relief?—trembles through the audience. "The School for Scandal" has come to a timely end!

I selfishly forbear from giving my readers a lengthened account of it, as they (unless any of the Aghyohillbeg party takes up this book) have mercy—that is, unfortunately, been debarred by fate from ever witnessing a performance such as this, that certainly, without servile flattery, may be termed unique. Words (that is, *my* words) would fail to give an adequate idea of it, and so from very modesty I hold my pen.

"It was marvellous," says Sir Mark Gore, who is paying a flying visit to Lord Rossmoyne. He says this with the profoundest solemnity, and perhaps a little melancholy. His expression is decidedly pensive. [Pg 245]

"It was indeed wonderful," says the old rector, in perfect good faith.

And wonderful it was indeed. Anything so truly remarkable, I may safely declare, was never seen in this or any other generation.

Miss Fitzgerald's Lady Teazle left nothing to be desired, save perhaps an earlier fall of the curtain, while Captain Cobbett's Joseph Surface was beyond praise. This is the strict truth. He was indeed the more happy in his representation of the character in that he gave his audience a Joseph they never had seen and never would see again on any stage, unless Captain Cobbett could kindly be induced by them to try it on some other occasion.

A few ignorant people, indeed, who plainly found such a splendid rendering of the part too much for their intellectual capacity, were seized with a laughter profane, if smothered, whenever the talented captain made his appearance, giving the rest of the company (who could see them shaking behind their fans) to understand that they at least were "not for Joe,"—that is, Captain Cobbett's Joe. But the majority very properly took no notice of these Philistines, and indeed rebuked them by maintaining an undisturbed gravity to the very end.

Sir Peter (Mr. Ryde) was most sumptuously arrayed. Nothing could exceed the magnificence of his attire. Upon an amateur stage, startling habiliments copied from a remote period are always attractive, and Mr. Ryde did all he knew in this line, giving even to the ordinary Sir Peter of our old-fashioned knowledge certain garments in vogue quite a century before he could possibly have been born. This gave a charming wildness to his character, a devil-may-care sort of an air, that exactly suited his gay and festive mood. After all, why should Sir Peter be old and heavy? why indeed?

The effect was altogether charming. That there were a few disagreeable people who said they would have liked to know what he was *at* (*such* a phrase, you know!), what he *meant*, in fact, and who declared that, as a mere simple matter of choice, they liked to hear a word now and again from an actor, goes without telling. There are troublesome people in every grade of society,—gnats that *will* sting. Silence is golden, as all the world knows; and Mr. Ryde is of it: so of course he forgot his part whenever he could, and left out all the rest! [Pg 246]

This he did with a systematic carefulness very praiseworthy in so young a man.

On the whole, therefore, you will see that the affair was an unprecedented success; and if some did go away puzzled as to whether it was a burlesque or a tragedy, nobody was to blame for their obtuseness. There certainly are scenes in this admirable comedy not provocative of laughter; but such was the bad taste of Madam O'Connor that she joined in with the Philistines mentioned farther back, and laughed straight through the piece from start to finish, until the tears ran down her cheeks.

She said afterwards she was hysterical, and Olga Bohun, who was quite as bad as she, said, "*no wonder*."

Now, however, it is all over, and the actors and actresses have disappeared, to make way for the gauze, the electric light, and the tableaux; whilst the audience is making itself happy with iced champagne and conversation, kind and otherwise (very much otherwise), about the late performance.

Olga Bohun, who is looking all that the heart of man can desire in white lace and lilies, leaving the impromptu theatre, goes in search of Hermia, who, with Owen Kelly, is to appear in the opening tableau. She makes her way to the temporary green-room, an inner hall, hidden from the outer world by means of a hanging velvet curtain, and with a staircase at the lower end that leads to some of the upper corridors. Here she finds Ulic Ronayne, Miss Browne, Monica, Desmond, and Kelly.

She has barely time to say something trivial to Miss Browne, when a pale light appearing at the

top of the staircase attracts the attention of all below. Instinctively they raise their eyes towards it, and see a tall figure clad in white descending the stairs slowly and with a strange sweet gravity. Is it an angel come to visit them, or Hermia Herrick?

It resolves itself into Hermia at last, but a beautiful Hermia,—a lovely apparition,—a woman indeed still, but "with something of an angel-light" playing in her dark eyes and round her dusky head. Always a distinguished-looking woman, if too cold for warmer praise, she is now at least looking supremely beautiful.

She is dressed as Galatea, in a clinging garment of the severest Greek style, with no jewels upon her neck, and with her exquisite arms bare to the shoulder. One naked sandalled foot can be seen as she comes leisurely to them step by step. She is holding a low Etruscan lamp in one hand upon a level with her head, and there is just the faintest suspicion of a smile about her usually irresponsive lips. [Pg 247]

No one speaks until her feet touch the hall, when a little murmur, indistinct, yet distinctly admiring, arises to greet her.

"I hope I don't look foolish," she says, with as much nervousness in her tone as can possibly be expected from her.

"Oh, Hermia, you are looking too lovely," says Olga, with a burst of genuine enthusiasm. "Is she not, Owen?"

But Mr. Kelly makes no reply.

A slight tinge of color deepens Mrs. Herrick's complexion as she turns to him.

"Poor Mr. Kelly!" she says, the amused flicker of a smile flitting over her face, which has now grown pale again. "What a situation! There! don't sully your conscience: I will let you off your lie. That is where an old friend comes in so useful, you see."

"At all events, I don't see where the lie would come in. But, as you do, of course I shall say nothing," says Kelly.

"What a Pygmalion!" says Olga, in high disgust. "And what a speech! Contemptible! I don't believe any Galatea would come to life beneath *your* touch. It would be cold as the marble itself!"

So saying, she moves away to where Monica is standing, looking quite the sweetest thing in the world, as

> "A nun demure, of lowly port."

"She has prophesied truly," says Kelly, in a low tone, turning to Mrs. Herrick. "I fear *my* Galatea will never wake to life for *me*."

A subdued bell tinkles in the distance.

"Our summons," says Mrs. Herrick, hastily, as though grateful to it; and presently she is standing upon a pedestal, pale motionless, with a rapt Pygmalion at her feet, and some Pompeian vases and jugs (confiscated from the drawing-room) in the background.

And then follow the other tableaux, and then the stage is deserted, and, music sounding in the distant ballroom, every one rises and makes a step in its direction, the hearts of some of the younger guests beating in time to it.

"Where are you going?" says Ulic Ronayne, seeing Olga about to mount the stairs once more.

"To help the others to get into civilized garb,—Hermia and Monica, I mean. Lady Teazle I consider capable of looking after herself." [Pg 248]

"H'm! you say that? I thought Miss Fitzgerald was a friend of yours."

"Then you thought like the baby you are. No! Women, like princes, find few real friends. But one in a hundred can fill that character gracefully, and Bella is *not* that one."

She turns to run up the stairs. "Well, don't be long," says Mr. Ronayne.

"I'll be ready in a minute," she says; and in twenty-five she really *is*.

Monica, who has had Kit to help her,—such an admiring, enthusiastic, flattering Kit,—is soon redressed, and has run down stairs, and nearly into Desmond's arms, who, of course, is waiting on the lowest step to receive her. She is now waltzing with him, with a heart as light as her feet.

Hermia's progress has been slow, but Miss Fitzgerald's slowest of all, the elaborate toilet and its accessories taking some time to arrange themselves; she has been annoyed, too, by Olga Bohun, during the earlier part of the evening, and consequently feels it her duty to stay in her room for a while and take it out of her maid. So long is she, indeed, that Madam O'Connor (most attentive of hostesses) feels it her duty to come upstairs to find her.

She *does* find her, giving way to diatribes of the most virulent, that have Olga Bohun for their theme. Mrs. Fitzgerald, standing by, is listening to, and assisting in, the defamatory speeches.

"Hey-day! what's the matter now?" says Madam, with a *bonhommie* completely thrown away.

Miss Fitzgerald has given the reins to her mortification, and is prepared to hunt Olga to the death.

"I think it is disgraceful the license Mrs. Bohun allows her tongue," she says, angrily, still smarting under the speech she had goaded Olga into making her an hour ago. "We have just been talking about it. She says the most wounding things, and accuses people openly of thoughts and actions of which they would scorn to be guilty. And this, too, when her own actions are so hopelessly faulty, so *sure* to be animadverted upon by all decent people."

"Yes, yes, indeed," chimes in her mother, as in duty bound. Her voice is feeble, but her manner vicious.

"The shameful way in which she employs nasty unguents of all kinds, and tries by every artificial means to heighten any beauty she may possess, is too absurdly transparent not to be known by all the world," goes on the irate Bella. "Who run may read the rouge and veloutine that cover her [Pg 249] face. And as for her lids, they are so blackened that they are positively *dirty*! Yet she pretends she has handsome eyes and lashes!"

"But, my dear, she may well lay claim to her lashes. All the Egyptian charcoal in the world could not make them long and curly. Nature is to be thanked for them."

"You can defend her if you like," says Bella, hysterically, "but to my mind her conduct is—is positively *immoral*. It is cheating the public into the belief that she has a skin when she hasn't."

"But I'm sure she has: we can all see it," says Madam O'Connor, somewhat bewildered by this sweeping remark.

"No, you can't. I defy you to see it, it is so covered with pastes and washes, and everything; she uses every art you can conceive."

"Well, supposing she does, what then?" says Madam, stoutly. She is dressed in black velvet and diamonds, and is looking twice as important and rather more good-humored than usual. "I see nothing in it. My grandmother always rouged,—put on patches as regularly as her gown. Every one did it in those days, I suppose. And quite right, too. Why shouldn't a woman make herself look as attractive as she can?"

"But the barefaced fashion in which she hunts down that wretched young Ronayne," says Mrs. Fitzgerald, "is dreadful! You can't defend that, Gertrude. I quite pity the poor lad,—drawn thus, *against his will*, into the toils of an enchantress." Mrs. Fitzgerald pauses after this ornate and strictly original speech, as if overcome by her own eloquence. "I think he should be warned," she goes on presently. "A woman like that should not be permitted to entrap a mere boy into a marriage he will regret all his life afterwards, by means of abominable coquetries and painted cheeks and eyes. It is horrible!"

"I never thought you were such a fool, Edith," says Madam O'Connor, with the greatest sweetness.

"You may think as you will, Gertrude," responds Mrs. Fitzgerald, with her faded air of juvenility sadly lost in her agitation, and shaking her head nervously, as though afflicted with a sudden touch of palsy that accords dismally with her youthful attire. "But I shall cling to my own opinions. And I utterly disapprove of Mrs. Bohun."

"For me," says Bella, vindictively, "I believe her capable of *anything*. I can't bear those women who laugh at nothing, and powder themselves every half-hour."

"You shouldn't throw stones, Bella," says honest Madam O'Connor, now nearly at the end of her [Pg 250] patience. "Your glass house will be shivered if you do. Before I took to censuring other people I'd look in a mirror, if I were you."

"I don't understand you," says Miss Fitzgerald, turning rather pale.

"That's because you won't look in a mirror. Why, there's enough powder on your right ear to whiten a Moor!"

"I never——" begins Bella, in a stricken tone; but Madam O'Connor stops her.

"Nonsense! sure I'm looking at it," she says.

This hanging evidence is not to be confuted. For a moment the fair Bella feels crushed; then she rallies nobly, and, after withering her terrified mother with a glance, sweeps from the room, followed at a respectful distance by Mrs. Fitzgerald, and quite closely by Madam, who declines to see she has given offence in any way.

As they go, Mrs. Fitzgerald keeps up a gentle twitter, in the hope of propitiating the wrathful goddess on before.

"Yes, yes, I still think young Ronayne should be warned; she is very designing, very, and he is very soft-hearted." She had believed in young Ronayne at one time, and had brought herself to look upon him as a possible son-in-law, until this terrible Mrs. Bohun had cast a glamour over him. "Yes, yes, one feels it quite one's duty to let him know how she gets herself up. His eyes should be opened to the rouge and the Egyptian eye-stuff."

While she is mumbling all this, they come into a square landing, off which two rooms open. Both are brilliantly lighted and have been turned into cosey boudoirs for the occasion.

In one of them, only half concealed by a looped curtain from those without, stand two figures, Olga Bohun and the "poor lad" who is to have his eyes opened.

They are as wide open at present as any one can desire, and are staring thoughtfully at the wily widow, who is gazing back just as earnestly into them. Both he and Olga are standing very close together beneath the chandelier, and seem to be scanning each other's features with the keenest scrutiny.

So remarkable is their demeanor, that not only Bella but her mother and Madam O'Connor refrain from further motion, to gaze at them with growing curiosity.

There is nothing sentimental about their attitude; far from it; nothing even vaguely suggestive of tenderness. There is only an unmistakable anxiety that deepens every instant. [Pg 251]

"You are sure?" says Olga, solemnly. "Certain? Don't decide in a hurry. Look again."

He looks again.

"Well, *perhaps*! A *very* little less would be sufficient," he says, with hesitation, standing back to examine her countenance more safely.

"There! see how careless you can be," says Olga, reproachfully. "Now, take it off with this, but lightly, *very* lightly."

As she speaks, she hands him her handkerchief, and, to the consternation of the three watchers outside, he takes it, and with the gentlest touch rubs her cheeks with it, first the one, and then the other.

When he had finished this performance, both he and she stared at the handkerchief meditatively.

"I doubt you have taken it *all* off," she says, plaintively. "I couldn't have put more than that on, and surely the handkerchief has no need of a complexion; whilst I——It must be all gone now, and I was whiter than this bit of cambric when I put it on. Had I better run up to my room again, or ——"

"Oh, no. You are all right; indeed you are. I'd say so at once if you weren't," says Ronayne, reassuringly. "You are looking as lovely as a dream."

"And my eyes?"

"Are beautifully done. No one on earth could find you out," says Ulic, comfortably; after which they both laugh merrily, and, quitting the impromptu boudoir, go down to the ballroom.

Mrs. Fitzgerald shows a faint disposition to sob, as they pass out of sight. Madam O'Connor is consumed with laughter.

"I don't think I should trouble myself to open 'that poor young Ronayne's' eyes, if I were you, Edith," she says, with tears of suppressed amusement in her eyes.

"He is lost!" says Mrs. Fitzgerald, with a groan; but whether she means to Bella or to decency never transpires. [Pg 252]

CHAPTER XXIV.

How Madam O'Connor tells how lovers throve in the good old days when she was young; and Brian Desmond thrives with his love in these our days, when he and she are young.

The day is near; the darkest hour that presages the dawn has come, and still every one is dancing, and talking, and laughing, and some are alluring, by the aid of smiles and waving fans, the hearts of men.

Kit Beresford, in spite of her youth and her closely-cropped head,—which, after all is adorable in many ways,—has secured, all to her own bow, a young man from the Skillereen Barracks (a meagre town to the west of Rossmoyne). He is a *very* young, young man, and is by this time quite *bon comarade* with the sedate Kit, who is especially lenient with his shortcomings, and treats him as though he were nearly as old as herself.

Monica is dancing with Mr. Ryde. To do him justice, he dances very well; but whether Monica is dissatisfied with him, or whether she is tenderly regretful of the fact that at this moment she might just as well—or rather better—be dancing with another, I cannot say; but certainly her fair face is clothed with a pensive expression that heightens its beauty in a considerable degree.

"Look at that girl of Priscilla Blake's," says Madam O'Connor, suddenly, who is standing at the head of the room, surrounded, as usual, by young men. "Look at her. Was there ever such a picture? She is like a martyr at the stake. That intense expression suits her."

Brian Desmond flushes a little, and Kelly comes to the rescue.

"A martyr?" he says. "I don't think Ryde would be obliged to you if he heard you. I should name him as the martyr, if I were you. Just see how hopelessly silly—I mean, sentimental—he looks."

"Yet I think she fancies him," says Lord Rossmoyne, who is one of those men who are altogether good, respectable, and dense.

"Nonsense!" says Madam O'Connor, indignantly. "What on earth would she fancy that jackanapes for, when there are good men and true waiting for her round every corner?" [Pg 253]

As she says this, she glances whole volumes of encouragement at Desmond, who, however, is so depressed by the fact that Monica has danced five times with Ryde, and is now dancing with him again, that he gives her no returning glance.

At this apparent coldness on his part, the blood of all the kings of Munster awakes in Madam O'Connor's breast.

"'Pon my conscience," she says, "I wouldn't give a good farthing for the lot of you, to let that girl go by! She came into Rossmoyne on the top of a hay-cart, I hear,—more luck to her, say I; for it shows the pluck in her, and the want of the sneaking fear of what he and she will say (more especially *she*) that spoils half our women. When I was her age I'd have done it myself. Rossmoyne, get out of that, till I get another look at her. I like her face. It does me good. It is so full of life *et le beaute du diable*," says Madame O'Connor, who speaks French like a native, and, be it understood, Irish too.

"*We* like to look at her, too," says Owen Kelly.

"To look, indeed! That would be thought poor comfort in my days when a pretty woman was in question, and men were men!" says Madam, with considerable spirit. "If I were a young fellow, now, 'tis in the twinkling of an eye I'd have her from under her aunt's nose and away in a coach and four."

"The sole thing that prevents our *all* eloping with Miss Beresford on the spot is—is—the difficulty of finding the coach and four and the blacksmith," says Mr. Kelly, with even a denser gloom upon his face than usual. Indeed, he now appears almost on the verge of tears.

"We never lost time speculating on ways and means in *those* days," says Madame O'Connor, throwing up her head. "Whoo! Times are changed indeed since my grandfather played old Harry with the countrymen and my grandmother's father by running away with her without a word to any one, after a big ball at my great grandmother's, and that, too, when she was guarded as if she was the princess royal herself and had every man in the South on his knees to her."

"But how did he manage it?" says Desmond, laughing.

"Faith, by making the old gentleman my great-grandfather as drunk as a fiddler, on drugged potheen," says Madam O'Connor, proudly. "The butler and he did it between them; but it was as near being murder as anything you like, because they put so much of the narcotic into the whiskey that the old man didn't come to himself for three days. That's the sort of thing for *me*," says Madam, with a little flourish of her shapely hand. [Pg 254]

"So it would be for me, too," says Kelly, mournfully. "But there's no one good enough to risk my neck for, now you have refused to have anything to do with me."

"Get along with you, you wicked boy, making fun of an old woman!" says Madam, with her gay, musical laugh. "Though," with a touch of pride, "I won't deny but I led the lads a fine dance when I was the age of that pretty child yonder."

"I wonder you aren't ashamed when you think of all the mischief you did," says Desmond, who delights in her.

"Divil a bit!" says Madam O'Connor.

"Still, I really think Ryde affects her," says Rossmoyne, who, being a dull man, has clung to the first topic promulgated.

"That's nothing, so long as she doesn't affect him," says Kelly, somewhat sharply.

"But perhaps she does; and I daresay he has money. Those English fellows generally have a reversion somewhere."

"Not a penny," says Mr. Kelly. "And, whether or no, I don't believe she would look at him."

"Not she," says Madam O'Connor.

"I don't know that. And, even allowing what you say to be true, women are not always to be won by wealth" (with a faint sigh), "and he is a very good-looking fellow."

"Is he?" says Desmond, speaking with an effort. "If flesh counts, of course he is. 'Let me have men about me that are fat; sleek-headed men, and such as sleep o' nights.' To look at Ryde, one would fancy he slept well, not only by night but by day."

"I feel as if I was going to be sorry for Ryde presently," says Mr. Kelly.

"Well, he's not the man for Monica," says Madam O'Connor, with conviction. "See how sorrow grows upon her lovely face. For shame! go and release her, some one, from her durance vile. Take heart of grace, go in boldly, and win her, against all odds."

"But if she will not be won?" says Desmond, smiling, but yet with an anxious expression.

"'That man that hath a tongue, I say, is no man if with his tongue he cannot win a woman,'" quotes Madam, in a low voice, turning to Desmond with a broad smile of the liveliest encouragement; "and as for you, Desmond, why, if I were a girl, I'd be won by yours at once."

Desmond laughs.

"I'm sorry I'm beneath your notice now." [Pg 255]

"Where's your uncle? Couldn't even my letter coax him here to-night?"

"Not even that. He has gone nowhere now for so many years that I think he is afraid to venture."

"Tut!" says Madam, impatiently; "because *he* jilted a woman once is no reason why the rest of us should jilt *him*."

It is an hour later, and all the guests have gone except indeed Kit, who has been sent upstairs tired and sleepy to share Monica's room, and Terence and Brian Desmond, who with his friend Kelly are struggling into their top-coats in the hall. The rain is descending in torrents, and they are regarding with rather rueful countenances the dog-cart awaiting them outside, in which they had driven over in the sunny morning that seems impossible, when Madam O'Connor sweeps down upon them.

"Take off those coats at once," she says. "What do you mean, Brian? I wouldn't have it on my conscience to send a rat out of my house on such a night as this, unless under cover." Her conscience is Madam's strong point. She excels in it. She ofttimes swears by it! Her promise to Miss Priscilla that Desmond shall not sleep beneath her roof during Monica's stay is forgotten or laid aside, and finally, with a smile of satisfaction, she sees the two young men carried off by Ronayne for a final smoke before turning in.

"I don't feel a bit sleepy myself," says Monica, who is looking as fresh and sweet as if only now just risen.

"Neither do I," says Olga. "Come to my room, then, and talk to me for a minute or two."

They must have been long minutes, because it is quite an hour later when a little slender figure, clad in a pretty white dressing-gown, emerges on tiptoe from Mrs. Bohun's room and steals hurriedly along the deserted corridor.

Somebody else is hurrying along this corridor, too. Seeing the childish figure in the white gown, he pauses; perhaps he thinks it is a ghost; but, if so, he is a doughty man, because he goes swiftly up to it with a glad smile upon his lips.

"My darling girl," he says, in a subdued voice, "I thought you were in the middle of your first happy dream by this."

Monica smiles, and leaves her hand in his.

"I am not such a lazy-bones as you evidently thought me," she says. "But I must hurry now, indeed. All the world is abed, I suppose; and if Kit wakes and finds me not yet come, she will be frightened." [Pg 256]

"Before you go, tell me you will meet me somewhere to-morrow. You," uncertainly, "*are* going home to-morrow, are you not?"

"Yes. But—but—*how* can I meet you? I have almost given my word to Aunt Priscilla to do nothing—clandestine—or that; and how shall I break it? You are always tempting me, and"—a soft glance stealing to him from beneath her lashes—"I should *like* to see you, of course, but so much duty I owe to her."

"Your first duty is to your husband," responds he, gravely.

She turns to him with startled eyes.

"Who is that?" she asks.

"I am," boldly; "or at least I soon shall be: it is all the same."

"How sure you are of me!" she says, with just the faintest touch of offence in her tone that quickens his pulses to fever-heat.

"*Sure!*" he says, with a melancholy raised by passion into something that is almost vehemence. "Was I ever so *unsure* of anything, I wonder? There is so little certainty connected with you in my mind that half my days are consumed by doubts that render me miserable! Yet I put my trust in you. Upon your sweetness I build my hope. I feel you would not willingly condemn any one to death, and what could I do but die if you now throw me over? But you *won't I think*."

"No, no," says Monica, impulsively, tears in her eyes and voice. Tremblingly she yields herself to him, and let him hold her to his heart in a close embrace. "How could you think that of me? Have you forgotten that I *kissed* you?"

Plainly she lays great stress upon that rash act committed the other night beneath the stars.

"*Forget it!*" says Desmond, in a tone that leaves nothing to be desired. "You are mine, then, now, —now and forever," he says, presently.

"But there is always Aunt Priscilla," says Monica, nervously. Her tone is full of affliction. "Oh, if she could *only* see me now!"

"Well, she *can't*, that's one comfort; not if she were the hundred-eyed Argus himself."

"I feel I am behaving very badly to her," says Monica, dolorously. "I am, in spite of myself, deceiving her, and to-morrow, when it is all over,——" [Pg 257]

"It shan't be over," interrupts he, with considerable vigor. "What a thing to say!"

"I shall feel *so* guilty when I get back to Moyne. Just as if I had been doing something dreadful. So I have, I think. How shall I ever be able to look her in the face again?"

"Don't you know? It is the simplest thing in the world. You have only to fix your eyes steadily on the tip of her nose, and there you are!"

This disgraceful frivolity on the part of her lover rouses quick reproach in Monica's eyes.

"I don't think it is a nice thing to laugh at one," she says, very justly incensed. "I wouldn't laugh at *you* if you were unhappy. You are not the least help to me. What *am* I to say to Aunt Priscilla?"

"'How d'ye do?' first; and then—in an *airy* tone, you know—'I am going to be married, as soon as time permits, to Brian Desmond.' No, no," penitently, catching a firmer hold of her as she makes a valiant but ineffectual effort to escape the shelter of his arms, "I didn't mean it. I am sorry, and I'll never do it again. I'll sympathize with *anything* you say, if you will promise not to desert me."

"It is you," reproachfully, "who desert me, and in my hour of need. I don't think," wistfully, "I am so *very* much to blame, am I? I didn't *ask* you to fall in love with me, and when you came here all this week to see Madam O'Connor I couldn't possibly have turned my back upon you, could I?"

"You could; but it would have brought you to the verge of suicide and murder. Because, as you turned, I should have turned too, on the chance of seeing your face, and so on, and on until vertigo set in, and death ensued, and we were both buried in one common grave. It sounds awful, doesn't it? Well, and where, then, will you come to meet me to-morrow?"

"To the river, I suppose," says Monica.

"Do you know," says Desmond, after a short pause, "I shall have to leave you soon? Not now; not until October, perhaps; but whenever I do go it will be for a month at least."

"A *month*?"

"Yes."

"A whole long month!"

"The longest month I shall have ever known," sadly.

"I certainly didn't think you would go and do a thing like *that*," says his beloved, with much severity.

"My darling, I can't help it; but we needn't talk about it just yet. Only it came into my head a moment ago, that it would be very sweet to get a letter from you while I was away: a letter," softly, "a letter from my own wife to her husband." [Pg 258]

Monica glances at him in a half-perplexed fashion, and then, as though some thought has come to her for the first time, and brought merriment in its train, her lips part, and all her lovely face breaks into silent mirth.

"What is it?" asks he, a little—just a very little—disconcerted.

"Oh, nothing; nothing, really. Only it *does* seem so funny to think I have got a husband," she says, in a choked whisper, and then her mirth gets beyond her control, and, but that Brian presses her head down on his chest, and so stifles it, they might have had Miss Fitzgerald out upon them in ten seconds.

"Hush!" whispers the embryo husband, giving her a little shake. But he is laughing, too.

"I don't feel as if I honored you a bit," says Miss Beresford; "and as to the 'obey,' I certainly shan't do that."

"As if I should ask you!" says Desmond. "But what of the *love*, sweetheart?"

"Why, as it is yours, you ought to be the one to answer *that* question," retorts she, prettily, a warm flush dyeing her face.

"But why must you leave me?" she says, presently.

"The steward has written to me once or twice. Tenants nowadays are so troublesome. Of course I could let the whole thing slide, and the property go to the dogs; but no man has a right to do that. I am talking of my own place now, you understand,—*yours*, as it will be soon, I hope."

"And where is—*our* place?"

The hesitation is adorable, but still more adorable are the smile and blush that accompany it.

"In Westmeath," says Brian, when some necessary preliminaries have been gone through. "I hope you will like it. It is far prettier than Coole in every way."

"And I think Coole lovely, what I've seen of it," says Monica, sweetly.

Here the lamp that has hitherto been lighting the corridor, thinking, doubtless (and very reasonably, too), that it has done its duty long enough, flickers, and goes out. But no darkness follows its defection. Through the far window a pale burst of light rushes, illumining in a cold and ghostly manner the spot on which they stand. "The meek-eyed morn, mother of dews," has come, and night has slipped away abashed, with covered front. [Pg 259]

Together they move to the window and look out upon the awakening world; and, even as they gaze enraptured at its fairness, the sun shoots up from yonder hill, and a great blaze of glory is abroad.

> "Over the spangled grass
> Swept the swift footsteps of the lovely light,
> Turning the tears of Night to joyous gems."

"Oh, we have delayed too long," says Monica, with a touch of awe engendered by the marvellous and mystic beauty of the hour. "Good-night, good-night!"

"Nay, rather a fair good-morrow, my sweet love," says Desmond, straining her to his heart.

CHAPTER XXV.

How The Desmond's mind is harrassed by a gentle maiden and two ungentle roughs; and how the Land League shows him a delicate attention.

"By the by," says old Mr. Desmond, looking at his nephew across the remains of the dessert, "You've been a good deal at Aghyohillbeg of late: why?"

It is next evening, and, Monica being at Moyne and inaccessible, Brian is at Coole. Mr. Kelly is walking up and down on the gravelled walk outside, smoking a cigar.

"Because Miss Beresford was there," says Brian, breaking a grape languidly from the bunch he holds in his hand.

"*What!*" says Mr. Desmond, facing him.

"Because Miss Beresford was there."

"What am I to understand by that?"

"That she was there, I suppose," says Brian, laughing, "and that I am head over ears in love with her."

"How dare you say such a thing as that to me?" says the squire, pushing back his chair and growing a lively purple. "Are you going to tell me next you mean to marry her?"

"I certainly do," says Brian; "and," with a glance of good-humored defiance at the squire, "I'm the happiest man in the world to-day because she last night told me she'd have me." [Pg 260]

"You shan't do it!" says the squire, now almost apoplectic. "You shan't do it!—do you hear? I'm standing in your poor father's place, sir, and I *forbid* you to marry one of that blood. What! marry the daughter—of—of—" something in his throat masters him here,—"the niece of Priscilla Blake, a woman with a tongue! Never!"

"My dear George, you wouldn't surely have me marry a woman *without* one?"

"I think all women would be better without them; and as for Priscilla Blake's, I tell you, sir, Xantippe was an angel to her. I insist on your giving up this idea at once."

"I certainly shan't give up Miss Beresford, if that is what you mean?"

"Then I'll disinherit you!" roars the squire. "I will, I swear it! I'll marry myself. I'll do something desperate!"

"No, you won't," says Brian, laughing again; and going over to the old man, he lays his hands upon his shoulders and pushes him gently back into his chair. "When you see her you will adore

her, and she sent her love to you this morning, and this, too," laying a photograph of Monica before the Squire, who glances at it askance, as though fearful it may be some serpent waiting to sting him for the second time; but, as he looks, his face clears.

"She is not like her mother," he says, in a low tone.

"I never met such a remorseful old beggar," thinks Desmond, with wonder; but just at this moment a servant enters with a message to the squire; so the photograph is hastily withdrawn, and the conversation—or rather discussion—comes to an end.

"Two of the tenants are asking to see you, sir," says the butler, confidentially.

"What two?"

"Donovan, from the East, and Moloney, from the Bog Road, sir."

"Very well; show Moloney into the library, and tell Donovan to wait downstairs until I send for him."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, Moloney, come to pay your rent?" says the squire, cheerfully, entering the library and gazing keenly at the man who is awaiting him there. He is a fellow of ordinary build, with a cringing, servile expression and shifting eyes. He smiles apologetically, and shuffles uneasily from one foot to the other as he feels the squire's eye upon him.

"No, sir; I can't bring it, sir. I'd be in dhread o' my life wid the boys to do it." [Pg 261]

"I don't know who the gentlemen in question you designate as 'the boys' may be," says the squire, calmly. "I can only tell you that I expect my rent from you, and intend to get it."

"That's what I come to spake about, yer honor. But the Land League is a powerful body, an' secret too; look at the murdher o' Mr. Herbert and that English Lord in Faynix Park, and the rewards an' all, an' what's come of it?"

"A good deal of hanging will come of it, I trust," says The Desmond, hopefully. "In the mean time, I am not to be detered from doing my duty by idle threats. I thought you, Moloney, were too respectable a man to mix yourself up with this movement."

"I'm only a poor man, sir, but my life is as good to me as another's; an' if I pay they'll murdher me, an' what'll become o' me then? An' besides, I haven't it, sir; 'tis thrue for me. How can I be up to time, wid the crop so bad this year."

"It is as good a year as I have ever known for crops," says Desmond. "I will have no excuses of that sort: either you pay me or turn out; I am quite determined on this point."

"Ye wouldn't give me an abatement, yer honor?"

"No, not a penny. Not to men such as you, who come here to demand it as a right and are very well to do. There are others whose cases I shall consider; but that is my own affair, and I will not be dictated to. On Monday you will bring me your rent, or give up the land."

"I think ye're a bit unwise to press matthers just now," says the man, slowly, and with a sinister glance from under his knitted brows. "I don't want to say anything uncivil to ye, sir, but—I'd take care if I were you. The counthry is mad hot, an', now they think they've got Gladstone wid 'em, they wouldn't stick at a trifle."

"The trifle being my assassination," says old Desmond, with a laugh. He draws himself up, and, in spite of his ugly face, looks almost princely. "Tut, man! don't think, after all these years among you, I am to be intimidated: you should know me better."

The man cowers before the haughty glance the old squire casts upon him, and retreats behind his cringing manner once again.

"I thought ye might take into considheration the fact that I'm of yer own religion," he says cunningly.

"That you are a Protestant does not weigh with me one inch. One tenant is as worthy of consideration as another; and, to tell the truth, I find your Roman Catholic brethren far easier to [Pg 262] deal with, I will have no whining about differences of that sort. All I require is what is justly due to me; and that I shall expect on Monday. You understand?"

"Ye're a hard man," says Moloney, with an evil glance.

"I expected you to say nothing else. All the kindness of years is forgotten because of one denial. How often have I let you off your rent entirely during these twenty years we have been landlord and tenant together! There, go! I have other business to attend to. But on Monday, remember."

"Ye won't see me that day or any other," says the fellow, insolently, sticking his hat on his head with a defiant gesture.

"Very good. That is your own lookout. You know the consequences of your non-arrival. Denis," to the footman, "show this man out, and send Donovan here."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, Donovan, what is it?" says Desmond, a few minutes later, as the library door again opens to admit the other malcontent. He is a stout, thick-set man, with fierce eyes and a lowering brow, and altogether a very "villanous countenance." He has mercifully escaped, however, the hypocritical meanness of the face that has just gone. There is a boldness, a reckless, determined daring about this man, that stamps him as a leading spirit among men of evil minds.

"I've come here to spake to ye to-night, Misther Desmond, as man to man," he says, with a somewhat swaggering air.

"With all my heart," says The Desmond; "but be as fair to me as I have ever been to you and yours, and we shall come to amicable terms soon enough."

"As to fairness," says the man, "I don't see how any landlord in Ireland can spake of it without a blush."

Strange to say, the aggressive insolence of this man fails to rouse in Mr. Desmond's breast the anger that the servile humility of the last comer had brought into active being.

"Look here, Donovan," he says, "I've been a good landlord to you; and I expect you, therefore, to be a good tenant to me. You hint that I, along with the rest, have dealt unfairly with my people; but can you prove it? You can lay to my charge no tales of harshness. In famine times, and when potatoes failed, in times of misfortune and sickness, I have always stood your friend, and the friend of every man, woman, and child on my estate; yet now what harvest do I reap, save grossest ingratitude? yet what more can I hope for in this most unhappy time, when blood is unrighteously poured upon the land, and the laws of God and my queen are set at naught?" [Pg 263]

There is a touch of passionate old-world grandeur in the squire's face and manner that works a sense of admiration in Donovan's breast. But it quickly gives way to the carefully-cultivated sense of injury that has been growing within him for months.

"Ye can talk, there's no doubt," he mutters; "but words go for little; and the fact is, I've got no rent to pay ye."

His tone conveys the idea that he *has* the rent, but deliberately refuses to pay it.

"You will bring it on Monday, or I shall evict you," says the Squire quietly. "You hear?"

"I hear," says the man, with an evil frown. "But ye can't have it all yer own way now, Misther Desmond. There's others have a voice in the matther."

"I don't care for innuendoes of that sort, or for any insolence whatever; I only mean you to fully know that I must live as well as you, and that therefore I must have my rents."

"I know well enough what ye mane," says the man, with increasing insolence. "But I'd have you know this, that maybe before long ye'll whistle another tune. There's them I could mention, as has their eye upon ye, an' will keep it there till justice is done."

"Meaning, until I give up Coole itself to the mob," says the squire, with a sneer.

"Ay, *even* that, it may be," says the man, with unswerving defiance.

"You dare to threaten me?" says The Desmond, throwing up his head haughtily, and drawing some steps nearer to his tenant.

"I only say what is likely to prove truth before long," returns the man, sturdily, and giving in an inch. "That we'll have no more tyranny, but will have a blow for our rights, if we swing for it."

"You can shoot me when and where you like," says Desmond, with a shrug. "But I am afraid it will do you no good."

"It will be a lesson to the others," says the man between his teeth.

"To *you* others,—yes; because it will make my heir somewhat harder on you than I am. The Desmonds never forgive. However, that is more your lookout than mine. A last word, though: if you were not the consummate idiots this last revolt has proved you, you would see how you are being led astray by a few demagogues (a butcher's boy, perchance, or an attorney's clerk pushed by you from absolute obscurity into a Parliament ashamed to acknowledge them), who will save [Pg 264] their skins at the expense of yours at the last, and who meanwhile thrive royally upon the moneys you subscribe!"

"That's a damned lie for ye," says Donovan losing his temper altogether.

At this outbreak The Desmond rises slowly, and, ringing the bell, calmly pares his nails until a servant comes in answer to his summons.

"Ask Mr. Brian to come here for a moment," he says, calmly, not lifting his eyes from the fourth finger of his left hand, upon the nail of which he is just now employed.

Brian lounging in, in a few moments, his uncle pockets his penknife, and, waving his hand lightly in Donovan's direction, says, gravely,—

"This man, Donovan, will be one of your tenants, some time, Brian,"—plainly, he has forgotten all

about his determination to marry again, and so dispossess his nephew of Coole and other things, or else one glance at Monica's portrait (in which she had appeared so *unlike* her mother) has done wonders: "it is therefore as well you should learn his sentiments towards his landlord, especially as he is apparently the mouthpiece of all the others. Oblige me, Donovan, by repeating to Mr. Brian all you have just said to me."

But the man is far too clever a lawyer to commit himself before a third party.

"I have nothing to say," he answers, sullenly, "but this, that times are hard an' money scarce, an'——"

"We will pass over all that. It is an old story now; and, as you decline to speak, I will just tell you again, I intend to have my rent on Monday, and if I don't I shall evict you."

"Ay! as you evicted Ned Barry last month, throwing him on the open road, with his wife beside him, an' a baby not a month old."

"Nonsense! the child was six months old, and Barry was better able to pay than any tenant I have, and more willing, too, until this precious Land League tampered with him. He has proved he had the money since, by paying a sum to Sullivan yonder for board and lodging that would have kept him in his own house for twice the length of time he has been there. I know all about it: I have made it my business to find it out."

"Ye're mighty well informed entirely," says Donovan with a wicked sneer.

"If you can't keep a civil tongue in your head, you had better leave this room," says Brian, [Pg 265] flushing darkly and making a step towards him.

"Who are *you*, to order me about?" says the man, with a fierce glance. "Ye're not my master yet, I can tell ye, an' maybe *ye never will be*."

"Leave the room," says Brian, white with rage, pointing imperiously to the door.

"Curse ye!" says the man; yet, warned by the expression on Brian's face, he moves in a rebellious manner to the door, and so disappears.

"They are the most unpleasant peasantry in the world," says the squire, some hours later,—the words coming like a dreary sigh through the clouds of tobacco-smoke that curl upwards from his favorite meershaum.

He and Brian and Owen Kelly are all sitting in the library, the scene of the late encounter, and have been meditating silently upon many matters, in which perhaps Love has the largest share, considering his votaries are two to one, when the squire most unexpectedly gives way to the speech aforesaid.

"The women are very handsome," says Mr. Kelly.

"Handsome is as handsome does," says the squire with a grunt.

"Don't the Protestant tenants pay?" asks Owen, presently, who is in a blissful state of ignorance about the tenant-right affair generally.

"They're just the worst of the lot," says old Desmond, testily: "they come whimpering here, saying they would gladly pay, but that they are afraid of the others, and won't I let them off? and so forth."

"I wonder," says Brian, dreamily,—it is very late, and he is in a gently, kindly, somnolent state, born of the arm-chair and his pipe,—"I wonder if one was to give in to them entirely, would they be generous enough to——"

"If you can't talk sense," interrupted his uncle, angrily, "don't talk at all. I am surprised at you, Brian! Have you seen or noticed nothing all these years, have you been blind to the state of the country, that you give sound to such utter trash? Pshaw! the weakly sentiment of the day sickens me."

"But suppose one was to humor them. I am not alluding to you, my dear George," to his uncle,—"I know you have humored them considerably,—but I mean landlords generally: would not peace be restored? That fellow Donovan to-day was beyond doubt impertinent to the last degree; but of [Pg 266] course he meant nothing: they would, I should think, hesitate, in their own interest, before falling foul of you."

"You don't understand them as I do," says the squire, slowly.

"I still think peace, and not war, should be instilled into them," says Brian. "Too many landlords are harsh and unyielding in an aggravated degree, when a little persuasion and a few soft words would smooth matters. They, of course, are visited with the revenge of the League, whilst such as you escape."

These complacent words are still upon his lips, he has had time to lean back in his chair with the languid air of one who has given to the world views not admitting of contradiction, when a sharp

whirring noise is heard, followed by a crash of broken glass and the dull thud of a bullet that has found its home in the wall right opposite the squire. Right opposite Brian, too, for they had been side by side with Owen Kelly, fortunately not *quite*, but very nearly, opposite.

For a moment nobody quite knows what has happened, so sudden is the thing; and then they spring to their feet, full of the knowledge that a bullet has been fired into their midst.

It had passed right over The Desmond's shoulder, close to his ear, *between* him and Brian, and had grazed the sleeve of Kelly's coat, who, as I have said, was sitting *almost* opposite.

With an oath Brian rushes to the window, tears open the shutters, throws up the sash, and jumps down into the garden, followed by Kelly and the Squire.

It is a dark night, murky and heavy with dense rain-laden clouds, and so black as to render it impossible to see one's hand before one. Search after a while is found to be impossible and the cowardly would-be assassin so far is safe from arrest. Dispirited and indignant, they return to the room they left, to discuss the outrage.

"Now, who will preach to me of peace again?" says the squire turning to Brian a face pale with excitement.

"Not I," says Brian, with a face pale as his own, and eyes that burn fiercely with the wrath of an incomplete revenge.

"I retract every foolish word I said a few minutes since. Henceforth it shall be war to the knife between me and my tenantry, as well as yours."

"War to the bullet would be more in harmony," says Mr. Kelly, seriously. He has extracted the bullet in question from the wall with the aid of a stout penknife, and is now regarding it [Pg 267] mournfully as it lies in the palm of his hand. "Don't you think they take a very unfair advantage of you?" he says, mildly. "They come here and shoot at you; why don't you go to their cabins and shoot at them?"

"Let them keep their advantage," says Brian, disdainfully. "We shall conquer at last, no matter how many lives it costs us."

"At all events, they won't get a glimpse of the white feather *here*," says the squire, who is looking quite ten years younger. There is nothing like a row for an Irishman, after all.

"Still, I think I wouldn't sit with my back to that window any more, if I were you," suggests Mr. Kelly, meekly, seeing the squire has sunk into his usual seat again.

"It will be a bad winter, I fear," says the squire shaking his head.

"A lively one, no doubt. I quite envy you. I should rather like to stay here and see you through it. My dear sir, if you and that enormous chair are inseparables, let me entreat you to move it at least a *little* to the left."

> "'I love it, I love it, and who shall dare
> To chide me from loving this old arm-chair?'"

quotes the squire, with quite a jolly laugh. "Eh? well, Kelly, this is hardly a pleasant time to ask a fellow on a visit, and I expect you'll be glad to get back to more civilized parts; but we'll write and tell you how we're getting on, my lad, from time to time. That is, as long as we are alive to do it."

"You shall hear of our mishaps," says Brian laughing too.

"It is rather inhospitable of you not to take the hint I have thrown out," says Kelly, with a faint yawn. "*Won't* you ask me to spend this winter with you?"

"My *dear* fellow, you really mean it?" says Brian, looking at him.

"Oh, yes, I really mean it. Excitement of the sort I have been treated to to-night seldom comes in my way. I should like to see this affair through with you."

"You're a brave lad!" says the squire; "but there is always a risk in this kind of thing, and it is quite probable you will have the roof burned over your head one of these dark nights to come. You will have to chance that if you stay, as I intend to persevere with these blackguardly tenants and fight it out with them to the last." [Pg 268]

"To the very last," says Brian, regarding his friend meaningly.

"That's why I'm staying," returns his friend, languidly. Which is half, but not the whole, truth, as the fact that Mrs. Bohun and her cousin Hermia are going to spend the winter at Aghyohillbeg has a good deal to do with it too.

CHAPTER XXVI.

How rations fall short in the enemy's camp; and how Monica, armed with a strange ammunition, marches into the hostile land.

"Did ye hear, miss? Oh, faix, there's terrible news, ma'am!" says old Timothy, trotting into the breakfast-room at Moyne the following morning, his face pale with excitement.

"You alarm me, Ryan! what is it?" says Miss Priscilla, laying down her fork.

"Oh, it's beyant everything, ma'am! Oh, the blackguards o' the world! It was last night, miss, it happened. The ould squire, there below, was sittin' in his library, as paceable as ye plaze, ma'am, when they fired a bullet at him, an' shot him an' wounded Misther Brian——No, be the powers, I b'lave I'm wrong; they kilt Misther Brian an' wounded the Squire; an' there's the greatest commotion ye iver see down below, miss."

For one awful moment Monica thinks she is going to faint. A mist rises between her and Timothy's face; his voice sounds far away, in the next county as it were, and then ceases altogether. Then a sharp sting of pain rushing through her veins rouses her, and sends the blood back with a tumultuous haste to cheek and neck and brow. The pain is short but effective, and is, indeed, nothing more than a pinch of a pronounced type, administered by the watchful Kit, with a promptitude very creditable to her.

"He is exaggerating," says the astute Kit, in a subdued whisper apparently addressed to her plate. "Don't believe him; take courage; and, at all events, remember their eyes are upon you!" Her tone is great with mystery and kindly encouragement. More revived by it than even by the pinch, Monica takes heart of grace, and listens with maddening impatience for what is yet to come. Glancing at Miss Priscilla, she can see that her aunt is as pale as death, and that her hands [Pg 269] are trembling excessively. Miss Penelope is looking with anxiety at her, whilst trying to elicit the truth from Ryan.

"Collect yourself, Ryan," she says, severely. "Who was killed?"

"No one outright, I'm tould, miss,—but——"

"Then who is wounded?"

"The bullet went right through them, miss."

"Through *both*! But that is impossible. I must beg you again to collect yourself, Timothy; all this is most important, and naturally Miss Blake—that is, *we*—are much upset about it. Through whom did the bullet go?"

"The ould squire an' his nephew, miss."

"Through their bodies?" cries Miss Penelope, throwing up hope and both her hands at the same time.

"No, ma'am, jist between them, as it might be between you an' Miss Priscilla now." He illustrates the real truth as he says this.

"Bless me, man! sure they weren't touched at all so," says Miss Penelope.

"No more they were, miss. Sorra a bit, praise be——"

"Then why did you say they were killed?" says Terence, indignantly, who has been stricken dumb by the appalling fate of his dear Desmond.

"An' sure how much nearer could they be to it? What saved thim, but maybe the hitch of a chair? Oh! wirrasthrue this day!" says old Ryan, beginning to cry.

"Timothy sit down directly. Terence get him a glass of whiskey," says Miss Penelope. "Now, don't excite yourself, Timothy; you know it is very bad for you at your age. Take time, now. Collect yourself!"

"Have the assassins been discovered?" asks Miss Priscilla, in a trembling tone.

"No, miss. But I'm tould the polis is very eager afther 'em."

"Was nobody hurt, Timothy?"

"No one, ma'am."

Here Monica, feeling the relief greater than she can support, gives way to a dry but perfectly audible sob.

"Don't be afeard, miss, dear," says old Ryan, with heartfelt but most ill-judged sympathy: "the *young gentleman* is all right. Not a single scratch on him, they say; so you needn't be cryin' about him, honey."

"Miss Monica is in no wise anxious about Mr. Brian Desmond," says Miss Priscilla, recovering from her nervousness with as much haste as though she had been subjected to an electric shock. [Pg 270] "She is only distressed—as I am—by these lawless proceedings."

"An' we hear they're boycotted, too, ma'am," says old Ryan, still oppressed with news that must be worked off. "John Bileman, the Protestant baker in the village they always dealt wid, has been forbidden to give 'em another loaf, and the butcher is threatened if he gives 'em a joint, an' the Clonbree butcher has been telegraphed to also, miss, an' there's the world an' all to pay!"

"Do you mean that they are going to treat him as they did Mr. Bence Jones?" says Miss Penelope, indignantly.

"Troth, I believe so, ma'am."

"Will Mr. Brian have to milk the cows?" says Terence, at which astounding thought both he and Kit break into merry laughter until checked by Monica's reproachful gaze. How *can* they laugh when Brian may be *starving*?

"Faix, it's awful, miss; an' the ould man to be wantin' for things now,—he that allus kep' a fine table, to spake truth of him, and liked his bit an' sup amazin', small blame to him. I'm thinkin' 'tis hungry enough he'll be now for the future, the crathur! Oh, wirra! wirra!" says Timothy, sympathetically, as he shambles towards the door.

When he is gone, Miss Priscilla turns upon Terence and Kit.

"I must say, I think your mirth at such a time most unseemly," she says. "I am glad Monica takes no part in it. Terence, did you go up to the widow Driscoll with my message this morning?"

"Yes, aunt."

She had evidently expected him to say "no," because her tone is considerably mollified when she speaks again.

"Was she pleased, do you think?"

"Yes, aunt."

"She said so, perhaps?"

"No, aunt."

"Then what *did* she say? I wish, my dear boy, you would try to be a little less reticent."

"She said, 'Her duty to you, aunt, and her very coarse veins were worse than ever.'"

"Varicose, Terence—varicose!"

"She said very coarse, aunt, and I suppose she knows more about them than any one else." [Pg 271]

He has a very sweet face, and it is more than usually so as he says all this.

"And her son, how is he, poor soul?" asks Miss Penelope, as Miss Priscilla withdraws, beaten, into the background.

"His duty to you, too, and 'he is better, but has been much afflicted with the egg-cups for the last two days.'"

"*The what!*" says Miss Penelope, shifting her *pinceneze* uneasily, and looking perplexed in the extreme.

"Oh, Terry! how can you be so silly?" says Kit, with another merry laugh.

"How am I silly?" with an impassible countenance. "Young Driscoll is silly, of course, and evidently looks upon part of the breakfast-ware as enemies of some sort. But that is not *my* fault."

"Hiccoughs he must have meant, my dear," says Miss Priscilla, hastily. "Dear—dear—dear! what a terrible shock he—they—must have got last night at Coole!"

When day is deepening into eventide, Monica, finding Kit alone, kneels down beside her, and lays her cheek to hers.

All day long she has been brooding miserably over her lover's danger, and dwelling with foolish persistency upon future dangers born of her terrified imagination.

She had been down to their trysting-place at the river, hardly hoping to find him there, yet had been terribly disappointed when she had *not* found him, Brian at that very moment being busy with police and magistrates and law generally.

"What is it, ducky?" says Kit, very tenderly, laying down her book and pressing her pretty sister close to her.

"Kit," says Monica, with tearful eyes, "*do* you think it is all true that Timothy said this morning about their—their *starving* at Coole? Oh Kit, I can't bear to think he is *hungry*!"

"It is dreadful! I don't know what to think," says Kit. "If nobody will sell them anything, I suppose they have nothing to eat."

At this corroboration of her worst fears, Monica dissolves into tears.

"I couldn't eat my chicken at lunch, thinking of him," she sobs. "It stuck in my throat."

"Poor sweet love!—it *was* dry," says Kit, expanding into the wildest affection. She kisses Monica

fondly, and (though you would inevitably have suffered death at her hands had you even hinted at it) is beginning to enjoy herself intensely . Once again this luckless couple look to *her* for help. [Pg 272] She is to be the one to raise them from their "Slough of Despond,"—difficult but congenial task! "Then you have been existing on lemon tart and one glass of sherry since breakfast time?" she says, with the deepest commiseration. "Poor darling! I saw it; I noticed you ate nothing *except* the tart. You liked that, didn't you?"

"I didn't," says Monica. "I *hated* it. And I was a cruel, cold-hearted wretch to *touch* it. But it was sweet—and—I—it—somehow disappeared."

"It did," says Kit, tenderly.

"Oh, Kit, help me!"

"You mean you want to take him something wherewith to stave off the pangs of hunger," says the younger Miss Beresford, with that grandeur of style she usually affects in moments of strong excitement, and with the vigor that distinguishes her. "I see; certainly." She grows abstracted. "There's a leg of mutton hanging in the larder, with some fowl, and a quarter of lamb," she says, presently. "But I suppose if we took *them*, Aunt Priscilla would put us in the hue and cry."

"It mustn't be thought of. No, no; think of something else."

"Bread, then. Ordinary, of course, very ordinary, but yet the staff of life."

"I *couldn't* take him anything so nasty as mere bread," says Monica, in despair. "But, if cook would make us a cake——"

"A big one, with currants! The very *thing*!" says Kit, with decision. "And she will never betray us. Reilly, in little affairs of this kind,—though sadly wanting where soups are concerned,—is quite all she ought to be."

"When will it be baked? He *must* get it to-night," says Monica, who is evidently afraid her lover, if not succored, will die of want before morning.

"Leave all to me," says Kit, flitting away from her through the gathering gloom to seek the lower region and its presiding goddess.

Leaving all to Kit means that when dinner is over, about half-past eight, the two Misses Beresford may be seen crossing the boundary that divides Moyne from Coole with anxious haste and a hot cake.

This last is hugged to Monica's breast, and is plainly causing her the greatest inconvenience. It is a *huge* cake, and has to be carried parcelwise, being much too big for the smaller basket they [Pg 273] had, and much too small for the bigger. But Monica—though it is heavy beyond description (though, I hope, light in every other way for the sake of Reilly's reputation) and still appallingly *hot*—trudges along with it bravely, resisting all Kit's entreaties to be allowed to share the burden.

"Who are those coming towards us through the elms down there?" says Mr. Kelly, suddenly.

He and Brian Desmond are sitting upon a garden seat outside the dining-room windows, enjoying an after dinner cigar.

"There?" says Brian, following his glance. "Eh?—What?" There is a second pause, then, rising to his feet with much precipitancy, he flings his cigar to the winds, and, before Owen has time to recover from his astonishment at these proceedings, is well out of sight. A turn in the lawn has hidden Brian and the advancing figures from his view.

"Monica!" says Desmond, as he reaches her; "what has brought you here at this hour? My darling! how pale and tired you look!"

"She has been much perturbed," says Kit, solemnly. She has been meditating this remark for some time.

"We heard all about last night," murmurs Monica, with a sweet troubled face, out of which her eyes look into his, full of a tender pathos, like violets drowned. "And you were not at the river this afternoon, and so I came here to find you, and——" Her voice trembles ominously.

"I was obliged to be with the sergeant and the other men all day," says Desmond, hurriedly. "Do not blame me, my *love*. When I went to the river towards evening it was then of course too late. I meant to go up to Moyne when the moon was up——But what have you got there, dearest?" pointing to the enormous thing she is still holding tightly to her breast.

She colors and hesitates; seeing which, the faithful Kit comes once more to the rescue.

"It's a cake!" she says, with a nod of her sleek head. "We knew of you being boycotted, and we thought you would be hungry, so we brought it to you. But," eyeing him with disfavor, and as one might who feels herself considerably *done*, "you are evidently not. You are looking just the same as ever, and not a bit *pinched* or *drawn*, as people are when they are found starved in garrets."

"Yes, I was afraid you would get nothing to eat," says Monica, timidly. There is in her lovely eyes

a certain wistfulness suggestive of the idea that she hopes her cake has not been made in vain. [Pg 274]

Mr. Desmond, seeing it, grasps the situation.

"I *am* hungry," he says; and I hope, and think, the gentle lie will be forgiven him. "We have had nothing in the house all day but bread, and that is not appetizing."

"*There!*" says Monica, turning to Kit with sparkling eyes, "I *told* you he wouldn't like bread."

"But," goes on Desmond, with a view to making her future happier, "to-morrow all will be right again. We know of a few faithful people who will smuggle us in all we may require. So do not be unhappy about me again. Sweetheart, what a terrible weight you have been carrying!"

"It *is* a fine one, isn't it?" says Kit. "But give it to me now, Monica," taking the cake from her, "while you talk to Brian: when you are ready to come home, I can give it to him."

So saying, this inestimable child withdraws herself and Monica's offering to a safe distance, and pretends for the remainder of the interview an absorbing interest in some wild flowers growing near.

"I have only a moment to stay," says Monica, nervously. "I shall be missed; and now I have *seen* you safe and unhurt," with a very sweet smile, "I shall be able to sleep. But all day long I have been haunted by timid thoughts," she sighs.

"I doubt it was a sorry day for you, that first one when we met," says Desmond, remorsefully. "I have brought you only trouble. By and by you will regret you ever knew me."

"Do not say that. I have no regrets,—none! Even if—if—we cannot be—" reddening vividly, "more to each other than we are now, I can still be happy in the thought that you love me and are near me, and that I can sometimes, in spite of *every one*—" with a recklessness that sits very funnily upon her—"see you."

"But we shall be more to each other, Monica," says the young man, earnestly. "We shall be all in all to each other. No human being has the right to separate two hearts for the sake of a mere whim."

"There are so many things. But now, indeed, I must go. Good-night."

"Good-night, my own. But I shall go with you as far as the boundary fence."

"No, no, indeed!"

"But indeed I shall!" and of course he has his own way, and parts from her and Kit there, and [Pg 275] answers her parting injunction "to take care of himself for *her* sake"—this last very low—with a lingering lover's kiss, and watches the two slight figures with a beating heart, until they are out of sight.

Then, picking up the cake, he goes back again to where Mr. Kelly is still awaiting him.

CHAPTER XXVII.

How Monica's gift receives due attention, and is thoroughly appreciated; and how a torpedo falls into a morning-room at Moyne.

"Well," says Kelly, "was it Miss Beresford?"

"Yes, and her sister. I saw them back to the boundary fence, but they would let me go no farther. It was rather——"

"What on earth have you got there?" says his friend, sticking his eyeglass in his eye, and staring with bent head and some suspicion at the mysterious thing in Desmond's arms.

"This! oh, ah! yes." Then, desperately, "Kelly, if you laugh at it I'll never forgive you."

Mr. Kelly drops the eyeglass and looks afflicted.

"My dear fellow, do I *ever* laugh?" he says.

"Well, it—it's *a cake*!" says Brian, who (in spite of the warning just delivered to his friend) is now indulging in wild mirth and can scarcely speak for laughter. "She—Monica—heard we were boycotted, and, thinking we were starving, the dear angel! she brought this up herself to us."

"Desmond, I'm ashamed of you," says Kelly, who has not moved a muscle of his face. "Such an action as hers calls for reverence,—not this unseemly gayety."

"It's not the action I'm laughing at," says Brian, still convulsed; "it's the *cake*. The action is divine—the cake hot!" Here he sinks upon the garden-seat again, as if exhausted, and dries his eyes.

"I see nothing to laugh at in that, either. It seems an excellent cake, and, as you say, *hot*," says Mr. Kelly, prodding it meditatively with his finger,—"a merit in a cake of this sort, I should say;

and nicely browned, too, as far as I can see. I can see, too, that it is quite the biggest cake I ever made acquaintance with. *Another* merit! Did she carry it herself all the way?"

"All the way, poor darling! and just because she was afraid we should be hungry." Mr. Desmond's laughter has subsided, and he now looks rather absent. "It quite weighed her down," he says, in a low tone. [Pg 276]

"Poor child! I said yesterday, you remember, that I thought her one of the nicest girls I have met. The cake has finished me. I think her now *the* nicest." He says this with a cheerful conscience. Between girls and widows a deep margin lies.

"But what are we to do with it?" says Brian, regarding the cake, which is now lying upon the garden seat, with a puzzled expression.

"Say a repentant tenant—no, that sounds like tautology—say a remorseful tenant brought it to you."

"That wouldn't do at all."

"Then say you found it in the garden."

"Nonsense, Kelly! they don't *grow*. Think of something more plausible."

"Give me time, then." As he speaks he absently breaks off a piece of the cake and puts it in his mouth. Desmond, in quite as abstracted a manner, does likewise. Silence ensues.

"I think the idea was so sweet," says Desmond, presently, his thoughts being (as they should be) with Monica.

"As honey and the honeycomb!" says Mr. Kelly, breaking off another piece, with a far-off, rapt expression.

"She said she couldn't be happy, thinking we were hungry. Her dear heart is too big for her body."

"Her cake is certainly," says Mr. Kelly: here he takes a third enormous pinch out of it, and Desmond follows his example.

"I didn't tell her we had had dinner," says Brian. "It would have taken the gloss off it."

"Off this?" pointing to the smoking structure between them. "I don't believe it."

"No, the deed."

Another silence.

"It's a capital cake," says Mr. Kelly, pensively, who has been eating steadily since the first bite. "After all, give me a good sweet, home-made cake like this! Those bought ones aren't to be named in the same day with it. There is something so light and wholesome about a cake like this."

"Wholesome!" doubtfully: "I don't know about that. What *I* like about it is that it is hot and spongy. But, look here, you haven't yet said what we are to do with it." [Pg 277]

"I think we are doing uncommonly well with it," says Kelly, breaking off another piece.

"But what are we to do with the remains, provided we leave any, which at present seems doubtful?"

"Keep, them, of course. You ought to, considering she gave it you whole as a present."

"You are right: no one shall touch a crumb of it save you and me," says Mr. Desmond, as though inspired. "Let us smuggle it up to my room and keep it there till it is finished."

"I feel as if I was at school again with a plum-cake and a chum," says Mr. Kelly.

"Well, come and follow me up with it now, and distract my uncle's attention if we meet him."

"To *my* room or yours?" insinuatingly.

"To *mine*," firmly.

"I'd take the greatest care of it, if you like to trust it to me," with what Kit would certainly have termed "an obliging air."

"I don't doubt you," sardonically. "But certainly *not*. It was given to me, and I feel myself bound to look after it."

"Pity we can't have it petrified," says Mr. Kelly, thoughtfully. "Then you might hang it round your neck as a trophy." At this they both laugh, and finally the trophy, after much difficulty is satisfactorily stored away.

It is a fortnight later, and desolation has overtaken Monica. Brian has passed out of her active life, has ceased from that seeing and hearing and that satisfaction of touch that belong to a daily

intercourse with one beloved. Only in thought can she find him now. He has gone upon that threatened journey to those detested estates of his in Westmeath.

Yesterday he went; and to-day as she wakes it seems to her that a cold and cruel mist has wrapped her world in its embrace. We never know how we prize a thing until we lose it (N. B.—Mark the novelty of this idea;) and now, for the first time, Monica finds herself fully awake to the fact of how necessary Desmond is to her everyday happiness.

She had gone down to the river-side to bid him farewell, and had been calm, almost careless, throughout the interview,—*so* calm that the young man's heart dies within him, and a latent sense of hope deferred had made it sick.

But just at the very last she had given way, and had flung herself into his embrace, and twined her arms around his neck,—dear, clinging arms—and had broken into bitter weeping. And— [Pg 278]

"Don't be long, Brian! don't be *long*!" she had sobbed, with deep entreaty, and with such a tender passion as had shaken all her slender frame.

So they had "kissed and kissed," and parted. And Desmond, though sad as man may be at the thought that he should look upon her face no more for four long weeks, still left her with a gladder heart than he had ever known. Her tears were sweet to him, and in her grief he found solace for his own.

And, indeed, as the days flew by, they found the pain of absence was checkered by dreams of the reunion that lay before them; and each day, as it was born, and grew, and died, and so was laid upon the pile of those already gone, was a sad joy to them, and counted not so much a day lost as one gained.

"We take no note of time but from its loss." This loss in the present instance was most sweet to Monica and her lover. To them Time was the name of a slow and cruel monster, whose death was to be desired.

And now the monster is slain, and to-day Brian will return to Coole. A few lines full of joyful love and glad expectancy had been brought to her yesterday by the sympathetic Bridget, who affected an ignorance about the whole matter that utterly imposed on Monica, who would have found a bitterness in sharing her heart's secret with her maid. Yet Bridget knows quite as much about it as she does. To Kit alone has Monica unburdened her soul, and talked, and talked, and talked, on her one fond topic, without discovering the faintest symptom of fatigue in that indefatigable person.

Yes, to-day he comes! Monica had risen with the lark, unable to lie abed with the completion of a sweet desire lying but a few short hours away from her, and had gone through the morning and afternoon in a dreamy state of tender anticipation.

Yet surely not short, but of a terrible length, are these hours. Never has the old clock ticked with such maddening deliberation; yet—

"Be the day weary, or never so long,
At length it ringeth to evensong;"

and at last the old clock, tick it never so slowly, must bring round the hour when she may go down to the river to meet her love again.

But the relentless Fates are against her, and who shall interfere with their woven threads? As though some vile imp of their court had whispered in Miss Priscilla's ear the whole story of her forbidden attachment, she keeps Monica in the morning-room with her, copying out certain recipes of a dry nature, that could have been copied just as well to-morrow, or next year, or *never*. [Pg 279]

As the hour in which she ought to meet her lover comes and goes by, the poor child's pulses throb and her heart beats violently. Kit has gone to the village, and so cannot help her. All seems lost. Her eyes grow large and dark with repressed longing, her hand trembles.

"There, that will do, dear child; thank you," says Miss Priscilla, gratefully, folding up the obnoxious papers and slipping them into the davenport.

It is now quite half an hour past the time appointed by Desmond in his letter. Monica, rising impetuously, moves towards the door.

"Is the writing at an end?" Miss Penelope's voice comes to her from the other end of the room, with a plaintive ring in it. It casts despair upon the hopes that are kindling afresh within her bosom. "Dear, dear! I'm so glad! Monica, come to me, and help me with this wool. It has got so entangled that only bright eyes like yours," with a loving smile, "can rescue it from its hopeless state."

Poor Monica! after one passionate inclination to rebel, her courage fails her, and she gives in, and taking the tangled skein of wool (that reminds her in a vague, sorrowful fashion of her own hapless love story) between her slender fingers, bends over it.

Her cheeks are aflame. Her eyes are miserable but tearless. It all seems too cruel. There sits Aunt Priscilla at the davenport, with a smile of triumph on her lips, as she finds her accounts right to a halfpenny. Here sits Aunt Penelope fanning herself with soft complacency, because the

day, though of September, is sultry as of hot July. And all this time Brian is walking impatiently to and fro upon the tiny beach, thinking her cold, unloving, indifferent, watching with straining, reproachful eyes the path along which she ought to come.

This last thought is just too much. A great fire kindles in her beautiful eyes; the spirit of defiance seizes on her gentle breast; her lips quiver; her breath comes from between them with a panting haste. "Yes! she will go to him, she will!" She rises to her feet. [Pg 280]

Just at that moment the door is flung wide open, and Desmond enters the room.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

How the Misses Blake receive the nephew of their sworn foe—How Monica at all hazards proclaims her truth—And how Miss Priscilla sees something that upsets her and the belief of years.

One moment of coma ensues. It is an awful moment, in which nobody seems even to breathe. The two Misses Blake turn into a rigidity that might mean stone; the young man pauses irresolutely, yet with a sternness about his lips that bespeaks a settled purpose not to be laid aside for any reason, and that adds some years to his age.

Monica has turned to him. The tangled wool has fallen unconsciously from her hands to her feet. Her lips are parted, her eyes wide: she sways a little. Then a soft rapturous cry breaks from her, there is a simultaneous movement on his part and on hers; and then—she is in his arms.

For a few moments speech is impossible to them: there seems nothing in the wide world but he to her, and she to him.

Then he lifts her face, and looks at her long and eagerly.

"Yes, I have found you again, my love,—*at last*," he says.

"Ah! how long it has seemed!" whispers she, with tears in her eyes.

The old ladies might have been in the next county, so wrapt are they in their happy meeting. Their hearts are beating in unison; their souls are in their eyes. She has reached her home,—his breast,—and has laid her heart on his. The moment is perfect, and as near heaven as we poor mortals can attain until kindly death comes to our aid.

It is but a little moment, however. It passes, and recollection returns. Monica, raising her head, sees the two Misses Blake standing side by side, with folded, nerveless hands, and fixed eyes, and horror-stricken faces. Shrinking still closer to her lover, Monica regards them with a troubled conscience and with growing fear. She is at last discovered, and her sin is beyond redemption.

She trembles in Desmond's arms, and pales visibly. But the frantic beating of her heart against his renders him strong and bold. He throws up his head, with the action of one determined to [Pg 281] fight to the death. No one shall ever take her from him. He is only too anxious to enter the lists and do battle for his love.

And then, as his eyes light upon his foes, his spirit dies. Poor old ladies, so stupefied, so stricken! are they not already conquered? Looking at the frail front they present, he feels his weapons must be blunted in this fight, his gloves anything but steel.

A terrible silence fills the room,—a silence that grows almost unbearable, until at length it is broken by Miss Priscilla. Her voice is low, and hushed and broken.

"Monica, why did you deceive us?" she says.

There is reproach, agonized disappointment, in her tone, but no anger.

To these poor old women the moment is tragical. The child of their last years—the one thing they had held most dear and sacred—has proved unworthy, has linked herself with the opposition, has entered the lists of the enemy. They are quite calm, though trembling. Their grief is too great for tears. But they stand together, and there is a lost and heart-broken look about them.

Monica, seeing it, breaks away from her lover's restraining arms, and, running to Miss Priscilla, falls down on her knees before her, and, clasping her waist with her soft, white arms, bursts into bitter tears. She clings to Miss Priscilla; but the old lady, though her distress is very apparent, stands proudly erect, and looks not at her, but at Desmond. The tears gather slowly in her eyes—tears come ever slowly to those whose youth lies far behind—and fall upon the repentant sunny head; but the owner shows no sign of forgiveness; yet I think she would have dearly liked to take the sweet sinner in her arms, to comfort and forgive her, but for the pride and wounded feeling that overmastered her.

"Your presence here, sir, is an insult," she says to Desmond, meaning to be stern; but her grief has washed away the incivility of her little speech and has left it only vaguely reproachful. Desmond lowers his head before her gaze, and refrains from answer or explanation. A great sorrow for the defencelessness of *their* sorrow has arisen in his breast for these old aunts, and

killed all meaner thoughts. I think he would have felt a degree of relief if they had both fallen upon him, and said hard things to him, and so revenged themselves in part.

Monica is sobbing bitterly. Not able to endure her grief, Desmond, going even to the feet of Miss Priscilla, tries to raise her from the ground. But she clings even more closely to Miss Priscilla, and so mutely refuses to go to him. [Pg 282]

A pang, a sudden thought, shoots through him, and renders him desperate. Will they be bad to his poor little girl when he is gone? will they scold her?

"Oh, madam," he says to Miss Priscilla, with a break in his voice, "*try* to forgive her; be gentle with her. It was all my fault,—mine entirely. I loved her, and when she refused to hear me plead my cause, and shrunk from me because of that unhappy division that separates my family from yours, and because of her reverence for your wishes, I still urged her, and induced her to meet me secretly."

"You did an evil deed, sir," says Miss Priscilla.

"I acknowledge it. I am altogether to blame," says Desmond, hastily. "She has had nothing to do with it. Do not, I beseech you, say anything to her when I am gone that may augment her self-reproach." He looks with appealing eyes at Miss Blake, his hand on Monica's shoulder, who has her face hidden in a fold of her aunt's gown.

"Sir," says Miss Priscilla, drawing herself up, with a touch of old-world grandeur in her manner, but a sad tremulousness in her tone, "my niece has been with us now for some time, and we have dared to hope she has been treated in accordance with the great love we feel for her."

"The *great* love," echoes Miss Penelope, gently. Though deeply distressed, both old ladies are conscious of a subdued admiration for the young man, because of the tenderness of his fears for his beloved.

"But if," says Miss Priscilla, with a mournful glance at the pretty bowed head—"if *she* thinks we have failed in our love towards her, as indeed it seems it may be, by your finding it necessary to ask us to treat her with kindness in this trouble,—we can only say to her that we regret,—that we ——" Here she breaks down, and covers her sad old face with her trembling hands.

Monica springs to her feet.

"Oh, auntie!" she says, a world of love and reproach and penitence in her voice. She throws her arms round her aunt's neck; and, Miss Priscilla clasping her in turn, somehow in one moment the crime is condoned, and youth and age are met in a fond embrace.

"Go, sir," says Miss Priscilla, presently, without lifting her eyes. There is so much gentleness in her tone that the young man is emboldened to ask a question. [Pg 283]

"You will permit me to come to-morrow, to—to—plead my cause?" he says, anxiously.

Miss Priscilla hesitates, and a pang of apprehension rushes through his heart. He is almost in despair, when Miss Penelope's voice breaks the oppressive silence.

"Yes. Come to-morrow," she says, pressing Miss Priscilla's arm. "To-day we are too tired, too upset. To-morrow let it be."

"I thank you madam," says Desmond, humbly; and then he turns to go, but still lingers, with grieved eyes fixed on Monica.

"Monica, you will give me one parting word?" he says, at last, as though the petition is wrung from him.

Still holding Miss Priscilla's hand, she turns to him, and, raising her other arm, places it softly round his neck. Holding them both thus, she seems the embodiment of the spirit that must in the end unite them. Her position compels her to throw back her head a little, and she smiles at him, a sad little smile, but bright with love and trust.

"Not a *parting* word," she says, with a sweetness so grave as to be almost solemn.

"You will be true to me?" says Desmond, reckless of listeners. He has his arms round her, and is waiting for her answer with a pale, earnest face. Something in the whole scene touches the two kindly old maids with a sense of tender reverence.

"Until my death," says the girl, with slow distinctness, laying her head against the gray sleeve of his coat.

A great wave of color—born of emotion and love that is stronger than the grave—sweeps over his face. He stoops and lays his lips on hers. When he is gone, Monica turns suddenly upon Miss Priscilla.

"Do not say a word to me!" she cries, feverishly; "I could not bear it—*now*. I may have done wrong, but I am not sorry for it. I love him. That should explain everything to you; it means *all* to me! Nothing can alter that! And I will have nothing said,—nothing; and——"

"Nothing shall be said, dear child," says Miss Penelope, gently. "Everything shall be as you wish with regard to us. Can you not trust us to spare you where we *can*?"

"I am ungrateful. I must go and think it all out," says Monica, stoutly, pressing her hands against her head. She turns away. A little cry breaks from Miss Priscilla. [Pg 284]

"Oh! not without kissing us *too*, Monica!" she says, in a broken voice, holding out her arms to her niece. Monica throws herself into them.

Long and eager is the discussion that follows on the girl's disappearance.

The two Misses Blake, side by side, argue (with what they erroneously term dispassionate calmness) the case just laid before them.

"I don't know what is to be done," says Miss Priscilla, at length: "all I do know is that, for her sake, consent will be impossible."

"And what is to be said to him to-morrow? He looks so earnest, so—full of her. *What* is to be said to him?"

"So his uncle looked at her mother," says Miss Priscilla, with a terrible bitterness; "and what came of that? Is this young man to steal from us our best and dearest—as *he* did? Be firm, Penelope. For her sake crush this attachment before the fickleness that is in his blood asserts itself to break her heart."

"I fear it will be broken either way," says Miss Penelope, who has a secret hankering after all true lovers.

"At least her self-respect will be spared, and for that she will thank us later on. She must give him up!"

"Priscilla," says Miss Penelope, in a low tone, "supposing she *refuses* to do it?"

"When I have fully explained the matter to her, she will withdraw her refusal," says Miss Priscilla, very grandly, but her expression is not up to her tone in anyway. It is, indeed, depressed and uncertain.

"He struck me as being a very attractive young man," ventures Miss Penelope absently.

"Humph!" says Miss Priscilla.

"And—but that would be impossible in one of his name—a very *lovable* young man," says Miss Penelope, timidly.

"Hah!" says Miss Priscilla: this ejaculation is not meant for surprise or acquiescence, but is merely a warlike snort.

"And very loving, too," says Miss Penelope, dreamily. "I never saw such eyes in my life! and he never took them off her."

"Penelope," says Miss Priscilla, with such a sudden and awful amount of vehemence as literally makes Miss Penelope jump, "I am ashamed of you. Whatever we—that is" (slightly confused) "*you* may think about that young man, please keep it to yourself, and at least let me never hear you speak of a Desmond in admiring terms." [Pg 285]

So saying, she stalks from the rooms and drives down to the village to execute a commission that has been hanging over her for a fortnight, and which she chooses to-day to fulfil, if only to prove to the outer world that she is in no wise upset by the afternoon excitement.

Yet in a very short time she returns from her drive, and with a countenance so disturbed that Miss Penelope's heart is filled with fresh dismay.

"What is it?" she says, following Miss Priscilla into her own room. "You have heard something further; you have seen——"

"Yes, I have seen *him*—young Desmond," says Miss Priscilla, with an air of much agitation. "It was just outside the village, on my way home; and he was carrying a little hurt child in his arms, and he was hushing it so tenderly; and—the little one was looking up in his face—and he kissed it—and——*Why* isn't he a *bad*, *wicked* young man?" cries Miss Priscilla, in a frenzy of despair, bursting into tears.

CHAPTER XXIX.

How Miss Priscilla is driven to enter Coole—How she there receives an important proposal, but with much fortitude declines it—And how The Desmond suffers more from a twinge of conscience than from a bullet.

In the morning, a certain amount of constraint prevails with every one. Kit is, of course, aware of all that has happened, and of the day's expected visitor for Monica, who has refused to come

down to breakfast, and who is as unsettled and miserable as she well can be. Kit has espoused her cause *con amore*, and is (I need hardly say) ready for open war at a moment's notice. She has indeed arranged a plan of action that will bring her on the battle-field at a critical moment to deliver a speech culled from some old novels in her room and meant to reduce both her aunts to annihilation.

When breakfast is over she disappears to study her part afresh, and the Misses Blake, too, [Pg 286] separate and go to their own rooms, with an air of careful unconcern, that would not have imposed upon a one-year babe.

When again they reappear, they seem desirous of avoiding each other's glances, whereupon it occurs suddenly to everybody that they have both put on their very best silk gowns and lace caps, and have in fact got themselves up with elaborate care to receive—a *Desmond*! No wonder they are ashamed of themselves!

Still keeping up the outward symptoms of supreme indifference, they seat themselves in the drawing-room, Miss Penelope attacking her knitting with tremendous vigor, whilst Miss Priscilla gets apparently lost in the pages of "Temple Bar." Monica, sliding in presently like a small ghost, in her clinging white gown, slips into a seat in the window that overlooks the avenue, and hides herself and her pretty anxious face behind the lace curtains.

An hour glides by with aggravating slowness; and then a sound of wheels upon the gravel makes Monica's heart beat almost to suffocation. The two Misses Blake, suddenly forgetful of their *role* of unconcern, start from their seats and go to the window where Monica now is standing. A brougham and pair of horses drive up to the door, and a young man, opening the door, springs to the ground. It is Desmond.

"To come here in a close carriage!" says Miss Priscilla, with much contempt. "Is he afraid of catching cold, I wonder? I never heard of such foppery in my life."

"He is not a fop," says Monica, indignantly, and then she catches sight of her lover's face, and something in it awakes within her a prescience of coming evil.

Then the drawing-room door is thrown open with rather unceremonious haste, and the young man, entering, goes straight to where Miss Priscilla is standing, merely taking and holding Monica's hand as he reaches her, but addressing to her neither word nor look. He seems greatly agitated, and altogether unlike the man who stood here yesterday and almost defied them. His face is very pale, and full of honest grief and indignation.

"My uncle is at death's doors," he says in a voice that quivers with rage and excitement. "Coming home late last night he was shot at by some ruffians from behind the blackthorn hedge on the Coole road. He wants you Miss Blake" (to Priscilla). "He is asking for you. You will not refuse to come to a man who may be dying for all we know! I have brought the carriage for you, and I [Pg 287] implore you not to delay, but to come to him at once."

Miss Priscilla has sunk into a chair, and is quite colorless; Miss Penelope clasps her hands.

"Oh, poor George!" she says, involuntarily, almost unconsciously. His present danger has killed remembrance of all the angry years that stand between to-day and the time when last she called him by his Christian name.

"When did it happen? How?" asks Monica, tightening her fingers round his, and trembling visibly.

"About ten o'clock last evening. Both Kelly and I were with him, and a groom. Two shots were fired. Kelly and I jumped off the dog-cart and gave chase and succeeded in securing one of them. There were four altogether, I think. We did not know my uncle was wounded when we ran after them, but when we came back we found Murray the groom holding him in his arms. He was quite insensible. I left Kelly and Murray to guard our prisoner, and drove my uncle home myself. He is very badly hurt. Miss Blake," turning again to Miss Priscilla, "you will come with me?"

"Oh, yes, yes," says Miss Priscilla, faintly.

"And I shall go with you, my dear Priscilla," says Miss Penelope, heroically. "Yes, you will want me. To find yourself face to face with him after all these years of estrangement and in so sad a state will be distressing. It is well I should be on the spot to lend you some support."

Miss Priscilla lays her hand on her arm.

"I think I shall go alone, Penelope," she says, falteringly. For one moment Miss Penelope is a little surprised, and then in another moment she is not surprised at all. But I believe in her heart she is a good deal disappointed: there is a flavor of romance and excitement about this expedition she would gladly have tasted.

"Well, perhaps it will be better so," she says, amiably. "I am glad he has sent for you. He will be the easier for *your* forgiveness, though he cannot obtain *hers*, now. Come upstairs: you should not keep Mr. Desmond waiting." There is a kindly light in her eyes as she glances at the young man. And then she takes Miss Priscilla away to her room, and helps her carefully with her toilet, and accepts the situation as a matter of course, though in her secret soul she is filled with amazement at The Desmond's sending for Miss Priscilla even though lying at death's door.

And indeed when the old man had turned to Brian and asked him to bring Miss Blake to Coole, [Pg 288]

Brian himself had known surprise too, and some misgivings. Was he going to make her swear never to give her consent to his (Brian's) marriage with her niece? or was he going to make open confession of that dishonorable action which caused Miss Blake's pretty stepsister to suffer dire tribulation, according to the gossips round?

"I should like to see Priscilla Blake," the old squire had said, in a low whisper, his nephew leaning over him to catch the words, and then he had muttered something about "old friends and forgiveness," that had not so easily been understood.

"You shall see her," the younger man says, tenderly. "I'll go for her myself. I am sure she won't refuse to come."

"*Refuse!*" There is something in the squire's whisper that puzzles Brian.

"I am certain she will not," he repeats, mechanically, whilst trying to translate it. But the look has faded from the old man's face, and his tone is different, when he speaks again.

"If she is afraid to come," he says, generously, having evidently settled some knotty point of inward discussion to his entire satisfaction, "tell her from me that I am ready and willing to forgive *all*."

"You mean you are anxious to obtain her forgiveness," says Brian, with the kindly intention of assisting the old man's wandering imagination.

"Eh?" says the squire, sharply. "What d'ye mean, Brian? Speak, lad, when I desire you."

"Look here, George! if you excite yourself like this, you know what the consequences will be," says Brian, sharply, in his turn. "I only meant that, as you—er—jilted their stepsister, I suppose you are anxious to obtain their pardon, now you feel yourself pretty low. But I'd advise you to wait and see about that when you have recovered your strength a little."

"And you believed that old story too!" says the poor squire, forlornly. "I didn't jilt her at all, Brian. *It was she jilted me!*"

"*What!*" says Brian, turning to see if the bullet had touched his brain instead of his ribs.

"'Tis true. I tell you, that girl broke my heart. She was the prettiest creature I ever saw, with soft dove's eyes, and a heavenly smile, and no more heart than *that*," striking the post of the old-fashioned bedstead with his uninjured arm. "I gave myself up to her, I worshipped the very ground she walked on, and within a fortnight of our wedding she calmly wrote to tell me she could not marry me!" [Pg 289]

"Giving a reason?"

"No. Even *she*, I presume, could not summon sufficient courage to tell the wretch she had deluded of her love for another. She gave me no reason. She entreated me, however, to keep silence about the real author of the breach between us,—that is, herself. *I* was the one to break off our engagement! I was to bear all the blame! She implored me to conceal her share in it, and finally demanded of me, as a last favor, that I would give the world to understand I had thrown *her* over."

"A charmingly disinterested specimen of womankind," says Brian, raising his brows.

"And this to *me*," says The Desmond, an indignant sob making his weak voice weaker,—"a man who had always kept himself straight in the eyes of the world. I was required to represent myself as a low, despicable fellow, one of those who seek a woman's affections only to ignore them at the sight of the next pretty face."

"But you refused to comply with her request?" says Brian, hastily.

"No, sir, I didn't," says the squire, shame struggling with his excitement. "On the contrary, I gave in to her in every respect. I believe at that time I would cheerfully have allowed myself to be branded as a *thief* if she had desired it and if it would have saved her one scrap of discomfort. She was afraid of her sisters, you see. I blamed them then, Brian, but I think now her fear of them arose from the fact that *they* were as true as *she* was——Well, well!"

"This is indeed a revelation," says Brian.

"Yes; you wouldn't think they would behave like that, would you?" says Mr. Desmond, eagerly.

"Who? The Misses Blake?" says Brian, startled.

"Yes. It wasn't like them to keep silent all these years, and let me bear the brunt of the battle, when they knew I was innocent and that it was their own flesh and blood who was in fault. Yet they turned their backs upon me, and have treated me ever since as though I were in reality the miscreant they have succeeded in making me out."

"There is a terrible mistake somewhere," says Brian. "They do verily believe you to be the miscreant you describe."

"Brian, come here!" says the old man, in an ominously calm tone. "Do you mean to tell me Priscilla Blake believes me guilty of having behaved dishonestly to her sister Katherine? You positively think this?" [Pg 290]

"I *know* it," says Brian, who feels it is better to get out the plain unvarnished truth at once.

"You have no doubt? Think, Brian; think."

"I needn't.—There is no doubt on my mind."

"Then she deceived us *all*," says the squire, in a stricken tone. Then he roused himself again. He seems to have recovered his strength wonderfully during the past hour. "Go, get me Priscilla Blake," he says. "Hurry, boy! hurry! I must make it right with her before I die."

"Before you recover, you mean," says Brian, cheerily. "There! lie down now, and keep yourself quiet, or you won't be looking your best when she comes."

And now Miss Priscilla has come, and is standing beside the bed of her quondam friend, looking down upon him with dim eyes.

"I am sorry to meet you again like this, George Desmond," she says, at last, in tones meant to be full of relentless displeasure, but which falter strangely.

"She made as great a fool of *you* as of *me*, Priscilla," is the squire's answer, whose tired mind can only grasp one thought,—the treachery of the woman he had loved! And then it all comes out, and the letter the false Katherine had written him is brought out from a little secret drawer, bound round with the orthodox blue ribbon, and smelling sadly of dust, as though to remind one of all things, of warmest sweetest love, of truest trust, and indeed of that fair but worthless body from whose hand it came, now lying mouldering and forgotten in a foreign land.

"Oh, I wouldn't have believed it of her!" says Miss Priscilla, weeping bitterly. "But there must have been something wrong with her always, though we could never see it. What an angel face she had! But the children, they speak terribly of her, and they say—that she—and James Beresford—did not get on at all."

"Eh?" says the squire. He rises himself on his sound elbow, and quite a glow of color rushes into his pallid cheeks. When, with a groan of self-contempt, he sinks back again, and the light in his eye (was it of satisfaction?) dies.

"You have met Brian," he says presently. "What do you think of him, Priscilla? He is a good lad,—a *very* good lad."

"He looks it," says Miss Priscilla, shortly. [Pg 291]

"He does," heartily. "Well, I'm told this boy of mine is in love with your girl."

"Who told you?" says Miss Priscilla.

"Brian himself," says the Squire.

"I like that in him," says Miss Priscilla. "Well, George, if you will look upon that as settled, so shall I."

"So be it," says the squire—"Eh, my dear? but doesn't it make us feel old to be discussing the love-affairs of these young things, when it seems only yesterday that we—that you and I, Priscilla ——"

"That is all buried long ago: don't rake it up. It died when first your eyes fell on *her*," says Miss Blake, hurriedly.

"I was a fool," says the squire. "But, somehow, since I have been talking to you, I don't think I'm going to die this time, and old scenes came back to me, and—I suppose it is too late now, Priscilla?"

There is no mistaking his meaning.

"Oh, yes; a whole lifetime too late," says Miss Priscilla, with a soft, faint blush that would not have misbecome a maiden in her teens. "But I am glad we are friends again, George."

She pressed his hand with real affection, and then colors again warmly, as though afraid of having discovered herself in the act of committing an indiscretion. Could that gentle pressure be called forward, or light, or unseemly? Terrible thought!

"So am I, my dear," says the squire. And then again, "You won't think of it, then, Priscilla?"

"No, no," says Miss Blake, feeling flattered at his persistence, and then she actually laughs out loud, and The Desmond laughs too, though feebly; and then the doctor comes in again, and Miss Priscilla goes home, to tell Miss Penelope, in the secrecy of her chamber, and with the solemnity that befits the occasion, all about the squire's proposal, its reception, and its rejection.

Be assured no minutest detail is forgotten; Miss Penelope is soon in possession of every smallest look and word connected with it, and deeply gratifying is the manner in which the great news is received by that gentle maiden.

"Though late in the day, Penelope," says Miss Priscilla, as a sort of wind-up to her recital, "it was

an offer of marriage *any* woman might be proud of, be she young or old; and he *meant* it, too. He was quite *pressing*. Twice he asked me, although my first was a most decided 'No.'"

"It seems terrible, your having been so cold to him, poor fellow!" says Miss Penelope, with a [Pg 292] regretful sigh for the griefs of the rejected Desmond.

"What could I do?" says Miss Priscilla, with an air of self-defence. This thought, that she can actually be accused of having treated the sterner sex in a hardhearted fashion, is cakes and ale to her.

"We must not talk of this, Penelope," she says, presently. "It would be unfair. It must never transpire through *us* that George Desmond laid his heart and fortune at my feet only to be rejected."

To her these old-world phrases sound grand and musical and full of fire and sentiment.

"No, no," says Miss Penelope, acquiescing freely, yet with a sigh; she would have dearly liked to tell her gossips of this honor that has been done her dear Priscilla. And, after all, she has her wish, for the story gets about, spread by the hero of it himself.

The squire, tired, no doubt, of keeping secrets, and perhaps (but this in a whisper) grateful to her because of her refusal, goes about everywhere, and tells people far and near of his offer; so that when their friends flock to Moyne, and, giving The Desmond as their authority for it, accuse Miss Priscilla of her refusal, and she still, with maidenly modesty, parries their questions, Miss Penelope, feeling herself absolved from further reticence, comes to the front and gives them a full and true account of the wonderful event.

"Yes, Priscilla might indeed have reigned as queen at Coole had she so wished it, and well graced the position too," winds up Miss Penelope, on all these occasions, with much pride and dignity.

Brian, who had been busy all the morning swearing informations, and so forth, with Mr. Kelly and the groom, before magistrates and others, coming into his uncle's room about half an hour after Miss Blake's departure, finds him considerably better both in mind and in body, though feeble in spirit, as is only natural. Indeed, the bullet had done him little harm, causing merely a flesh-wound, but the shock had been severe to a man of his years.

"Come here, Brian; I want to tell you something," he says, as the young man leans over him.

"You are not to talk," says his nephew, peremptorily.

"If you won't listen to me, I'll send for Bailey, the steward," says the squire. "Nonsense! it does me good." And then he tells him all the particulars of Miss Priscilla's visit relating to his [Pg 293] engagement with Katherine Beresford, with one reservation.

"It is all right between us now," he says, in a pleased tone. "She told me everything, and it appears we were both sadly taken in, though I don't wish to say anything against her even now. I daresay she had her own grievances, poor soul; and indeed Priscilla said——"

Here he pauses, and a guilty flush covers his pale face. He hesitates, and then beckons Brian to come even nearer.

"Look you, lad! I'm not quite at ease even yet. There's something wrong here!" laying his hand upon his heart.

"Is it pain?" asks his nephew, anxiously. "I told you you were talk——"

"No, no, boy. It's only mental pain. I want to be ashamed of myself, and I *can't*. I'm feeling a satisfaction about something that I shouldn't. It's not right, Brian. It's not a gentlemanly feeling, but I can't curb it. The more I think of it, the more pleased I feel. Eh? You don't look as if you understood me."

"I don't, much," confesses Brian, seating himself on the edge of the bed. "You see, you haven't told me what it is all about."

"It is about Katherine Beresford. Priscilla told me, and I should like to tell you. I say, Brian, you won't throw it in my teeth, now, when I'm better, eh?"

"I swear I won't," says Brian.

"Well, she told me Katherine had a regular *devil* of a life with her husband, and *I'm glad of it*! *There!*" says the squire; after which disgraceful confession he regularly scrambles under the bedclothes, with a view to hiding his shame and his exultation from public view.

Brian fairly roars with laughter. At the sound of his welcome mirth, the old man slowly emerges from the sheets again, and looks at him doubtfully, but with growing hope.

"*She* had the best of it, of course; any one would have the best of it with James Beresford," he says. "But she couldn't have been altogether comfortable; that's what I mean. I don't want you to think I should rejoice at her having received bad treatment at her husband's hands. He had all the bad treatment to himself, I expect."

"So do I," says Brian, who is laughing still.

"And you don't think so badly of me for it?" says the Squire, anxiously.

"Not I," says Brian. [Pg 294]

"Still, it's rather a mean sort of feeling, isn't it, now? It's very low—eh?"

"Low or not," says Brian, with decision, "I'm perfectly certain if it was *my* case I should feel just like that myself."

"You're the comfort of my life, Brian," says his uncle, gratefully; and then he indulges in a covert smile himself, after which he drops off into a slumber, sound and refreshing.

CHAPTER XXX.

How Madam O'Connor gives her opinion on certain subjects—How Fay electrifies an entire audience—And how Olga makes up her mind.

It is growing towards evening, and as yet at Aghyohillbeg they have not grown tired of discussing the terrible event of last night.

"When I called just now, Priscilla Blake was with him," says Madam O'Connor. "Brian told me The Desmond had sent for her. I suppose the old quarrel about Katherine will be patched up now, and I shouldn't wonder if our two lovers, Monica and Brian, get married quite comfortably and in the odor of sanctity, after all."

"I suppose they couldn't have managed it without the old people's consent," says Mrs. Herrick, who is rocking herself lazily to and fro in a huge American chair.

"Nonsense, my dear!" says Madam, throwing up her chin. "Accredit them with some decent spirit, I beg of you. Of course they would have got married whether or not,—there is nothing like opposition for that kind of thing, and no doubt would have enjoyed it all the more for the fun of the thing, because there must be an excitement in a runaway match unknown to the orthodox affair."

"I don't think I should like to run away," says Olga Bohun; "there is always a difficulty about one's clothes."

"What's the good of being in love if you can't get over a few paltry obstacles?" says Madam, whose heart is still young. "Well, I expect we shall have a gay wedding here before long, and be able to give that pretty child our presents without any trouble."

"How long the day has been!" says Olga, with a little affected yawn, meant to reduce Ulic [Pg 295] Ronayne to despair, who is sitting in a distant window touching up one of her paintings. "I don't know when I have been so bored,—no one to speak to. Madam, darling, you shall never go out again without me; remember that. Nobody has called,—I suppose they are afraid of being shot,—not even Owen Kelly; and one would *like* to see him and Brian, to make sure they are all there."

"Talk of somebody," says Madam, looking out of the window, "here comes Owen."

As Olga puts her hand in his presently, she says, laughing,—

"Madam O'Connor says you are, in polite language, his sable majesty himself. So you must be, to escape as you did last night. Now tell us all about it. We have heard so many garbled accounts that a *real* one will set our minds at rest."

Then he tells them all about it, dropping as though unconsciously into a low chair very close to Hermia's.

"So, you see," he says, when he had finished, "it might have been a very sensational affair, and covered us all with glory, only it didn't."

"I think it did," says Mrs. Herrick, gently. She doesn't raise her eyes from her work to say this, but knits calmly on; only a *very* careful observer could have noticed the faint trembling of her fingers, or the quivering of her long, downcast lashes.

"How can you say such a thing, Owen?" says Olga. "Look at all the cases we have known where the assassins have got away quite free, and here we have the principal secured."

"Yes, that was very clever of Brian," says Mr. Kelly.

"Did he capture him, then, single-handed? Were not you with him? Were *you* in no danger of your life, too?" exclaims Hermia, with such unwonted animation that every one looks at her. She takes no notice of their regard, but fixes her kindling eyes on Kelly, who, in returning her mute protest, forgets that any other more open answer may be required of him. Then she lets her eyes fall from his, and her face grows calm and statuesque again, and only the rapid clicking of her needles show the perturbation of the mind within.

"Did the fellow give you much trouble, Kelly?" asks Ronayne, who in his secret soul is bitterly regretful he had not been on the scene of action.

"Not he, the fool!" says Mr. Kelly, with something approaching a smile. "Brian fired his revolver and grazed his arm slightly,—a mere scratch, you will understand,—and the miserable creature [Pg 296] rolled upon the ground, doubled himself in two, and, giving himself up as dead, howled dismally. Not knowing at that time that the poor squire was hurt, Brian and I roared with laughter: we couldn't help it, the fellow looked so absurd."

They all laugh at this, but presently Olga, holding up her finger, says, seriously,—

"Owen, recollect yourself. You said you *laughed*. Oh! it *can't* be true."

"I regret to say it is," says Mr. Kelly, with intensest self-abasement. "For once I forgot myself; I really *did* do it; but it shan't occur again. The exquisite humor of the moment was too much for me. I hope it won't be placed to my account, and that in time you will all forgive me my one little lapse."

"Well, Owen, you are the drollest creature," says Madam O'Connor, with a broad sweet smile, that is copied by Olga and Ronayne. Mrs. Herrick remains unmoved, and her needles go faster and faster: Mr. Kelly stares at them uneasily.

"They'll give out sparks in another minute or so," he says, warningly, "and if they do there will be a general conflagration. Spare me that: I have had enough excitement for a while."

Mrs. Herrick lets her knitting fall into her lap.

"The squire may be thankful he got off so easily," says Madam O'Connor at this moment.

"He may, indeed," says Kelly. "Fay," to the child who is standing at a distance gazing thoughtfully with uplifted head at the blue sky without, "what are you wondering about now?"

The child turns upon him her large blue eyes, blue as Nankin china, and answers him in clear sweet tones, indifferent to the fact that every one in the room is regarding her.

"I was wondering," she says, truthfully, "why Ulic says his prayers to Olga."

A most disconcerting silence follows this speech. Madam hums a tune; Mrs. Herrick loses herself in her knitting; but Mr. Kelly, who is always alive, says "Eh?"

"I saw him," says Fay, dreamily.

Olga, who is as crimson as the heart of a red rose, makes here a frantic but subdued effort to attract the child's attention; Mr. Kelly, however, gets her adroitly on to his knees before she can grasp the meaning of Olga's secret signals.

"Where did you see him?" he says, mildly. [Pg 297]

"In the summer-house, this morning. He was kneeling down before her, just as I kneel to mamma, and he had his head in her lap, and he was whispering his prayers. I could not hear what he said." At this instant an expression of the most devout thankfulness overspreads Mrs. Bohun's features. "But they were very *long* prayers; and I think he was *sorry* for something he had done."

"I haven't a doubt of it," says Mr. Kelly, mournfully. "Go on, my child."

"I'm not your child; I'm mamma's," says Fay, firmly; but, having so far vindicated her mother's character, she goes on with her tale: "When he got up he didn't look a bit better," she says. "He looked worse, I think. Didn't you, Ulic?" addressing the stricken young man in the window. "And I always thought it was only children who said their prayers to people, and not the grown-up ones. And why did he choose Olga? Wasn't there mamma? And wasn't there Madam? You would have let him say his prayers to you, Madam, wouldn't you?" turning placidly to her hostess.

"I should have been only too charmed,—too highly flattered," says Madam, in a stifled tone; and then she gives way altogether, and breaks into a gay and hearty laugh, under cover of which Olga beats an ignominious retreat.

Mr. Ronayne, feeling rather than seeing that his colleague in this disgraceful affair has taken flight, puts down his brushes softly and jumps lightly from the open window to the grass beneath. Then with a speed that belongs to his long limbs, he hurries towards that corner of the house that will lead him to the hall door: as he turns it, he received Olga almost in his arms.

"You here?" she says. "Oh, that terrible child!"

"She didn't understand, poor little soul." And then, as though the recollection overcomes him, he gives away to uncontrollable mirth.

"Such unseemly levity!" says Mrs. Bohun, in a disgusted tone; but, after the vaguest hesitation, she laughs too.

"Come to the orchard," says Ronayne; and to the orchard they go. Here, finding a rustic seat at the foot of a gnarled and moss-grown apple-tree, they take possession of it.

"It is very unfortunate," says Olga, with a sigh. Her fair hair is being blown like a silver cloud hither and thither and renders her distractingly pretty.

"You mean our betrayal by that child?" [Pg 298]

"Yes. I hope it will cure you of ever being so silly as to go on your knees to any woman again."

"I shall never go on my knees to any woman but you, whether you accept or reject me."

"I am sure I don't know how I am ever to face those people inside again." Here she puts one dainty little finger to her lips and bites it cruelly.

"There is nothing remarkable in having one's *accepted* lover at one's feet."

"But you are not that," she says, lifting her brows and seeming half amused at his boldness.

"By one word you can make me so."

"Can I? What is the word?"

This is puzzling; but Mr. Ronayne, nothing daunted says,—

"You have only to say, 'you are,' and I am."

"It isn't Christmas yet," says Mrs. Bohun: "you shouldn't throw conundrums at me out of season. It is too much? 'you *are* and I *am*.' I couldn't guess it, indeed; I'm anything but clever."

"If you say the 'I will,' you will find the solution to *our* conundrum at once."

"But that is two words."

"Olga, does the fact that I love you carry no weight with it at all."

"But do you love me—*really*?"

"Need I answer that?"

"But there are others, younger, prettier."

"Nonsense! There is no one prettier than you in this wide world."

"Ah!" with a charming smile, "now indeed I believe you do love me, for the Greek Cupid is blind. What a silly boy you are to urge this matter! For one thing I am older than you."

"A year or two."

"For another——"

"I will not listen. 'Stony limits cannot hold love out:' why, therefore, try to discourage me?"

"But you should think——"

"I think only that if you will say what I ask you, I shall be always with you, and you with me."

"What is *your* joy is *my* fear. Custom creates weariness! And—'the lover in the husband may be lost!'"

"Ah! you have thought of me in that light," exclaims the young man, eagerly. "Beloved if you will only take me, you shall find in me both a lover and husband until your life's end." [Pg 299]

The smile has died from Olga's lips; she holds out her hands to him.

"So be it," she says gravely.

"You mean it?" says Ronayne, as yet afraid to believe in his happiness.

"Yes. But if ever you repent blame yourself."

"And if you repent?"

"I shall blame you too," she says, with a sudden return to her old archness.

"And you will refuse Rossmoyne?"

She laughs outright at this, and glances at him from under drooping lashes.

"I can't promise that," she says, with carefully simulated embarrassment—"because——"

"What?" haughtily, moving away from her.

"I *did so yesterday*."

"Oh, darling, how cruelly I misjudged you! I thought—I feared——"

"Never mind all that. I know—I forgive you. I've a *lovely* temper," says Olga, with self-gratulation.

"Why did you refuse him? Was it," hopefully, "because you didn't like him?"

"N—o. Not so much that—as——" again this shameless coquette hesitates, and turns her head uneasily from side to side, as though afraid to give utterance to the truth.

"What? Explain, Olga," says her lover, in a fresh agony.

"As that I——*loved you*!" returns she, with a heavenly smile.

His arms close round her, and at this moment she lets all her heart be seen by him. The mocking light dies out of her eyes, her face grows earnest. She lets her heart beat with happy unrestraint against his. The minutes fly, but time was never made to be counted by blissful lovers.

A gong sounding in the distance rouses them from their contented dreaming.

"I must go and tell Hermia," she says, starting to her feet: "that is the dressing-bell."

"You won't let her influence you against me?"

"Nobody could do that." She moves away from him, and then runs back to him again and lays her arms round his neck.

"You are more to me now than Hermia and *the world*!" she says, softly.

Yet presently, when she finds herself in Hermia's calm presence, her courage somewhat fails her. [Pg 300] It is not that she for a moment contemplates the idea of having to give up her lover, but she is afraid of her cousin's cold disparagement of both him and her.

"I have just promised to marry Ulic," she says, plunging without preface into her story, with a boldness born of nervous excitement.

"To *marry* him! Why, I thought you looked upon him as a mere boy! Your 'baby,' you used to call him."

"Probably that is why I have accepted him. A baby should not be allowed to roam the world at large without some one to look after him."

"Do you love him, Olga?"

"Yes, I do," says Olga, defiantly. "You may scold me if you like, but a title *isn't* everything, and he is worth a dozen of that cold, stiff Rossmoyne."

"Well, dearest, as you have given him the best part of you,—your heart,—it is as well the rest should follow," says Mrs. Herrick, tenderly. "Yes, I think you will be very happy with him."

This speech is so strange, so unexpected, so exactly unlike anything she had made up her mind to receive, that for a moment Olga is stricken dumb. Then with a rush she comes back to glad life.

"'Do I wake? do I dream? are there visions about?'" she says. "Why, what sentiments from *you*! You have 'changed all that,' apparently."

"I have," says Hermia, very slowly, yet with a vivid blush. Something in her whole manner awakes suspicion of the truth in Olga's mind.

"Why," she says, "you don't mean to tell me that——Oh, no! it can't be true! and yet——I verily believe you have——*Is* it so, Hermia?"

"It is," says Hermia, who has evidently, by help of some mental process of her own, understood all this amazing farrago of apparently meaningless words.

There is a new sweetness on Mrs. Herrick's lips. One of her rare smiles lights up all her calm, artistic face.

"After all your vaunted superiority!" says Olga, drawing a deep sigh. "Oh, *dear*!" Then, with a wicked but merry imitation of Mrs. Herrick's own manner to her, she goes on!—

"You are throwing yourself away, dearest. The world will think nothing of you for the future; and you, so formed to shine, and dazzle, and——" [Pg 301]

"*He* will be a baronet at his father's death," says Mrs. Herrick, serenely, with a heavy emphasis on the first pronoun; and then suddenly, as though ashamed of this speech, she lets her mantle drop from her, and cries, with some tender passion,——

"I don't care about that. Hear the truth from me. If he were as ugly and poor as Mary Browne's Peter, I should marry him all the same, just because I love him!"

"Oh, Hermia, I am so *glad*," says Olga. "After all what is there in the whole wide world so sweet as love? And as for Rossmoyne,—why, he couldn't make a tender speech to save his life as it should be made; whilst Ulic—*oh he's charming!*"

CHAPTER XXXI.

How Monica's heart fails her; and how at last Hope (whose name is Brian) comes back to her through the quivering moonlight.

And now night has fallen at last upon this long day. A gentle wind is shivering through the elms; a glorious moon has risen in all its beauty, and stands in "heaven's wide, pathless way," as though conscious of its grandeur, yet sad for the sorrows of the seething earth beneath. Now clear, now resplendent she shines, and now through a tremulous mist shows her pure face, and again for a space is hidden,

"As if her head she bow'd
Stooping through a fleecy cloud."

Miss Priscilla, with a sense of now-found dignity upon her, has gone early to bed. Miss Penelope has followed suit. Terence, in the privacy of his own room, is rubbing a dirty oily flannel on the bright barrels of his beloved gun, long since made over to him as a gift by Brian.

Kit is sitting on the wide, old-fashioned window-seat in Monica's room at her sister's feet, and with her thin little arms twined lovingly round her. She is sleepy enough, poor child, but cannot bear to desert Monica, who is strangely wakeful and rather silent and *distraite*. For ever since the morning when he had come to carry Miss Priscilla to Coole, Brian has been absent from her; [Pg 302] not once has he come to her; and a sense of chill and fear, as strong as it is foolish, is overpowering her.

She rouses herself now with a little nervous quiver that seems to run through all her veins and lets her hand fall on Kit's drooping head.

"It grows very late. Go to bed, darling," she says, gently.

"Not till you go," says Kit, tightening the clasp of her arms.

"Well, that shall be in a moment, then," says Monica, with a stifled sigh. All through the dragging day and evening she has clung to the thought that surely her lover will come to bid her "good-night." And now it is late, and he has not come, and——

She leans against the side of the wide-open casement, and gazes in sad meditation upon the slumbering garden underneath. The lilies,—"tall white garden-lilies,"—though it is late in the season now, and bordering on snows and frosts, are still swaying to and fro, and giving most generously a rich perfume to the wondering air. Earth's stars they seem to her, as she lifts her eyes to compare them with the "forget-me-nots of the angels," up above.

Her first disappointment about her love is desolating her. She leans her head against the woodwork, and lifts her eyes to the vaguely-tinted sky. Thus, with face upturned, she drinks in the fair beauty of the night, and, as its beauty grows upon her, her sorrow deepens.

"With how sad steps, O moon! thou climb'st the skies!
How silently, and with how wan a face,
Thou feel'st a lover's case!
I read it in thy looks; thy languish'd grace,
To me, that feel the like, thy state descries."

As she watches the pale moon, Sidney's sad words return to her. Just now Diana is resting in a path of palest azure, whilst all around her clouds, silver-tinged, are lying out from her, trembling in mid-air.

Great patches of moonlight lie upon the garden sward. One seems brighter than its fellows, and as her eyes slowly sink from heaven to earth they rest upon it, as though attracted unconsciously by its brilliancy. And, even as she looks, a shadow falls athwart it, and then a low, quick cry breaks from her lips.

"What is it?" says Kit, scrambling to her knees. [Pg 303]

"Only Brian," says Monica, with a hastily-drawn breath. A rich color has rushed into her cheeks, her eyes are alight, her lips have curved themselves into a happy smile.

"It's all right now, then, and I can go," says Kit, joyfully.

"Go? To bed, you mean, darling?"

"Yes, now I know you are *happy*," says Kit, tenderly; and then the sisters embrace, and presently Monica is alone, but for the shadow in the moonlight.

"It is you, Monica?" says Brian, coming close beneath her window, and looking upwards.

She leans out to him, her white gown gleaming softly in the moon's rays.

"Oh, why venture out at this hour?" she says, nervously. Now he is here,—woman-like,—fears for his safety, forgotten before, arise in all their horror. "They may have followed you; they may——"

"Come down to the balcony," he interrupts her, with a light laugh. "I want to talk to you. Nonsense, dear heart! I am as safe as a church. Who would touch me, with an angel like you near to protect me?"

His shadow, as he moves away, may again be seen for an instant, before he turns the corner of the old house; and Monica, opening her door softly, runs lightly down the corridor and the staircase, and across the hall and the drawing-room floor until she reaches the balcony beyond, where she finds his arms awaiting her.

"You have missed me all day?" he says, after a pause that to them has been divine.

"Oh, Brian, what a day it has been!" she clings to him. "All these past hours have been full of horror. Whenever I thought of your danger last night, I seemed to grow cold and dead with fear; and then when the minutes slipped by, and still you never came to me, I began to picture *you* as

cold and dead, and then——Ah!" she clings still closer to him, and her voice fails her. "I never knew," she whispers, brokenly, "how well I loved you until I so nearly lost you. I could not live without you now."

"Nor shall you," returns he, straining her to his heart with passionate tenderness. "My life is yours, to do what you will with it. And somehow all day long I knew (and was happy in the knowledge, forgive me that) that you were lonely for want of me; but I could not come to you, my soul, until this very moment. Yet, believe me, I suffered more than you during our long [Pg 304] separation." (If any one laughs here, it will prove he has never been in love, and so is an object of pity. This should check untimely mirth.)

"You felt it long too, then?" says Monica, hopefully.

"How can you ask me that? Your darling face was never once out of my mind, and yet I *could* not come to you. I had so many things to do, so many people to see, and then the poor old fellow was so ill. But have we not cause to be thankful?—at last the breach between our houses is healed, and we may tell all the world of our love."

"You should have heard Aunt Priscilla, how she talked of you when she came back to-day from Coole," says Monica, in a little fervent glow of enthusiasm. "It was beautiful! You know she must have *understood* you all along to be able to say the truth of you so well. She said so much in your favor that she satisfied even me."

She says this with such a graceful *naivete*, and such an utter belief in his superiority to the vast majority of men, that Mr. Desmond does well to feel the pride that surges in his heart.

"I really think she has fallen in love with you," says Miss Beresford, at the last, with a little gay laugh.

"Perhaps that is why she refused the squire," says Brian; and then he basely betrays trust, by telling her all that tale of the late wooing of Miss Priscilla, and its result, which awakens in the breast of that ancient lady's niece a mirth as undutiful as it is prolonged.

"And what were you doing all day?" she says, when it has somewhat subsided.

"Trying to keep my uncle—did I tell you he has fallen in love with your photograph?—from talking himself into a brain fever, and I was swearing hard, and——"

"*Brian!*"

"Only informations, darling! And I wouldn't have done that either, only I had to. They made me. Lay the blame on '*they*.' It wasn't my fault, indeed. If I had thought for a moment you had the slightest objection to that sort of——"

"Nonsense! don't be silly; go on," says Miss Beresford, austerely.

"Well, then, I listened patiently to a good deal of raving from Kelly on the subject of Hermia Herrick. I don't suppose I should have exhibited as much patience as I did, but for the fact that I was waiting on George—my uncle—at the time, and couldn't get away. And after that I listened with even more patience to a perfect farrago of nonsense from our sub-inspector about the [Pg 305] would-be assassin we have caught, and his fellows; and, besides all this, I thought of *you* every moment since last I saw you."

"*Every* moment. Not *one* neglected?" asks she, smiling.

"I'll swear to that too, if you like. I'm in good practice now."

"No, no," hastily. "I can believe you without that."

"Did you hear about your Ryde?" asks Desmond, suddenly.

"I disclaim the possession," says Monica. "But what of him?"

"He has been ordered, with his regiment, to Egypt, to fight Arabi, where I hope he will be shot. And the 36th are coming in his place."

"How can you say such shocking things?"

"Is it shocking to say the 36th are coming to Clonbree?"

"No, but what you said about Mr. Ryde."

"Oh, that! Well, I hope, then, if they don't knock the life they will knock the conceit and the superfluous *flesh* out of him: will that do?"

"Very badly. He was a horrid man in many ways, but he did *you* no harm."

"He dared to look at you."

"The cat may look at the king."

"But the cat may not look at my queen. So now, madam, what have you to say?"

"Well, never mind, then: tell me about Hermia. So Mr. Kelly is engaged to her?"

"Yes. He has just discovered her to be the most superior as well as the loveliest woman upon earth. He told me so. I ventured mildly, but firmly, to differ with him and enter a protest on your behalf, but he wouldn't hear of it. In his opinion you are nowhere beside the majestic Hermia."

"I know that. He is right," says Monica, meekly. But there is a reproachful question in her eyes, as she says it, that contradicts the meekness.

"He is *not*," says Desmond, with loving indignation, pressing her dear little head so close against his heart that she can hear it throbbing bravely and can find joy in the thought that each separate throb is all her own. "The man who thinks so must be insane. A fig for Hermia! Where would she be if placed beside *you*, my 'Helen fair beyond compare'?"

"You are prejudiced; you tell too flattering a tale," says Monica, with soft disparagement; but the [Pg 306] fond, foolish, lover-like words are very dear and sweet to her, all the same.

He has his arms round her; in her tender childish fashion she has laid her cheek against his; and now, with a slow movement, she turns her head until her lips reach his.

"I love you," she whispers.

Almost in a sigh the words are breathed, and a sense of rapture—of completion—renders the young man for the instant mute. Yet in her soul so well she knows of his content that she cares little for any answer save that which his fond eyes give.

A breath from the sleeping world of flowers below comes up to the balcony and bathes the lovers in its sweets. The "wandering moon" looks down upon them, and lights up the dark windows behind them, till they looked like burnished silver. A deadly silence lies on grass and bough; it seems to them as though, of all the eager world, they two only are awake, and alone!

"Do I count with you, then, as more than all?" he says, at length; "than Terence or than Kit?"

"You know it," she says, earnestly.

Suddenly he loosens his arms from round her, and, pushing her slender, white-robed figure gently backwards, gazes searchingly into her calm but wondering face.

"Tell me," he says,—some mad, inward craving driving him to ask the needless question—"how would it have been with you if I had been killed yesterday? Would you *in time* have loved again?"

I am not sure, but I think he would have recalled the words when it is too late. A quiver runs through the girl's frame; a great wave of emotion sweeping over her face transfigures it, changing its calm to quick and living grief. The moonbeams, catching her, fold her in floods of palest glory, until he who watches her with remorseful eyes can only liken her to a fragile saint, as she stands there in her white, clinging draperies.

"You are cruel," she says, at last, with a low, gasping cry.

He falls at her feet.

"Forgive me, my love, my darling!" he entreats, "I should never have said that, and yet I am glad I did. To feel, to *know* you are altogether mine——"

"You had a doubt?" she says; and then two large tears rise slowly, until her beautiful eyes look passionate reproach at him through a heavy mist. Then the mist clears, and two shining drops, [Pg 307] quitting their sweet home, fall upon the back of the small hand she has placed nervously against her throat.

"A last one, and it is gone *forever*." He rises to his feet. "Place your arms round my neck again," he says, with anxious entreaty, "and let me feel myself forgiven."

A smile, as coy as it is tender, curves her dainty lips, as she lifts to his two, soft, dewy eyes, in which the light of a first love has at last been fully kindled. She comes a step nearer to him, still smiling,—a lovely thing round which the moonbeams riot as though in ecstasy over her perfect fairness,—and then in another instant they are both in heaven, "in paradise in one another's arms!"

"You are happy?" questions he, after a long pause, into which no man may look.

"I am with *you*," returns she, softly.

"How sweet a meaning lies within your words!"

"A true meaning. But see, how late it grows! For a few hours we must part. Until to-morrow—good-night!"

"Good-night, my life! my sweet, *sweet* heart!" says Desmond.

THE END.

Transcriber's corrections

- p. 7: man!" says[say] Miss Priscilla, with such terrible energy and such a
- p. 7: this dismal picture. Tears born of tenderness spring[pring] to her
- p. 8: of vicious satisfaction[satisfactiou] for her.
- p. 15: then, not Ryan or the cook, but a much more perplexing[preplexing] vision
- p. 17: The Beresfords are[ars] like so many clocks wound up, and
- p. 22: "Yes, some other time," echoes Miss Penelope[Penolope], gently.
- p. 24: she pretty, Reilly[Rielly]?"
- p. 27: To-morrow[To morrow], if to-day proves successful and her rowing does
- p. 30: why lose this lovely afternoon, and that corner you were speaking of[speak of]?
- p. 40: child, this girl, Bella," says Miss Priscilla, still full of reminiscences[reminiscenses],
- p. 44: "She is a regular old wretch!" says the youngest Miss[Uiss]
- p. 47: Miss Priscilla Blake then enters the carriage. She is followed[follow]
- p. 50: face, but very velvety eyes and a smile rare but handsome[handsone].
- p. 54: amuse himself with, and he ought to be proud of his victories[victorles]."
- p. 56: "Then let me come too[to]?"
- p. 56: changes, and he colors perceptibly[perceptibily]; he hesitates too, and regards
- p. 60: "I decline to shrink," with unparalleled[unparalled] bravery. "I prefer
- p. 63: making Mr. Desmond preternaturally[perternaturally] grave.
- p. 68: "Don't trouble yourself to do that again," says Monica[Moncia]
- p. 68: rude[rud] things about Ireland, because I don't like that *either*."
- p. 69: even to herself, ignores that ignominious[ignominous] first) to declare in this
- p. 71: This with the learned air of one who could[would] say
- p. 87: "No giving in, no shilly-shallying[shilly-shillying], but downright determination.
- p. 91: In fact, he is so kind-hearted that I cannot think how[now] all that
- p. 91: At this Monica blushes a little, and twirls her rings[rings her] round her
- p. 93: that, as[a] I am not in love with *any one*, and hope I never shall
- p. 98: which has been accepted by Mitchell as a deliberate[delibirate] insult.
- p. 105: man is waiting and it is woefully[wofully] late."
- p. 108: kept it for you all along, you know. If you tell me you[yu] have
- p. 108: fat young marine, so it cannot be said that she has[has she] altogether a
- p. 112: turn again[egain] to the room beyond, and make search for the siren
- p. 120: "You were indeed!" interrupting him hastily, with a contemptuous[comtemptuous]
- p. 123: "Others[Other's] *can*!" says Mr. Ronayne. As he speaks he
- p. 125: Terence, in a tone that is not to be borne[born].
- p. 140: breed tyranny[tryanny]—that she hardly turns aside to meditate upon
- p. 147: "Not to-day[to day], I think," says Monica, lazily.
- p. 149: pointing[pionting] to a hanging spray of pink blossoms, satisfying as a
- p. 151: ago) that a dark-blue petticoat beneath, of some[come] coarse description,
- p. 151: says; but it's belike I'll never see a sight of his handsome[handsone] face
- p. 154: ugly spalpeen, if ye came without a civil tongue in yer head[hand]?"
- p. 157: for[or] him close to Monica. "What's the matther wid ye to-day,
- p. 157: keenly from Brian[Brain] to Kit, and then back again.
- p. 158: but with a lovely smile. "I am going to[] pick to some ferns for Aunt
- p. 159: and she repents[her] of her last words.
- p. 160: aggrieved[agrieved]; "that is visiting the sins of the uncles

upon
- p. 165: After this come[comes] sundry other jottings, such as—
- p. 166: "Oh, don't! my dear Penelope!" says Miss Priscilla[Penelope], with
- p. 166: he is,"—pointing through the window[winddw] to where Terence may
- p. 169: Mrs. Herrick, regards with dismay[disma].
- p. 171: "Nevertheless[Neverheless] speak. Anything is better than this ghastly
- p. 174: Conscience forbidding her, she abstains from[fron] entering those
- p. 178: "Do not say another[auother] word," says Monica, imperiously.
- p. 182: you. What shall I swear by, then?" he asks, half laughing[laughinn]:
- p. 186: and in perfect good faith. She knows[knowns] less of him than the
- p. 187: Fancy a frowzy couch saturated with tears! you know," reproachfully[rereproachfully]
- p. 190: arms,—as is[in] his habit with most children, being a special favorite
- p. 205: readily let her tapered[taper] fingers droop until they touch the pale
- p. 206: "And the good man! What of him?" says[say] Desmond, looking
- p. 206: like a superannuated[superanuated] ghost, only awfuller."
- p. 207: "That's[Taat's] a good thing," says Madam O'Connor, entering,
- p. 210: forever, boy though[through] you deem me; and, yet, is one ever a boy
- p. 211: nearer," says Mrs. Bohun, with[wiih] a soft laugh.
- p. 215: quarrel," says[said] Mrs. Herrick, in a perfectly even tone: "so don't
- p. 217: with himself too," says Olga, provokingly. "Really. I think[thinh]
- p. 223: "Don't be stupid!" says[say] this prospective wife, with considerable
- p. 223: "Don't be stupid!" says this prospective wife, with[wth] considerable
- p. 223: with increasing[in] temper.
- p. 223: The *denouement[denoument]* was full of interest,—positively thrilling! I
- p. 223: have addressed me that contemptuous[comtemptuous] remark."
- p. 234: "I am very glad of that," says Monica[Mouica], simply; and then
- p. 237: return, and thinking, somewhat sadly, how small a way[away] he has
- p. 238: Monica's week at Aghyohillbeg[Aghyohillberg] is drawing to a close.
- p. 239: protector. Faith, you needn't laugh, for it's[its] only common
- p. 241: the slightest[slighest] thought of her money."
- p. 242: "I know," says Monica, mysteriously: "she is *asleep*,—getting[gerting]
- p. 242: room, is gazing with dreamy delight at the pretty gown[grown] Miss
- p. 243: up this book) have mercy[merci]—that is, unfortunately, been debarred
- p. 248: the Egyptian[Egyptain] charcoal in the world could not make them long
- p. 248: usual[nsual]. "I see nothing in it. My grandmother always rouged,—put
- p. 251: How Madam O'Connor tells[tell] how lovers throve in the good old days when
- p. 255: You," uncertainly, "*are* going home to-morrow[to morrow], are
- p. 259: "I think[Ihink] all women would be better without them; and as
- p. 265: and the cowardly would-be assassin[assassins] so far is safe from arrest.
- p. 265: discuss[disscuss] the outrage.
- p. 265: "I retract[retrace] every foolish word I said a few minutes since.
- p. 272: much precipitancy[preciptancy], he flings his cigar to the winds, and, before
- p. 272: and——" Her voice trembles ominously[ominiously].
- p. 274: CHAPTER[CHAPTEK] XXVII.
- p. 275: off a piece of the cake and puts it in his mouth[mouths]. Desmond,
- p. 276: But just at the very last she had given way, and had

flung[flnng]
- p. 278: it. It casts despair upon the hopes that are[is] kindling afresh within
- p. 278: of her own hapless[hapeless] love story) between her slender fingers,
- p. 281: A pang, a sudden thought, shoots through[though] him, and renders
- p. 281: his voice, "*try* to forgive[foigive] her; be gentle with her. It was all
- p. 281: of old-world[old-words] grandeur in her manner, but a sad tremulousness
- p. 285: Priscilla gets apparently[apparenly] lost in the pages of "Temple Bar."
- p. 285: An hour glides by with aggravating slowness[slowuess]; and then a
- p. 287: you feel yourself pretty low[ow]. But I'd advise you to wait and see
- p. 289: they say—that she—and James Beresford[Berestord]—did not get on at
- p. 290: if you will look upon that as settled[setted], so shall I."
- p. 298: She laughs outright at this, and glances[glance] at him from under
- p. 301: and a sense of chill and fear, as strong as it is foolish, is overpowering[overpowdering]

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