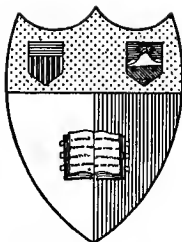


LADY KILPATRICK

ROBERT BUCHANAN





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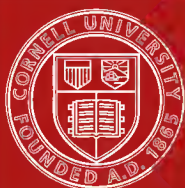
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LADY KILPATRICK

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LADY KILPATRICK

BY

ROBERT BUCHANAN

AUTHOR OF

'THE SHADOW OF THE SWORD,' 'GOD AND THE MAN,' ETC.



A NEW EDITION

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LADY KILPATRICK

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCES DESMOND AND DULCIE.

ON a summer evening, twenty years ago, a girl and a youth were strolling slowly along the strip of yellow sands which leads from the verge of the Atlantic to the steep line of rock dominated by Kilpatrick Castle.

The girl, who was not more than seventeen years of age, carried her hat and parasol in her hand: the first a serviceable article, little superior in form and material to that generally worn by the superior

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peasants of the district ; the other a dainty trifle in pale blue silk, better in keeping with the tailor-made dress and dainty French shoes in which its owner was dressed. She had a delightfully fair and fresh complexion, a little freckled by a too free exposure to the sun, and her dark blue eyes shone from under the rather disorderly waves of her light golden hair with an expression of harmless audacity and frank gaiety eloquent of youth and health and innocence.

Her companion, who might have been three or four years her senior, was a long-limbed, supple youngster of the finest Western Irish type. His hair, long, black and curly, escaped in natural ripples from under a battered soft felt hat, and framed an olive-hued face of great strength and delicacy, lit by a pair of black eyes sparkling with honest, boyish impudence. The merest shade of callow down darkened his upper lip. He was clad in rough and

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rather ill-cut tweeds, stained in brown patches with salt water, and the collar of a flannel shirt, innocent of stud or necktie, left to view a sun-tanned, muscular throat. His long legs kept swinging pace with the tripping lightness of the girl's walk, and he looked down at her from his superior height with a mingling of admiration and protection very pretty to witness, and of which she was perhaps a shade too obviously unconscious.

'We shall be late for dinner,' said the girl, breaking the first silence which had fallen upon them since the beginning of a long day's ramble. 'Uncle will be angry.'

'Sorra a bit,' replied the boy. 'The old gentleman's temper's queer at times, but it has to be mighty bad before he's angry with *you*. And as to being angry with *me*, sure I'm used to it. It's not often he's anything else.'

'My uncle is very fond of you,' said the

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girl, 'and very kind to you—kinder than you deserve, most people think.'

'Your uncle!' repeated the boy. 'Which of 'em?'

'Lord Kilpatrick, of course!'

'Indeed he is, then! He's been as good as a father to me nearly all my life. I owe to him all I have and all I am.'

'Tell me, Desmond,' said the girl, after another short interval of silence, 'why does Lord Kilpatrick take so great an interest in you, and yet let you run about like—like a young colt? Isn't it time that you began to take life seriously, and to think of doing something?'

'Faith, I suppose it is,' said Desmond. 'I've been trying for the last six months to find what kind o' life I'm fit for. I'll take to something by-and-by. As to why Lord Kilpatrick's so good to me, you know just as much as I know myself, Lady Dulcie; Mr. Peebles, that knows more of

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his ways than anybody else, says 'tis to aise his conscience.'

'To ease his conscience?' the girl repeated.

'Just that,' said Desmond. 'An old debt he owed and never paid till my parents were dead. 'Twas my mother asked him to pay it by looking after me. He promised, and he's kept his word—more power to him.'

'Do you remember your parents?'

'No. Both died before I could run about. They were gentlefolk, I suppose, or I'd not be called the Squireen, and I've the true gentlemanly knack o' getting into scrapes. But let's talk of something else, Lady Dulcie; 'tis a subject that always makes me sad.'

'Why?' asked Dulcie.

'Why,' said Desmond, 'there's times when I feel like a boat on the sea, all alone. I've neither kith nor kin, only friends. You'll laugh at me, I know, but

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there's times, when I'm by myself, I feel the mist rising to my eyes and the lump in my throat, thinking I've never known a father's care nor a mother's love.'

The bright face had lost its merry impudence for the moment, and the quick, swinging step slackened.

'Laugh at you !' repeated Dulcie. 'I'll never laugh at you for that. And *I* care for you, Desmond.'

'And that might come to be the bitterest of all,' said Desmond. 'You're like a star in the sky above me, Lady Dulcie. You're a rich young lady, and I'm only a poor boy dependent on strangers. But come, now,' he continued after a short pause, 'I've answered your question, will you answer mine? Is it true what I hear all about the place, that you're to marry Richard Conseltine?'

'Nonsense !' said Dulcie, flushing redly. 'I'm not going to marry anybody !'

'Ah !' said Desmond dryly, 'that's what

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all the girls say, but they never mean it.'

'I mean it. I think marriage is absurd. Don't you?'

'Sure I do,' responded Desmond. 'But the priest says it's convenient, if the world is to continue. Tell me, now, what d'ye think of Master Richard?'

'Think of him?' said Dulcie slowly. 'Oh, I think—I think he's my cousin, and as stupid as girls' cousins always are.'

'That's mighty hard on boys in general,' said Desmond laughingly, 'for they're mostly some girl's cousin. I may be myself, for all I know. But Richard's as fond of you as a fox of a goose—a duck, I mean. And that's why he hates *me*.'

'For shame, Desmond! How has he ever shown that he hates you?'

'Shown it? Faith, he doesn't need to show it. It just comes out of him like steam from boiling water. Much I care

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for the hate or the love of the likes o' him !
I can run him out of breath, fight him
out of time, gallop him out of hearing,
swim him out of seeing, chaff him out of
temper—and as for loving, sure if he loves
you, I'll just adore you, and so beat him
at that as well !'

The girl smiled, with her face concealed
by the brim of her sun-bonnet, and turned
a little away from this brisk wooer, whose
bursts of affectionate impudence were
generally followed by long intervals of
silence.

'You adore too many, Desmond.'

'Sorra one but yourself.'

'Nonsense!' cried Dulcie. 'What were
you doing with Rosie this morning in the
stable-yard?'

'I mistook her for her mistress,' said
Desmond. 'No, sure,' he added, as the
girl flushed a little angrily, 'I don't mane
that.'

'I should think you didn't "mane that !"'

DESMOND AND DULCIE

said the young lady. 'I should like to catch you kissing me.'

'I'm agreeable to be caught,' returned the unabashable.

'Oh, you Irish boys!' cried Dulcie, with a transparent simulation of contempt. 'You kiss anybody, so it's no compliment.'

'That depends,' said Desmond. 'There's kissing for duty, and kissing for interest, and kissing for love. There's a mighty difference between kissing a rose and kissing a thorn. But, after all, what's a kiss but a salutation?'

'You're a great deal too forward,' said Dulcie, with an almost matronly air of reproof.

'Then get behind me,' responded Desmond, 'and I'll go backward.'

The battle of wit was interrupted at this point by the sudden appearance of a man at the end of the ascent leading to the Castle. As he approached, the young

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couple fell apart a little, and advanced to meet him with a proper and respectful distance between them.

‘It’s Blake of Blake’s Hall,’ said Desmond, as he neared them.

‘In his usual condition of an afternoon,’ said Dulcie.

The man, tall and strongly built, with a mane of black hair and whiskers streaked heavily with gray, and a flushed face, was reeling and tacking along the narrow path. His hat reposed at a dangerous angle at the back of his head, and his waistcoat was open to catch the cooling breeze. There was an air of jolly ferocity about him; but in spite of that and of the disorder of his dress and the other signs of dissipation he carried about with him, the least observant person in the world would hardly have taken him for anything but a gentleman. As he came level with the young people he stopped in his walk and in the scrap of Irish song he was chanting,

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and saluted the young lady with a wide and unsteady sweep of the hat.

‘Good morning, Lady Dulcie.’ The voice, though husky, and at that moment a little thick with liquor, was sound and full and sweet, and the brogue simply defied phonetics to render it. ‘Ye’re a cure for sore eyes. Desmond, ye divil, give us your fin.’

‘You have been dining with my uncle, Mr. Blake?’ asked Lady Dulcie.

‘Faith, I have, then,’ returned Mr. Blake; ‘and if the company had only been as good as the dinner and the wine—and the whisky—’tis not yet I’d been after leaving it.’

‘And what was the matter with the company?’ asked Desmond.

‘It appears to me, Mr. Desmond Macartney,’ said Blake, with portentous, drunken dignity—‘it appears to me, sor, that a gentleman of the long descent and the high breedin’ of Lord Kilpatrick might

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have thought twice before inviting a man o' my blood to sit at the same table with a low, dirty, six-an-eight-scrapin' thief of an attorney. The back o' my hand and the sole of my foot to 'm ! the filthy reptile ! I've left my mark on 'm, an' I've spoke my mind of him, and 'twill be a long day ere he forgets Patrick Blake, of Blake's Hall.'

'My uncle ?' cried Lady Dulcie in a tone of half amaze, half question.

'Your uncle, Lady Dulcie !' answered Blake. "'Tis not in that fashion that a gentleman of my figure behaves to a gentleman of his. 'Tis not at the head of a nobleman that I throw bottles, nor, sor,' he continued to Desmond, as if the interruption had come from him, 'tis not him I'd call a dirty thief nor a filthy reptile, and that I'd have ye to know, sor.'

'You've been quarrelling with somebody at his lordship's table ?' said Desmond.

'I have, then ! And if Dick Consel-

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tine and that white-livered boy of his, and old Peebles—may the devil fly away with the whole boodle of 'm—if they hadn't interfered and spoilt the sport, I'd have had the ruffian's blood. By the lud, I'd have smashed him like an egg!' He drove one powerful fist into the palm of the other with such force as to over-balance himself, and was only prevented by Desmond's restraining hand from coming to the ground. ' 'Tis an insult before Heaven ; 'tis an insult to ask a gentleman to put his legs under the mahogany with such a snake as that !'

' You had your legs under the mahogany a pretty long time before you found 'twas an insult, from the looks of you,' said Desmond dryly. ' Now, look here, Mr. Blake, 'tis not for a boy of my years to be after offering lessons in politeness to a gentleman of yours, but I'll just ask you to remember that the host whose hospitality you're insulting is this lady's uncle.'

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Blake's ferocity vanished with ludicrous suddenness. He began to stammer apologies to Lady Dulcie.

'And then, too, Mr. Blake,' continued Desmond, 'you'd claim the right to choose the guests at your own table—if you had one,' he interpolated *sotto voce*; 'and Lord Kilpatrick, or any gentleman, has the same right.'

'And that's true, if the devil spoke it,' cried Blake. 'Desmond Macartney, ye're a gentleman. Ye can carry a gentleman's apology to a gentleman without demeaning yourself. Present my apologies to his lordship, and tell him that I'll honour myself by presenting them personally when I hear that he's got rid of his present company.'

'Tis Mr. Feagus, of Ballymote, that you've had the row with?'

'Faith then, it is, and ye can tell him that if he has the spunk to stand up at twenty paces I'll do sufficient violence to

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my feelings as a gentleman to honour him by lettin' daylight into him.'

'Nonsense, Mr. Blake,' said Desmond. 'Men don't fight duels nowadays.'

'No, by the saints!' cried Blake; 'they stab each other with inky pens, and suck each other dry with lawsuits, by the help of such parchmint-scrapin' vermin as Jack Feagus. 'Tis a dirty world we live in, Desmond, my boy, but sure that's all the more reason that the few decent men should stick together. I'm goin' on to Widdy Daly's shebeen, and if ye're inclined for a drink at the stone cow, I'll be proud of your company.'

'Later, perhaps,' said Desmond. 'I've Lady Dulcie to take care of now, you see.'

'Ah!' said Blake, with a vinous smile at the girl, 'tis the best end of the stick that ye've got hold of, Desmond Macartney. Whisky's a good familiar craythur, but 'tis a mighty poor substitute for the colleens.

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Good luck to ye. Lady Dulcie, your obedient servant.'

He swaggered off, his recent anger quite forgotten, and a moment later the quiet evening air rang tunably with a scrap of Irish song :

'And thin he'd reply, with a wink of his eye,
"Arrah! Paddy, now can't ye be aisy "'

'"Tis a beautiful voice,' said Desmond, standing still to listen. "'Twould have been better for poor Blake, maybe, if it hadn't been so fine ; it's just been the ruin of him.'

'The horrid old man!' said Dulcie. 'I wonder uncle admits him to his table.'

'Oh, sure, there's no harm in poor Blake!' said Desmond. 'He's nobody's enemy but his own, and there's no better company in Ireland, till he gets too much of the whisky inside him, or sees an attorney.'

'What makes him hate lawyers so?' asked Dulcie.

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‘Sure he has reason,’ returned the boy, who had all an Irishman’s apparently innate detestation of law and its exponents. ‘He lost one half of his acres in trying to keep the other half, years ago, before you and I were born, and Feagus, who acted for him, played him false. That’s the story, at least, and I don’t find it hard to believe, for he’s an ugly customer, that same Feagus.’

They passed together through the ruined arch, which had been in former times the main point of ingress, through the outer wall of the Castle, the rough and ponderous stones of which had, in these later years of peace, gone to the building of stables, offices, and peasants’ cottages. The main building, a huge castellated mansion with an aspect of great age and rugged strength, contrasted strongly in its air of well-kept prosperity with most proprietorial residences in that part of Ireland. Skirting the side of the Castle, they came upon a

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garden and pleasaunce, bright with flowering plants and emerald turf, commanding a view of the sea, now shining with the glaring tints of sunset, which were reflected too by the bay-windows of the Castle façade.

A heavy-faced, sullen-looking young man, dressed in an ultra-fashionable dress suit, and strangling in a four-inch collar, was sprawling ungracefully on a garden seat with a newspaper on his knees and a cup of coffee on the rustic table at his elbow. He turned at the sound of footsteps on the garden gravel, and seeing Dulcie, rose clumsily to his feet.

‘His lordship has been asking for you, Lady Dulcie.’

‘Dinner is over, I suppose?’ said Dulcie.

‘Yes, dinner is over,’ said the young man, scowling, ‘and so is the fight.’

‘We’ve heard all about the fight from Blake. We met him on the rocks,’ said Desmond.

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The young man took no heed of the remark, and did not even look at the speaker.

‘I’m getting pretty tired of living down here among these savages,’ he continued to Lady Dulcie, with an attempt at the accent of a certain type of London men, a drawl which struggled vainly against a pronounced Dublin brogue. ‘Bottles flying at people’s heads—it isn’t my style, you know.’

‘Sure,’ said Desmond, ‘if we’re so savage as all that, ’twould be a charity to stop here among us and civilize us. We’re willing to learn, Mr. Richard Conseltine, and willing to teach the little we know.’

The young dandy looked at him with a heavy insolence, in which there was a lurking touch of fear, but did not deign to address him.

‘His lordship’s awf’ly upset. My father’s with him, and the doctor’s been sent for.’

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‘I’ll go and see him,’ said Dulcie. ‘Desmond, you might go and ask Mrs. O’Flaherty for some dinner for both of us. I’m as hungry as a hunter.’

‘I’ll follow you directly,’ said Desmond.

‘You’ll come at once, if you please,’ she said, with a pretty imperiousness. ‘Come!’

They went away together, young Conseltine following them with a deepening of his usual ill-bred, angry scowl.

‘The supercilious brute!’ said Desmond under his breath.

‘One fight a day is quite enough, Desmond,’ whispered Lady Dulcie.

‘Fight!’ said Desmond. ‘Much of a fight ’twould be. I’d——’

‘Quite so,’ Dulcie interrupted him quietly. ‘I know you ’d—and as I don’t want you to, you’ll just go quietly, and ask to have some dinner laid for us, and keep out of his way for the rest of the evening.’

CHAPTER II.

LORD KILPATRICK.

FOUR of our leading characters, including our best apology for a hero, have introduced themselves. All that remains to be explained, at least for the present, is that Dulcie Broadhaven, called by courtesy Lady Dulcie, was the youngest daughter of Lord Belmullet, who had married Lord Kilpatrick's only sister and left her a widow with several children and heavily mortgaged estates in county Mayo; and that Dulcie was just then paying one of her annual visits to her uncle's castle in Sligo. Here she had struck up a friendship with young Desmond, who had for

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years been a sort of protégé of Lord Kilpatrick. Only in the wild west of Ireland are such intimacies common or even possible, but there, where the greater and the smaller gentry still meet on terms of free and easy equality, and where the vices of more civilized society are still unknown, they excite no comment.

Mr. Blake's abrupt and angry departure from the Castle left anything but comfortable feelings in the breasts of one or two of his late convives. Lord Kilpatrick, an elderly nobleman, whose originally feeble constitution had not been improved by early dissipation, and who was afflicted with a mysterious cardiac disorder, which caused him constant nervous tremors, was in a condition of semi-senile anger over Blake's violation of the sanctities of his dinner-table. Mr. Feagus, Blake's *bête noire*, was naturally and excusably enraged by the terms of unmeasured contempt in which the latter had addressed him. He

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was almost as great a rascal as Blake thought him, but he had a full measure of the commonest of Irish virtues, brute courage; and had it not been for the interference of my lord's brother, Mr. Conseltine, his son Richard, and old Mr. Peebles, my lord's butler, valet, general factotum, and tyrant, Blake might have had cause to regret his outrage on his host's hospitality.

‘The beggarly bankrupt brute!’ he cried. ‘By the blood of the saints, Mr. Conseltine, if ’twas not for the respect I owe you as my lord's brother—ye used me ill, sir, in holding me back!’

Conseltine, a dark man of late middle age, with an inscrutable face and a manner of unvarying suavity, poured a bumper of burgundy, and held it out to the angry attorney.

‘Drink that, Mr. Feagus. ’Tis a fine cure for anger. Maybe I’ve not used you so ill as you think. Mr. Peebles,’ he

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continued, 'you had better assist my brother to his room. Pray be calm, my dear Henry. The disturbance is over. If you will permit me, I will do myself the pleasure of looking in on you before retiring.'

His lordship, his face twitching, and his hands tremulous with anger, sat back in his chair, and pettishly brushed the old Scotchman's hand from his shoulder.

'At my table!' he ejaculated angrily, for the sixth time.

'Ay,' said Peebles, with a broad, dogmatic drawl. 'Ye should keep better company. Come awa', my lord, come awa'. Ye'll get nae good by sitting there glowering at folk.'

'Hold your tongue, sir!' snapped the nobleman. 'How dare you address me in that fashion?'

'Come awa', come awa',' repeated Peebles gently, as one speaks to a froward child. 'Ye'll be doing yourself a mischief.'

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The old lord rose tremulously, and left the room on his servant's arm. Mr. Conseltine stepped rapidly forward to open the door, and shook his brother's hand as he passed from the room. Then, returning, he addressed Feagus, who was still puffing with anger.

‘Sit down, Mr. Feagus. Fill again, man, and wash the taste of that drunken blackguard out of your mouth. Yes, yes,’ he continued, seeing Feagus about to speak; ‘he’s all that you could call him, but he has to be endured; he knows too much to be crossed.’

‘Knows?’ snorted Feagus; ‘and what does he know, then?’

Conseltine looked warily round before replying, and then, bending across the table till his face was within a foot of Feagus's, he said in a low voice :

‘He knows all about Moya Macartney.’

‘Moya Macartney!’ echoed his son.
‘And who, pray, is Moya Macartney?’

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‘She was a peasant girl, away down in Kenmare. My brother married her—a sham marriage—’twas Blake that played priest for him, and pretended to be in Holy Orders.’

‘That’s true!’ murmured Feagus. ‘And after—tell him what came of it!’

‘The old story. Henry grew tired of his plaything. One day, when the child—they had a child—was two years old, he told Moya the truth. She went on like a madwoman for a time, and then went quite cold and quiet. Henry thought ’twas all right, and that she had accepted the situation; but within two hours she disappeared, taking the child with her, and for a month or two nothing was heard of her.’

‘Well?’ said Dick eagerly.

‘Then,’ continued Conseltine, ‘one night—a devilish cold winter’s night it was, too—the boy was brought to my brother with a letter. “Take your child,”

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the letter said, "and as you use him may God use you! You'll never hear from me again." 'Twas signed "Moya Macartney," and a week later her body was found on the sands of Kenmare Bay.'

'A good riddance,' said Feagus. 'And now, Dick, guess the name of the child!'

Dick looked questioningly at his father, who said quietly:

'The child is the Squireen, Desmond Macartney.'

Feagus gazed sideways from under his ponderous brows at young Conseltine. The boy's sullen mask was almost as inscrutable as his father's smooth face.

'Does Desmond Macartney guess that he's my lord's son?' asked the youth.

'No,' said Conseltine. 'A story was trumped up that he was the orphan son of people to whom my brother owed obligations. He's too big a fool to trouble himself asking questions.'

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‘Well, then,’ said Feagus, ‘spake out and let me know what ’tis ye fear.’

‘I fear my brother’s weakness. He may leave all to this young vagabond. He’s been conscience - haunted about Moya Macartney’s death ever since it happened, and I know that more than once he has made his will in favour of the Squireen. There’s not a square yard of the estate entailed. He could leave it to a beggar in the street if he liked, and Dick would get nothing but the title. I’m as certain as I can be that he has sent for you to make a will; and with that old rascal Peebles always whispering in his ears, praising the bastard, and running down Dick, there’s danger.’

‘Well?’ asked the lawyer, after a pause.

‘Well?’ Conseltine’s smooth voice echoed him.

There was silence for a full minute, during which Feagus sat looking over his glass from father to son.

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‘ Plain speech is best, Mr. Conseltine. I’m a friend of the family—a humble friend—and I’d like to see justice. Will ye spake straight, and say what ye’d have done ?’

Conseltine smiled with half-shut eyes.

‘ I thought you’d understand me,’ he said coolly. ‘ I’m sure that the interests of the family are safe in your hands, and you may be sure that the family won’t be ungrateful.’

‘ Ye can trust me, sor,’ said Feagus. ‘ I’ll take care that justice is done. Ye needn’t fear your brother’s wakeness if I have the drawin’ o’ the will.’

Conseltine nodded again. The worthy trio brought their glasses together with a light chink, and drank.

‘ You see now,’ continued Conseltine, ‘ why Blake has to be humoured. He’s capable of blowing on us in one of his drunken tantrums, and then the whole story would be ripped up.’ Feagus nodded.

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‘Keep out of his way, Mr. Feagus, or, if you meet him, control your temper. That’s all I wanted to say, and I think we understand each other.’

‘Fairly well,’ said Feagus.

‘’Tis a pretty kettle o’ fish I’m stirring,’ he said to himself, when father and son had left him alone; ‘but I’ll be surprised if I don’t keep the biggest trout for my own share. I’ll help Conseltine to get the estates, and then I’ll be on his back like the old man o’ the sea on Sinbad’s. Here’s success to virtue! ’Tis a fine drink this, and ’tis not often, Jack Feagus, that ye get the chance of drinkin’ real wine out of a live lord’s cellar.’

Lord Kilpatrick had meanwhile been conducted to the drawing-room by the faithful, though outwardly unsympathetic, Peebles. Sitting at the open oriel window in a high-backed antique chair, he drew in the soft evening air with tremulous gulps. His face, which in youth and man-

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hood had been singularly handsome, was drawn with pain and pettish anger, and wore that peculiar gray tinge so often seen in the complexions of people afflicted with diseases of the heart. His long, waxen fingers drummed irritably on the arm-pieces of his chair, so that the rings with which they were decorated cast out coruscations of coloured light.

Peebles, a long, dry Scotchman, who but for his white hair might have been of any age from thirty-five to eighty, long in leg and arm, long in the back, long in the nose and upper-lip, shrewd of eye, dry and deliberate in action, moved soundlessly about the room until summoned by his master's voice.

‘Peebles!’

‘My lord?’

‘How do I look? No flattery, now. Speak out.’

‘Much flattery ye’ll get frae me, or ever did,’ muttered Peebles, taking his stand

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before the invalid, and scrutinizing him with a cast-iron countenance of no nameable expression.

‘Well, Peebles, well! How do I look?’

‘My lord,’ said Peebles, after another thirty seconds’ inspection, ‘you look as green as grass and as sick as pease-meal!’

‘Nonsense! Pooh! Rubbish!’ Each word shot out of his lordship’s mouth like a bullet. ‘I never felt better.’

‘Ye never looked worse,’ said Peebles.

‘God bless my soul!’ said his lordship. ‘It must be those damn’d globules that Clarke is giving me. They’re ruining my liver—actually ruining it. Infernal idiots of doctors!’ His fingers moved faster. ‘Go away, Peebles, go away!’

Peebles retired into the background, and stood scraping his lantern jaws with his right hand.

‘Peebles!’ said the old gentleman presently.

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‘ My lord ?’

‘ You don’t think——’ Lord Kilpatrick paused, hem’d, and finally shot the question out of himself with a suddenness which showed how strong a repugnance he had to conquer before he could ask it— ‘ you don’t think I’m going to *die* ?’

‘ Ye don’t suppose ye’re *immortal*, do ye?’ asked the unbending servitor.

‘ Of course not ! Confound you for an unfeeling blockhead !’ cried his master. ‘ Give me your advice—tell me what to do.’

‘ I’m to prescribe for ye?’ asked Peebles, looking, as he stood outlined against the oblong of white sky seen through the window, like the silhouette of some curious species of parrot.

‘ If you can !’

‘ What else have I been doing this last nineteen years,’ asked Peebles, ‘ but prescribing the one sure remedy ye winna tak’? My lord, your disease is pride.

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Try the black draught of humility and the blue pill of atonement !

‘What the devil are you talking about?’ asked his lordship, looking angrily at his servant, who returned his gaze quite unmoved.

‘Ye know weel what I’m talkin’ about,’ he returned, with no quickening of his usual deliberate drawl. ‘Acknowledge your child, Lord Kilpatrick, and thank God humbly on your knees for such a son to bless your declining years.’

‘By Heaven !’ cried his lordship, sitting up in his chair, ‘you—you—how dare you trifle with me?’ The gray shade deepened on his face, his trembling hands were pressed against his heart. ‘I have done my uttermost. I have provided for the boy. I have looked after his welfare—can a man do more?’

‘Ay, he can! Desmond Macartney is your flesh and blood. Acknowledge him before the world—it’s all the atone-

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ment ye can make to the poor lass that's gone.'

'She was not my wife!'

'Ay was she,' returned Peebles, 'in the sight o' God!'

His lordship struggled up in his seat with an oath.

'That's enough! You are out of my service, Peebles, from this moment—I discharge you!'

'I'm agreeable,' said Peebles, with unmoved calm.

'And without a character—mind that!'

'Character, is it?' said the dour old Scot. 'If ever I need one, I'll gang till a God-fearing man, and no' till your father's son. Good-afternoon to your lordship.'

Peebles had reached the door when his lordship's voice arrested him:

'Stay—stay! I—ha!—I command you!'

'Too late!' said Peebles coolly. 'I'm no longer at your lordship's orders—I'm discharged.'

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‘Nonsense!’ said Kilpatrick. ‘Why do you provoke me, Peebles? I have been a good master to you—a forbearing master. If we parted I should—I should miss you.’

‘No doot o’ that,’ returned Peebles, smiling. ‘Dismiss me, and ye dismiss your conscience. Dismiss me, and the Deil has ye, tooth and nail.’

His lordship laughed, but with no aspect of enjoyment.

‘You’re an assuming old scoundrel, Peebles. My conscience? Gad!—my conscience, indeed!’

‘Ay, and your conscience says, “Make amends to your own begotten son, the bairn of the puir lass who died for your sake, and who loved ye, Lord Kilpatrick.”’

The old lord’s head sank upon his breast; his eyes were dim with a sudden moisture.

‘I loved *her*, Peebles—I loved her!’

‘And yet ye played that deil’s trick on her, with the aid o’ yon scoundrel Blake.’

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‘How could I marry one so much my inferior?’ asked Kilpatrick tremulously. ‘And yet there are moments when I think that if—if she had not—if she had had a little more patience, I might have done it. There, there,’ he continued, with his usual testiness, ‘let it sleep. Don’t talk about it. As for Desmond, I have brought him up almost like my own son and heir. He has wanted nothing—he shall never want. I shall provide for him in my will.’

‘Grandly, no doot,’ said Peebles, with the abrupt snort which was his laugh, ‘with Mr. Conseltine at your lug, pleading for that smug-faced imp, his son.’

‘Desmond shan’t be forgotten,’ said Kilpatrick. ‘Nothing on earth shall make me forget Desmond.’

‘There’s just a chance,’ said Peebles, after an interval of silence, scraping at his chin—‘there’s just a chance that Desmond, when he kens ye’re his father, will refuse to tak’ a shilling o’ your money. I know

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the lad, for isn't he like the child o' my ain old age—haven't I watched over him and seen him grow—haven't I had daily to *lie* to him, and tell him that he has neither father nor mother, but only a kind friend who knew them both—and haven't I heard his voice break when he has asked of his dead mother? Man alive!' he continued, in answer to Kilpatrick's stricken look, 'do your duty—acknowledge your son before the world! If anything can get ye a free pass through the gates of heaven, it will be a deed like that!'

'Gad!' said Kilpatrick, 'I've a mind to do it, if only to spite my brother Dick. Peebles, do you think I'm a fool? Do you think I don't know Dick Conseltine? He's looking forward to my funeral. He wants the estate for young spindleshanks, my nephew. Suppose I showed him a trick worth two of that, eh? Ha, ha!'

His lordship's rather spiteful chuckle was cut short by a rap at the door.

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Peebles opened it, and Mr. Conseltine appeared.

‘My dear Henry,’ he said, advancing solicitously, ‘I trust you are better?’

‘Yes, yes,’ said Kilpatrick uneasily; ‘but——’

‘In that case,’ said Conseltine, smoothly interrupting him, ‘may I talk to you privately for a few minutes?’

‘If you desire,’ said his brother. ‘Don’t go, Peebles. Never mind Peebles, Dick. He’s my conscience, my—my *alter ego*—eh, Peebles?’

‘As it is a family matter,’ said Conseltine, ‘I would prefer——’

‘Peebles is one of the family,’ said his lordship; ‘I’ve no secrets from him.’

‘Very good,’ said Conseltine, suffering no shade of annoyance to cloud his smooth face. ‘Mr. Peebles doubtless agrees with me that you exaggerate the gravity of your condition, and that, unless you specially

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desire it, the drawing up of a new will can be postponed. In the will already placed in my possession you, as is natural, devise the bulk of your estate to your next-of-kin. Do I understand that you desire to alter or modify that arrangement ?’

His lordship, nervously interlacing his fingers, glanced at Peebles.

‘Tell your brother the truth, my lord. Tell him ye wish to leave the estates to your own begotten son.’

‘My brother has no son, Mr. Peebles,’ said Conseltine sternly.

‘Ay has he,’ said Peebles—‘Desmond Macartney.’

‘The fruit of a foolish liaison with a peasant. My dear Henry——’

‘Peebles is right, Dick,’ said Kilpatrick. ‘Desmond should be my heir.’

‘My dear Henry!’ said Conseltine, ‘you must surely be mad. Proclaim your folly to the world! Acknowledge a waif and

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stray as your flesh and blood ! It is simply midsummer madness ! Thank God, whatever you do with any portion of your personal possessions, you can't pass your patrimonial title to one born out of wedlock.'

Kilpatrick looked from his brother to Peebles, and back again, interlacing his fingers and dragging them apart.

'Faith,' he said, 'that's true, that's true, Peebles. The title must go to my next-of-kin. It must go. There's no help for it, and the title, with nothing to support it ! eh ? You must see that, Peebles. Gad, I'm sorry—I'm devilish sorry !' He rose. 'Never mind, Peebles, Desmond shan't be forgotten. Trust me, he shan't be forgotten.'

Conseltine offered him his arm, and he took it with a glance at his servant.

'Ay, my lord,' said Peebles, with an immovable face, 'lean on your brother. It's good to have loving kith and kin.'

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Voices and laughter were heard from the landing without, and a moment later Dulcie, with Desmond at her heels, entered the room.

CHAPTER III.

MR. PEBBLES RECEIVES A MESSAGE.

HIS lordship welcomed the appearance of the two young people as a relief from the further discussion of a painful topic.

‘So, young madam,’ he said to Dulcie, pinching her ear, ‘you’ve come back! And where have you been all the afternoon?’

‘On the sands,’ said Dulcie. ‘You’re not angry with me, are you?’ she asked, kissing him in a coaxing fashion, for the tone in which he had spoken was a little sharp. ‘I was so sorry to hear that you had been upset.’

‘It wouldn’t have happened if you had

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been at the table,' said Kilpatrick. 'I suppose I have to thank *you*, sir,' he continued to Desmond, 'for her absence? You're pretty spectacles, the pair of you,' he went on, looking at the disordered dresses, flushed faces and untidy hair of the young couple. 'You've been up to some mischief, I suppose?'

'Not this time,' said Desmond, smiling.

'Hold your tongue, boy!' snapped his lordship, with sudden and inexplicable ill-temper. 'Don't bandy words with me—hold your tongue!'

'Yes, sir,' said Desmond.

'Can't you find something better to do than to go wandering about the place, mixing with all the loafers and blackguards in the county? Can't you speak? You can chatter fast enough when you're not asked to.'

'You told me to hold my tongue, sir,' said Desmond, falling back on Irish prevarication and broadening his brogue.

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‘I shall have to take some order with you, sir,’ said Kilpatrick. ‘Come to my study to-morrow after breakfast. It’s time you were doing something—time you began to think of—of your future. There, there,’ he continued, patting Desmond’s shoulder, ‘I’m not angry with you, my boy. I’ve been upset, and in my state of health the least thing excites me—ask Peebles.’

‘Ay,’ said the Scot, ‘that’s true—you’ve a troublesome temper.’

‘Never mind,’ said Dulcie; ‘we’ll coddle you up and comfort you. I’ll play a game of backgammon with you, and if that doesn’t cure you, I’ll send over to Galway for mamma.’

‘For your mother!’ cried Kilpatrick. ‘My sister Matilda!’

‘She’s a capital nurse,’ said Dulcie. ‘She’ll set you right in a jiffy—as Desmond would say.’ The bit of slang passed unnoticed by his lordship in his terror at the suggestion it conveyed.

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‘ Good heavens, child ! Matilda will be praying over me day and night. I’m not quite so bad as that—I won’t be prayed over ; but for this little cardiac weakness, I’m in excellent condition. Ask Peebles. There, there, go and get your dinner, and take Desmond with you.’

‘ I shall come back afterwards,’ said Dulcie.

‘ Yes, yes !’ said her uncle. ‘ Come back by-and-by and give me my game of backgammon.’

‘ I met Mr. Blake on the road, sir,’ said Desmond. ‘ He asked me to deliver a message to your lordship.’

‘ Well,’ snapped Kilpatrick, ‘ what has the drunken brute to say to me ?’

‘ Just to apologize for what he did and said this afternoon.’

‘ His repentance is mighty sudden,’ said Kilpatrick.

‘ He didn’t repent at all till Desmond talked to him,’ said Dulcie, glad to

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get in a word in favour of her sweetheart.

‘So you’ve been giving Blake a lesson in manners, eh?’ said the old man. ‘And what did you say to him, and how did he take it?’

Desmond recounted the interview.

‘He took it like mother’s milk, sir. Sure he knew he was in the wrong. He’s not a bad fellow, if you know how to humour him.’

Peebles coughed behind his hand a dubious note, and Kilpatrick, catching the old man’s eye, said with something of his former testiness :

‘Well, well, that will do—go and eat your dinner. Peebles, wait on Lady Dulcie.’

The two young people and the old servitor left the room together, and Kilpatrick, sinking back into the seat he had quitted, sat for some time plunged in silent thought. Conseltine, leaning against

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the high, old-fashioned mantelpiece, took advantage of the shadow with which the room was filled, and of his brother's abstraction, to watch him narrowly. The old lord sighed once or twice, and gave one or two movements of impatience, and once the sound of a broken murmur reached Conseltine's ear, in which he distinguished only the word 'Moya.'

'Dick,' said Kilpatrick, suddenly turning towards him, 'I must provide at once for Desmond—I simply must do it—I should be a cad if I didn't.'

The intently watchful look which Conseltine's face had worn was replaced by his general expression of suavity as he came forward into the ray of light which was yet coming through the great oriel window.

'My dear Henry,' he said smoothly, 'you are perfectly right. 'Tis the dictate of nature and justice—it does you credit.'

Kilpatrick, who was anything but a

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fool, looked at his brother with a curious, quick, questioning glance. Conseltine replied to it as if to a speech.

‘I know, my dear Henry, I know! You’ve been thinking me grasping, and avaricious, and heartless, all this time, now, haven’t you? And why? Just because I’ve felt it my duty, as your brother and Richard’s father, to safeguard the interests of the family. The title goes to Richard, anyhow; and ’tis but common-sense, as you said just now yourself, that the bulk of the property should go with it. ’Tis mighty little I can leave him, and a lord without soil to his foot or a guinea in his pocket would be a queer spectacle, wouldn’t he? ’Tis not Lord Kilpatrick, anyhow, that shall be seen in that predicament; but you can provide for Desmond, too. You can give him all he has a right to expect, and still leave enough for Richard.’

The argument was unanswerable, the

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manner and voice with which it was put were suave, persuasive, honest; but Kilpatrick's only answer was to shoot another quick, questioning glance at his brother's face, and to tap the carpet with his foot.

'What would you call a proper provision?' he asked, after an interval of silence.

'Give the boy a profession, and—well, some hundreds a year. He's bright and clever, and with that income, and a calling in his fingers, if he can't make his way in the world, 'tis a pity.'

'A profession!' said Kilpatrick musingly. 'I don't know what the boy's fit for, unless it's for a soldier or a sailor.'

'Bad pay and poor prospects,' said Conseltine. 'Why not the Church?'

His lordship went off into a sudden cackle of laughter.

'The Church! Fancy Desmond a priest! Faith, 'twould be a pretty parish that he had charge of!'

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‘The bar?’ suggested his brother.

‘No; Desmond hates lawyers almost as much as Blake himself—it’s in the blood, I suppose—I’m none too fond of them myself. I’ll think it over, Dick, I’ll think it over; don’t bother me about it any more at present. Nothing shall be done without your knowledge and—without your knowledge, at all events.’

‘You are tired?’ asked Conseltine.

‘Yes, tired to death.’

‘Well, I’ll leave you to yourself. Good-night; sleep well, and you’ll be as sound as a trout in the morning. I’ll send up Peebles to help you to undress.’

He went; and Kilpatrick, rising from his seat, began to pace the room from end to end among the gathering shadows.

‘What the devil makes Dick Conseltine so tender all of a sudden?’ he asked himself. ‘Dictate of nature and justice, indeed! He hates the boy like poison, that I’m sure of. I can see it in his eye, sly and

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smooth as he is, every time he looks at him ; and so does that bull-headed young fool, his son. It's natural, I suppose. Faith, then, one sees the hatred that money breeds—brother hating brother, father hating son, son father ; the meanness, lying, ingratitude, intriguing ; I'd rather be the poorest peasant on my estate. I'd rather be Desmond, poor boy ; he knows his friends, at least. Nobody cajoles and flatters him.'

He fell silent again, and paced the room with a slower step.

'Poor Moya! Gad! how it all comes back to me! If she had been only a little more of a lady, just a shade more possible as my wife! She was a lady in heart and feeling; the truest I ever met, I think. I threw away a jewel when I cast her off—nineteen years ago.

'Nineteen years ago this month, and it is all as clear and vivid as if it had happened yesterday. Poor girl! I can see

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her face now as it was when I broke the secret to her. It will haunt me till I die, and after, if all tales are true. I was a scoundrel! It was a vile business. There are moments when I think Peebles is right: that it is my plain duty to let family considerations slide, own the boy, and leave him all. It wrings my heart to see him, handsome, manly, courageous, loved by everybody—my son! my own son!—and then look at that long-shanked cub of Dick's, and think that he, Desmond, is worth a million of him, worth a planetful of the stupid, ugly cur. How like his mother he is! Sometimes he frightens me; it is as if the dead came out of the grave to accuse me.'

He paused in his walk, and looked round the darkened chamber as if he feared an actual hidden presence there; then he walked to his desk, struck a match, and applied it to the wick of a small shaded reading-lamp; then, stealthily, and with

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more than one glance over his shoulder, he unlocked the desk, touched a spring, and drew from a secret drawer a scrap of paper and a miniature portrait. It was to the paper he gave his first attention. The writing, originally bold and heavy, had faded to a faint rusty red, the paper was stained and spotted. 'Take your child,' he read falteringly; 'and as you use him may God use you.' He sat staring at the flame of the lamp, blurred by the mist of gathering tears.

'As you use him, may God use you,' he repeated half aloud. 'I'll do my duty by the boy—I *must!* Before God, if Moya were alive!—No, even that wouldn't mend matters—it wouldn't even mend her broken heart. It was not that she wasn't my lady—not that her vanity was wounded—it was the treachery! She loved me—she thought me an honest man. It was her pride in me that was broken. God forgive me! I acted like a villain!'

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He took up the portrait and bent his eyes upon it with a long, regretful gaze. It was the work of a true artist, who had caught and reproduced with actual fidelity the features and expression of the proud and tender girl Kilpatrick had betrayed. The bright, gay face, instinct with youth and happiness, beamed from the picture ; the sensitive lips seemed almost to tremble as the world-worn old man gazed at them. The dress was that of the better class of an Irish peasant of twenty years ago ; but the hand which held the shawl about the throat wore jewelled rings.

‘ She sent back the rings—every scrap and every rag I’d ever given her,’ said Kilpatrick. They lay in the secret drawer, and rattled as his blanched fingers drew them forth. ‘ She wouldn’t wear the dress I’d given her when she had this taken. “ Let me be as I was when you first knew me, when the great lord wasn’t ashamed to tell the poor girl he loved her.” ’

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With a sudden passionate gesture of love and remorse, he carried the picture to his lips.

‘My lord!’ said a voice so startlingly close that it seemed to be at his very ear. Kilpatrick turned with a start and beheld a dim form standing in the shadow of the door.

‘Confound you!’ he said. ‘Who is it?’

‘Just Peebles,’ said that worthy with his usual slow Scotch drawl.

‘Confound you,’ said his lordship again, ‘why didn’t you knock?’

‘I knocked twice,’ said Peebles, ‘and got nae answer. Mr. Conseltine told me ye needed me.’

Kilpatrick dropped the letter and the miniature back into the desk and closed and locked it before speaking again.

‘Is Feagus still below?’

‘Ay,’ said Peebles. ‘He’s drinking with Mr. Conseltine and Mr. Richard. He’s just as drunk as a lord—begging your

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lordship's pardon. It's an old proverb, and like the most o' proverbs, it has its exceptions.'

'Drunk, eh?' said his lordship musingly.

'Verra drunk!' said Peebles. 'It's seldom he gets such liquor as comes out o' your cellar, my lord.'

'I suppose so,' said Kilpatrick absently; 'I suppose so. Well, you can help me to undress, Peebles, and then you can tell Mr. Feagus—you can tell him—tell him I'll write him regarding the business I have in hand.'

Peebles, his face hidden in the darkness which surrounded the little circle of light cast by the reading-lamp, smiled sourly.

'Verra weel, my lord,' he said; and Kilpatrick, rising, accepted his arm as a support to his bedroom.

Half an hour later Peebles descended to the dining-room, where he found Mr. Feagus with his head on the table and one arm curled lovingly round an empty bottle.

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It took some trouble to rouse him, and even when awakened he was for a time oblivious of his surroundings. At last, dimly defining the figure of Peebles, he took him for Blake, and rising with a sort of paralytic alertness, bade the old man stand upon his defence. Peebles, from a safe distance, proclaimed his identity; thereupon the lawyer, relinquishing his pugnacious ardour, wept copiously, and would have embraced him.

‘Gang hame—gang hame, now!’ said Peebles, repulsing him; thereupon Mr. Feagus’s tears ran faster. ‘My lord will send for ye if he should hae need o’ ye.’

‘You’ll come and have a drink with me, just for the sake of old times, Mr. Peebles?’ said Feagus.

‘Ye’ve had drink enough,’ said Peebles; ‘gang hame!’ and bundled him through the French window opening on the lawn. Finding himself in the open air, Feagus

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made straight by instinct for the high road. Peebles stood at the window watching him tacking and reeling along the path until he had passed out of sight, and was about to return and close the window, when he heard a voice hailing him—

‘Misther Paybles ! Misther Paybles !’

Peering into the darkness, he made out a dim form approaching him.

‘Who is it ?’ he asked.

‘’Tis me, sure—Larry.’

Peebles recognised the lad, a henchman of Desmond’s, a village loafer, generally to be found in the company either of the Squireen or of Lady Dulcie’s maid, Rosie.

‘Weel, Larry ! What hae ye there ?’

‘’Tis a letter !’ panted Larry.

‘For my lord ?’

‘No, ’tis for yourself.’

‘And where did ye get it ?’

‘I met a poor woman at the foot o’ the hill, and she asked me if I knew one Misther Paybles. “Sure I do,” says I.

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“Then,” ses she, “will ye earn the blessin’ on a poor craythur by givin’ this into his own hand?” “I will,” ses I—and here I am.’

Peebles accepted the scrap of paper Larry held out to him, and walking to the chimneypiece, read it by the light of the lamp: ‘One who comes from Kenmare, and who knew Moya Macartney’—he started, but, remembering Larry’s presence, controlled himself and read on—‘would like to speak with him who was the best of friends to that poor colleen before she died. Will you meet the writer at ten to-morrow night in the churchyard by the lake-side and hear her message, for poor Moya’s sake?’

Peebles stood silent for a moment, the paper shaking in his fingers.

‘Who gave ye this, did ye say?’ he asked.

‘A stranger,’ said Larry. ‘She said there was no answer.’

MR. PEEBLES RECEIVES A MESSAGE

‘Verra weel,’ said Peebles, in a tone as near commonplace as he could make it. ‘I’ll attend to it.’ Larry saluted and vanished.

Left alone, Peebles mused :

‘What’s the meaning of this? What mystery’s here? A droll kind o’ message, and a droll kind o’ place for an appointment, and a droll hour o’ the night for a respectable man to be gadding about a kirkyard. Weel, weel! Maybe it’s one of Moya’s kin anxious to hear news about the bairn. Be she friend or foe, angel or deil, I’ll be there.’

CHAPTER IV.

A SURPRISE FOR DESMOND.

MR. RICHARD CONSELTINE, junior, was not a young man of brilliant parts, but, like most intellectually slow people, he made up for the paucity of his ideas by the intensity with which he dwelt on those he possessed. He had made up his mind quite easily and naturally that his uncle's belongings should come to him in their entirety along with the title. He had grown to early manhood in the unquestioning belief that such would be the case.

But now, to his amazement, he had learned of the real relationship existing between his uncle and the Squireen. Up to

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that moment, Mr. Conseltine had thought it well to keep the knowledge from his son.

The two boys had hated each other, almost at first sight, with a quiet instinctive ferocity as of cat and dog. In his sullen grudging fashion Richard detested all who were not subservient to his wishes and interests, and especially hated anybody who was his superior in matters in which he most desired to excel. Desmond, as bright and quick as he himself was lumpish and dull, compared with him to his disadvantage at every turn. The poor Squireen, who owned not a single acre of soil, and was dependent upon Richard's uncle for his daily bread, for the clothes he wore, was the idol of the district. Mr. Richard Conseltine, the independent young gentleman of birth and means, was everywhere tacitly, and not unfrequently overtly, set at naught. In those exercises which are popular in all rural districts, and especially

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among the sport-loving people of Ireland, Desmond was easily Richard's master. He was the best shot, rider, angler, boxer, dancer, and fly-fisherman of his years in the county. He was handsome in person, and had with all women, young or old, that serene and beautiful assurance which of all masculine qualities recommends itself most instantly to the feminine heart.

All women loved him, and did their best to spoil him. Every man and boy on the estate was his willing servant and accomplice in the freaks and frolics and breaches of discipline in which he delighted, confident that the simple excuse, 'Twas the Squireen that asked me,' would be quite sufficient to calm the wrath of my lord or his agent, or even of the dreaded Mr. Peebles, before whom, it was popularly believed, even his lordship trembled.

Richard could not but contrast this willing and eager service with the frigid

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obedience which was paid to him as the future owner of the soil. Had he been other than he was, he might have found a lesson in the contrast, and have penetrated the simple secret of Desmond's popularity, which lay more in his sunny good-temper, his quick sympathy, his courage and generosity, than in the physical superiorities which so galled his cousin's envious mind.

Ideas, it has been said, were not common with Richard, but the evening of the events just recorded was made additionally memorable to him by the implanting of a new one in his mind. He had happened to pass on the terrace below the open window of the drawing-room during the conversation held between Lord Kilpatrick and the faithful Peebles. The window was open, and the calm evening air had brought one single utterance of the old servant's distinctly to his ears.

'There's just a chance,' the deliberate Scotch voice had said, 'that Desmond,

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when he kens ye're his father, will refuse to tak' a shilling o' your money.'

Now, the moment Richard was made aware of Desmond's illegitimacy, the secret began to tremble at his lips. He longed to dash the insolent triumph of the nameless adventurer who diminished his chances of succession, and by every morsel he ate seemed to lessen the future possessions of the rightful heir. He was only restrained from insulting Desmond on the score of his birth by his father's strenuous assurance that to touch on that matter might be to lose his uncle's favour at once and for ever. Conseltine senior had impressed that belief on him very forcibly. Richard rolled the sweet morsel of insolence round his tongue a score of times, with a rich anticipation of the time when it should be safe to humiliate his adversary by full publicity.

Peebles' words came to him as a veritable revelation. For just a minute the

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solution of the whole difficulty, so long sought, so ardently desired, seemed almost ludicrously easy. He had only to acquaint the Squireen with the truth in order to secure the even greater and much more solid pleasure of inheriting his uncle's estate. Then a doubt came and chilled him. We are all apt to fancy that our neighbour's conduct in any given conditions will closely resemble our own conduct under like circumstances. Richard knew, and—no criminal being ashamed of his own instincts—confessed to himself quite openly and with no embarrassment, that if he, in Desmond's place, had learned the secret of his birth, the effects of the knowledge would certainly not be those foreshadowed by Peebles. Rather the contrary! The stain on his name would have been an added claim on the generosity of the father who had so wronged him. Still, a fiery-tempered fool like Desmond might think differently. Peebles' words

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stuck in his mind, and returned during the night with a constant reiteration, keeping sleep at arm's length. Again and again his clumsy imagination tried to realize the effects of the betrayal of the secret, until he determined to take the trouble to his father, and consult with him as to the best line of conduct to be followed.

He descended to the breakfast-table to find my lord and his father seated together there, attended by Peebles, but neither Desmond nor Dulcie was present. In answer to a remark on their absence from Kilpatrick, Peebles deposed to having heard them laughing and talking on the lawn at least three hours earlier, and suggested that they had gone on one of their eternal excursions. Breakfast was almost over when they appeared, flushed and radiant. Kilpatrick had shown some testiness in remarking their absence, but Dulcie's good-morning kiss had quite dissipated his gloom, and he listened with a good-

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tempered smile to their chatter about the morning's adventures.

'Don't forget to come to the study, Desmond,' he said, as he rose and passed out on to the terrace with his newspaper.

'All right, sir,' said Desmond.

Conseltine also withdrew, leaving the three young people together, Richard sitting apart, and scowling angrily at Dulcie and her companion, who ignored his presence completely.

'Dulcie,' he said suddenly, 'won't you come into the drawing-room and teach me that song? You promised, you know.'

'Not now,' said the girl, 'I'm busy. I've got to go and look out my fishing-tackle.'

'Are you going fishing?' asked Richard.

'Yes,' said Desmond; 'she's going with me.'

'I wasn't addressing you,' said Richard.

'Thank you for the honour you do me

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in not addressing me!' said Desmond quietly.

There was something in Richard's manner which the lad could not define, something more than usually insolent and offensive.

'I really think, Dulcie,' said Richard, 'that you might give us a little of your company now and then, instead of running all over the county like a madcap with all the tatterdemalions in the village. I wish we were back in Dublin, with civilized people about us.'

'Really, Mr. Conseltine,' said Dulcie quietly, but with a manner which marked her sense of the side-sneer at Desmond, 'I can choose my society without your assistance.'

The lowering look which always rested on Richard's heavy features deepened.

'No, you can't,' he said roughly; 'or, at all events, you don't. You're getting yourself talked about all over the county,

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wandering about like a girl off the hillside with any vagabond who——'

'I beg your pardon,' interrupted Desmond, with great smoothness of manner, but with a dangerous glitter in his eyes, 'but civility costs nothing, Mr. Richard. Were you alluding to me at all?'

'Well,' said Richard, trying hard to revert to his usual manner of heavy insolence, but speaking angrily, 'and what if I was?'

'Why——' returned Desmond, rising. 'Don't be afraid, Lady Dulcie, I'm not going to quarrel. If I've said or done anything to give offence to this kind, civil-spoken, amiable young gentleman, I'm willing and anxious to apologize. What's my offence, sir?'

'You hang too much about the Castle,' said Richard. 'I know his lordship encourages you, but you ought to know better than to presume on his good-nature.'

'Don't you think,' said Desmond quietly,

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‘that you might leave his lordship to say that?’

‘You’re not fit company for my cousin,’ cried Richard hotly.

Dulcie rose with an exclamation of anger, but Desmond laid his hand upon her arm, and she remained silent.

‘And don’t you think,’ continued Desmond again, ‘that you might leave that for your cousin to say? She hasn’t said it yet.’

‘Said it!’ cried Dulcie, in a white heat of anger; ‘why should I say it? A gentleman is fit company for anybody.’

‘A gentleman!’ sneered Richard. ‘A gentleman! Yes, but you should be able to tell the difference between the real article and the counterfeit.’

‘Oh!’ said Desmond, quietly still, but with more keenly glittering eyes and a pulsating voice. ‘And I suppose I’m the counterfeit? Is that what you mean?’

‘That is just what I mean,’ returned Richard.

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‘Then,’ said Desmond, ‘if Lady Dulcie will do us the honour to leave us to ourselves, or if you’ll kindly step out on the lawn, the counterfeit will give the real article a taste of his quality.’

‘Desmond!’ cried Dulcie.

‘All right, Lady Dulcie,’ said Desmond, soothing her with his hand, and keeping his eye on Richard’s face.

The girl let the endearing tone and action pass unregarded. They stung Richard to fury.

‘You beggar!’ he cried.

Desmond made a step towards him; Dulcie clung to him, beseeching him to be quiet.

‘Don’t be alarmed, now,’ said Desmond, with his Irish blood dancing in his veins, and his heart all aglow with love of battle. ‘We’re only going to have a small civil kind of a fight, just to see how *real* he is!’

Peebles, who had entered the room un-

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observed, overheard these last words, and came between the combatants.

‘Master Desmond,’ he said, ‘I’m surprised at ye. Ye’ll no’ disgrace his lordship’s house by brawling in it, as if ye were in a tap-room or a hillside shebeen?’

‘Stand out of the way, if you please, Mr. Peebles,’ said Desmond.

‘That I’il no’ do,’ returned the old Scot. ‘Ye’ll just be a sensible lad, as I’ve always thought ye, and tell me what’s the trouble. You’re the calmest, Master Richard—what’s a’ the steer about?’

‘I warned that ruffian,’ said Richard, ‘to avoid my company. He retaliated, as you see, and——’

‘You insulted him cruelly!’ cried Dulcie, with a heaving breast, and a glitter of tears in her soft eyes. ‘Never mind him, Desmond—come away!’

‘Insult *him!*’ cried Richard. Peebles’ presence, and the near neighbourhood of his lordship, gave him some sense of

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security, and Dulcie's obvious sympathy with the object of his antagonism enraged him beyond all control. 'Insult *him!* By the powers! Ask him who and what he is, and then you'll know what right he has to be in your company, or in the company of any young lady.'

The anger half faded from Desmond's face, and gave way to something of a look of astonishment.

'Who and what I am?' he repeated. 'Sure, I'm Desmond Macartney.'

Richard repeated the name, and gave a scornful laugh.

'And who has anything to say against me? I'm as good a gentleman as yourself.'

'That's a lie,' said Richard. 'You're a pauper, dependent on my uncle's charity for bread.'

Peebles let out a slow growl of remonstrance and warning, through which Dulcie's voice sounded like the clear note

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of a flute through the scraping of a violoncello.

‘For shame!’ she cried, her cheeks burning with a hot flush of generous indignation.

‘Shame!’ cried Richard. ‘If there’s any shame, it’s there!’ He pointed his finger straight at Desmond.

‘Hold your fool’s tongue!’ said Peebles gruffly.

‘I will speak!’ shouted Richard. ‘Everybody knows—he knows—that his mother was a common peasant woman, and that he is my uncle’s bastard!’

Desmond sprang past Peebles with a cry, and struck his traducer in the face.

‘Keep him off!’ cried Richard, white and reeling from the blow. ‘Curse you, Peebles, why don’t you keep him off?’

‘Ye fool!’ said Peebles, with angry contempt. ‘Ye pitiful, cowardly fool, ’twad serve ye right if he beat the life out of your carcase!’

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Desmond, blind with fury, had seized Richard by the throat.

‘Down on your knees!’ he cried.
‘Take back those words!’

Just then Kilpatrick’s gray face and trembling figure appeared at the room door—none but Peebles saw him.

‘Take them back!’ cried Desmond, raising his fist to strike again.

‘Let me go!’ cried Richard desperately.

Desmond’s hand slackened on his collar.

‘Speak!’ he cried. ‘Tell me, or I’ll strangle you! Is it the truth ye’ve told me? Is Lord Kilpatrick my father?’

‘Yes,’ cried Richard, ‘and you know it!’

Desmond released him, and fell back with a moan. Cur and coward as he knew the man to be, his words carried conviction. As by a lightning-flash, he read the meaning of a thousand details of his past life, which, thus illuminated, went to prove the truth.

‘My mother!’ he said. ‘My mother!’

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No, no! Don't say it—don't say it! Don't say it, for the love of God! I can't bear it!' He broke into a terrible sob.

'Ye're just the champion fool o' my experience,' said Peebles, as he passed Richard on his way to the door, to the frame of which Lord Kilpatrick was clinging, looking on the scene with haggard eyes.

'You cad!' said Dulcie, flinging the word at Richard like a missile.

'Peebles! Desmond! What's all this?' cried his lordship.

'The secret's out, my lord,' said Peebles. 'The poor lad knows he's your son.'

Kilpatrick looked with a ghastly face towards Desmond, who glared back at him like one turned to stone.

'Uncle,' cried Dulcie, 'speak to him. Tell him it is not true.'

'It *is* true,' said Kilpatrick hoarsely. Desmond, my boy, my son, speak to me!'

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‘*You!*’ said Desmond. ‘You—you are my father?’

Lord Kilpatrick tottered into the room and fell into a chair.

‘And my *mother*,’ said Desmond—‘my mother? What of *her*?’

‘She died, long years ago,’ said his lordship.

‘Who was she? Speak!’ cried Desmond—‘speak! I must know!’

‘She was named Moya Macartney,’ said Kilpatrick. ‘She was—she——’

‘She was not your *wife*?’ said the boy. ‘Then I am—I am what he called me!’

‘Convention!’ cried Kilpatrick—‘mere convention! I acknowledge you as my son. Who will dare to point at you? Take witness, all of you!’ he cried, rising from his seat, ‘Desmond Macartney is my son. Those who will receive him and treat him as such are welcome here. Those who will not, let them go their ways.’

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‘Uncle!’ cried Dulcie, ‘God bless you! Desmond——’

‘Hush, Lady Dulcie!’ cried Desmond. ‘Don’t speak to me now, or my heart will break. I was too happy to-day,’ he said brokenly; ‘I might have known that trouble was to come.’

Kilpatrick made a movement towards him.

‘Keep back!’ said Desmond. ‘Don’t come near me! I’m *her* son, not yours. I’ll never eat your bread, or call you father.’

So saying, he pushed his way past Peebles, who sought in vain to restrain him, and with one wild glance at the assembled group, rushed from the room and ran like a death-struck deer from Kilpatrick Castle.

CHAPTER V.

LADY DULCIE OFFERS CONSOLATION.

ON Desmond's departure, Dulcie left the room, and ran swiftly to her own chamber. Her hurried ring at the bell was answered by her maid, Rosie.

'Mr. Desmond has left the Castle,' said Lady Dulcie. 'He has had a misunderstanding with his lordship. Follow him, and tell him not to leave the village till he sees me. Quick!'

'Sure, there's no hurry,' said Rosie coolly.

'But there is!' cried Dulcie. 'The poor boy has quarrelled with Lord Kilpatrick, and vows that he will never come back.'

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‘He’ll not lave the place without sayin’ farewell to the boys at Widdy Daly’s,’ said Rosie. ‘There’s a grand dance there to-night, and the whole counthryside will be there. I’ll just go to the shebeen, and tell the widdy and the boys to kape on the watch for ’m, and lave word that I have a message for him from your ladyship.’

Rosie’s instinct had not deceived her, for that night Desmond was found sitting in the kitchen of the rude hostelry kept by the Widow Daly, listening to the strains of Patsey Doolan’s fiddle, and sombrely watching the dance of boys and colleens, in which, for the first time during their long experience of him, he had declined to take part. Rosie delivered her message. Desmond heard it with a half-averted face, which did not hide from the girl’s keen eyes a flush of pleasure on his cheek. He pressed her hand gratefully, but shook his head with a sad smile.

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‘ ’Tis like her, Rosie—’tis like her. But that’s all over now. What can she have to say to a poor devil like me? She’s up there with the reigning government of angels, and I’m down here with the opposition. Well, never mind! The world’s wide, and there’s room in it somewhere for us all. Don’t stand staring at me there, Rosie, as if I was a show in a fair. There’s Larry dying to shake the rheumatism out of his legs. Play up, Patsey, you rogue, and put the music into their heels!’

‘Ye’ll dance yourself, Mr. Desmond?’ said Rosie. ‘I’d be proud to stand out on the floor wid ye.’

‘And, sure,’ said Larry, ‘I wouldn’t be jealous if ye did!’

‘No, no,’ said Desmond. ‘Go and enjoy yourselves, and leave me to myself. Play up, play up!’ he shouted wildly, ‘and the devil take the hindmost!’

Rosie and Larry left him with pitying

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glances. The dance proceeded, the Squireen sitting apart and looking on with haggard eyes at the mirth he had so often shared.

A sudden cessation of the music and the measured beat of feet upon the earthen floor made him look round. Lady Dulcie stood just within the door.

‘Lady Dulcie!’ Desmond cried in astonishment, and rose and went towards her. ‘What has brought you here?’

‘I’ve come to speak to you,’ she said. ‘Desmond, I *must* speak to you.’

‘But,’ replied the boy, ‘this is no place for you.’

‘It’s the place where *you* are,’ said the girl, with a tender look shining in her eyes, ‘and that’s enough for me.’

Larry, standing arrested with his arm about Rosie’s waist, caught the words.

‘D’ye hear that?’ he said to his partner.

‘Clare out, boys,’ cried the widow. ‘There’s the rale stuff in the next room;’

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and in a moment, as if by magic, the whole company melted away,—only Larry and Rosie lingering at the door.

Widow Daly wiped the seat of a stool for her guest, and set it for her.

‘Sit ye down, my lady. Ye’re kindly welcome.’

Dulcie sat, looking up in Desmond’s face.

‘She’s the light of his eyes,’ whispered Rosie to her sweetheart. ‘See how she looks at him.’

‘Ah!’ said Larry, ‘when will ye be afther lookin’ at *me* like that?’

‘When your desarts are ayqual to your impudence!’

She curtsied, and drew Larry from the room after the others. The Widow Daly followed, dropping an ecstatic curtsey before she disappeared.

There was a long pause. Desmond sat looking sadly at the fire.

‘Desmond!’

‘Yes, Lady Dulcie.’

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‘Dulcie to you, now and always,’ she said, taking his hand.

‘Don’t, don’t!’ said the lad. ‘I can’t bear it. I’d rather you let me drift away from you like a leaf on the running water. I can bear all the rest, but not your pity.’

‘It’s not pity that brings me here,’ said the warm-hearted girl, with all her heart in her face. ‘It’s something more. I’ve come to ask your forgiveness.’

‘My forgiveness!’ cried Desmond. ‘For what?’

‘For all my foolish ways—my thoughtless words. I ought to have known better. But we were both so young. Well, I was a child this morning, but seeing your trouble, I feel to-night like an old, old woman.’

‘Ah! You’re still what you always were, Dulcie, sweet and beautiful. ’Twas on a sunny summer’s day God made ye, and ’twas the brightest bit of work He ever did!’

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‘You’re not going away, Desmond?’ she besought him.

‘I must,’ he answered.

‘I came to ask you for your father’s sake, for mine, to stay a little while. You will, Desmond? For my sake!’

‘They’re words to conjure with, Dulcie,’ said Desmond. ‘But sure I can’t. D’ye know what they’ll all be calling me? D’ye know what name they’ll soon be giving me? How can I stay and look you in the face?’

‘Oh, Desmond,’ she pleaded, ‘your father——’

‘Don’t spake of him!’ cried Desmond.

‘He loves you, Desmond. He’d give his right hand to put things right. If you will remain he will acknowledge you as his son—make you his heir.’

Desmond shook his head.

‘He can’t give me the one thing I want,’ said Desmond proudly and sadly. ‘He can’t take the blot off my name, the

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stain off my mother's. He can't turn back the years and bring her from the grave.'

'He can make amends,' said Dulcie. 'He will.'

'It's too late for that, too,' answered Desmond. 'Ah, spare me, Dulcie! Don't speak of it! Don't remind me of my disgrace!'

'Your disgrace?' repeated Dulcie. 'Where is the disgrace to you? Where there is no sin there can be no shame; and you are innocent. Desmond, there are others who care for you. There's one,' she added softly, 'who would give all the world to see you happy. Don't make her miserable by going away.'

'You mean that?' cried the boy. 'No? Oh, Dulcie, don't be too good to me! Don't let me think you care for me!'

'Why not, when I do care for you?' returned the girl. 'And I do, I do!' She took his hand and rose from her seat. 'I think you're very ungrateful.'

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‘Ungrateful ! To *you* !’

‘Yes. You think me a child still, a doll, with no heart, or head, or will of my own. Ah ! you don’t know me. If you were to say, now, “Dulcie, I want you,” I’d follow you to the end of the world.’

‘Dulcie !’ He stretched his arms towards her, but fell back and let them drop at his sides again. ‘I daren’t ! I mustn’t ! There’s a great black river running between you and me.’

Dulcie laughed with the old dashing spirit, so alien to his own.

‘Then show your pluck. Strip off your coat, plunge in, and swim across the river ! I’ll help you up the bank when you reach the other side.’

‘Oh, Dulcie ! my darling !’ Desmond caught her in his arms with a sudden gust of passion, and strained her to his breast.

‘Dulce, dulce domum !’ she said with another laugh, though her own eyes were

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brimming. ‘You may *kiss* me if you like,’ she added with ineffable drollness. Choking with tears, he pressed his lips to her face. ‘That’s a dreadfully damp kiss. Sure, you’ve swallowed the river. . . . No, you shan’t go. I’ve got you, and I mean to keep you.’

‘You—you love me, Dulcie?’ said Desmond, breathless with wonder and delight.

‘A wee little bit,’ said Dulcie; ‘just the least little bit in the world. Now, just sit down like a good sensible boy and listen to me. No more nonsense, if you please, about “shame” and “disgrace.” Our parents don’t consult us as to the how and the where of our being born, and I don’t see why we should trouble our heads about *them*! A boy’s a boy, and a girl’s a girl, and this boy and girl quite understand each other. Don’t we?’ she asked, nestling up to him. ‘I never knew you to be so backward before, Desmond! That river has washed all the old impudence out of you.’

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Her raillery could not altogether conquer Desmond's gloom.

'It can't be, Dulcie. You're only opening the door to a fool's paradise for me. I've lived in one long enough. 'Tis time I came out and looked at the world as it is. It can never be. It's madness to think of it. Even if it were different, even if the trouble had never fallen on me, I could never have hoped to win you. You're a lady. I'm only the Squireen.'

'You've grown mighty humble all of a sudden,' said Dulcie. 'You weren't like this only this afternoon. After I'd waded with you across the pool, you had the impudence to kiss my shoes.'

'Sure I did,' replied Desmond. 'And I'm ready now to kiss your feet.'

'That's better,' said Dulcie, nestling nearer yet. 'That's more like the old Desmond. But a boy of taste would look a little higher. The mouth's prettier, and more "convenient," as you'd call it.

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Ah ! she continued, with a sudden gush of tenderness, 'don't think me too bold ! don't think me an outrageous little flirt ! It wasn't till I felt your trouble that I knew my own heart, and learned that I loved you so much.' She broke into a sudden sob. 'Tell me you're not miserable any more !'

'Miserable !' cried Desmond, almost sobbing too ; 'I'm the most miserable and the happiest man in Ireland. But, oh, Dulcie, darling, I've sworn——'

'But you mustn't !' said Dulcie, laying her fingers on his lips. 'My sweetheart mustn't swear.'

'I mean, Dulcie, that while this shadow is over me I can never hold my head up again. I must leave this place. I've neither land nor title, father nor mother——'

'I don't want your land or your title,' interrupted Dulcie, 'nor your father and mother. I want *you*, and I've got you,

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and I shall keep you. Try to get away if you dare! You can't!

A sound behind them made them both start, and, turning quickly, Desmond beheld Peebles standing in the doorway. He turned away to brush the tears from his eyes, but Dulcie hailed the intruder with delight.

'Come in, Mr. Peebles,' she cried, 'and talk to this stubborn boy. He won't listen to me a bit.'

'Is that so?' said Peebles dryly, scratching at the scrap of gray whisker which decorated his cheek. 'I thought jest noo he seemed very attentive to your discourse! Desmond, laddie,' he continued, 'my lord has sent me after you. Noo, noo, ye'll just hear me deliver my message. He's oot of his mind, almost, clean daft, and neither pancreatic emulsion nor leever pills will hae much power to help him through in this trouble, I'm thinking.'

'Tell Lord Kilpatrick from me,' said

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Desmond, when he could trust his voice, 'that I've nothing more to say to him.'

'Hoot, lad!' said Peebles. 'Blood's thicker than water. Ye can't shake off the ties of relationship in that fashion, and cast awa' your father like an old glove. For, after all, ye ken, he *is* your father.'

'No!' said Desmond. 'He's no father of mine.'

'Then he himself is sairly mista'en,' quoth the old servitor. 'He's been leevin' for years under that impression!'

'The man who broke my mother's heart is neither kith nor kin to me! Dulcie, good-bye! God bless you for all your goodness. You must try to forget me.'

'Oh, Desmond!' cried the girl, 'you can't leave us; you can't, dear. Stay! Stay for my sake, I implore you!'

'To be pointed at by everyone as the wretched thing I am. To know that my mother's name is a byword, and I myself am an outcast. You don't know what it is you ask me. 'Tis more than I can do.'

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‘For my sake, Desmond!’

‘I can’t,’ cried the poor, proud boy; ‘I can’t, even for your sake.’

‘And where are ye going?’ asked Peebles. ‘Eh, Desmond, lad, what will ye do?’

‘Do! Hide myself at any rate from those that have known me. The world’s wide, old friend; don’t fear for me!’

And he made a movement to the door.

‘Stop!’ cried Peebles. ‘Since ye *will* gang, listen to a word I hae to say to you. Never think shame o’ the mother that bore ye, Desmond. *I* kenned her, lad; *I* kenned her weel. She was a brave woman, as true and honest as she was loving, and ’twas for *your* sake that she took the weary road o’ death.’

Desmond broke into sobs again, and the old man, seeing him thus softened, went on:

‘There’s jist one thing ye’ll promise me, lad. Before ye gang awa’, see me once more, and maybe I can help ye yet.’

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‘I’ll promise you that,’ said Desmond, ‘if you’ll give me a promise in return. You’ll tell me all about my mother?’

‘Ay, lad, I’ll tell ye all I ken. There’s no word o’ shame for *her* in all the story, whatever shame there may be for others.’

‘All I think of now,’ continued Desmond, ‘is the thought of the grief I brought her.’

‘Ne’er believe it, lad,’ cried the old man; ‘ne’er believe it. Ye brought her comfort and hope.’ He wiped his eyes. ‘Many’s the time I’ve grat o’er your cradle, and noo, old fool that I am, I’m greeting again. Bide a bit, lad; God may help us yet! There, there!’ he continued, as the impulsive young fellow threw his arms about him, ‘ye’ll not be for hugging old Peebles. Tak’ the little lass in your arms, and gie *her* one more kiss for luck!’

‘Desmond!’ cried Dulcie, stretching her arms to him.

‘My conscience!’ said Peebles, as the lovers embraced, ‘if I’d your youth, and

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siccan a mouth to kiss, I wadna care if the Deil himsel' was my progenitor !'

'Good-bye, my darling!' sobbed Desmond. 'Good-bye, and God Almighty bless ye ! I must go. Good-bye, good-bye !'

He tore himself from her arms, and ran out of the house. Dulcie sank back upon a bench, and her tears ran unrestrainedly.

'Tak' heart, Lady Dulcie, tak' heart,' said the good old man, patting her shoulder with one hand, as he wiped his own eyes with the other. 'It's a sair trouble, but we'll maybe reconcile them yet.'

'Oh, Mr. Peebles!' sobbed the girl. 'I love him !'

'Any fool could see that,' said the old man, with a chuckle which was half a sob. 'I love him, too, the rascal ! Ye must hasten home, Lady Dulcie. My lord needs watching, and 'tis weel ye should be with him, for the boy's sake.'

Dulcie dried her tears, and called Rosie, who answered the summons at once.

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‘You’ll take care of him?’ she said to Peebles. ‘You’ll see that he comes to no harm?’

‘Trust me for that,’ said Peebles. ‘There, there, my bonny doo, tak’ comfort. He’ll be yours yet.’

‘Oh, how good you are!’ cried Dulcie. She threw her arms about his neck, and kissed him on either cheek with right goodwill. ‘That’s for Desmond’s sake. Mind, I trust in *you*.’

Left alone, Peebles stood for some moments in a cataleptic condition, till he recovered his senses, and refreshed his brain with a liberal pinch of snuff from his waistcoat pocket.

‘Peebles, ye old villain!’ he said to himself, ‘what’s gone wi’ your morality, lettin’ the lassies kiss you at your age! Aweel! a kiss like that from a pure lass is better than a bad man’s blessing. Never fear, Lady Dulcie, nae mischief shall befall Desmond Macartney if *I* can save him.’

CHAPTER VI.

THE MEETING IN THE GRAVEYARD.

THAT same night a cold round moon was shining on the old graveyard where the people of Kilpatrick had for many generations buried their dead—a place of green and grassy graves, with here and there a simple cross of stone or wood. It was a lonely place, a lonely hour, and with the rising moon came a chilly night wind, stealing from grave to grave, and lifting the grass upon them as a cold hand might lift the hair of human heads.

The silence of the spot was broken by the sound of a slow but firm footstep approaching along the quiet by-road that

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led to the village. A tall woman, with a shawl about her head, and clad in a material so dark as to pass for black in the moonlight, entered the graveyard, and stood looking towards the distant sea. She looked long and earnestly before she spoke.

‘It’s the time I named,’ she murmured in a deep, inward-sounding voice. ‘Will he come, I wonder? Maybe he’ll think it’s an idle message, and never guess who sent it, for he thinks me dead and gone long years ago. I must speak with him, and hear tidings of my boy. Oh, saints in heaven, that know the achings of a mother’s heart, ye’ve given me strength to bear my trouble all these years—give me strength now, and pity the wakeness that brought me here, maybe to get a glimpse of my darling son!’

She leaned against a ragged, wind-blown tree, with her forehead supported on her arm; then, slipping to the ground, bent

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her head in prayer—an appeal of which only an occasional word could have been heard by any chance listener, though the fervour of her supplication shook her whole body with a passionate tremor. She was so lost for the moment to all sense of her surroundings that a loud and cheerful whistle, coming along the path she had herself travelled but a few minutes previous, fell unheeded on her ear, and the gravedigger, returning for his pick and shovel, was close upon her before she recognised his presence.

She rose with a start, and the suddenness of her apparition made the intruder's music stop with a ludicrous suddenness.

‘Musha!’ he cried. ‘What’s that at all? ’Tis a woman! Bedad, I took ye for a ghost!’

‘I’m flesh and blood, like yourself,’ she answered.

‘But why were ye kneeling there?’ he asked, still fearfully.

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‘I was only saying a prayer,’ she answered.

‘A mighty lonesome place to say your prayers in,’ said the gravedigger, crossing himself. ‘Unless,’ he added as an after-thought, and more gently, ‘ye’ve any kith or kin lying here.’

‘No,’ said the woman; ‘I am a stranger.’

‘Well, good luck t’ ye, whoever y’ are,’ said the gravedigger. ‘I’ll just get the pick and the spade, and lave ye to your devotions.’ He jumped into an open grave at a little distance. ‘I can finish this in the morning,’ he added to himself. ‘Another two feet ’ll do it.’

‘Who’s to be buried there?’ she asked, as he clambered out with his tools in his hand.

‘A poor colleen that kilt herself for love. Leastways, she drowned herself, but wint out of her mind first, to make sure of Christian burial. Are ye livin’ hereabouts, my woman?’

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‘Yes,’ she answered. ‘I’ve a lodging down at the old mill.’

‘Musha!’ said the gravedigger, ‘that’s a lonesome place.’

‘The more fit, maybe,’ she answered, ‘for a lonesome woman.’

‘Will ye be going now?’ asked the man, looking at her with some anxiety.

‘Presently,’ she answered. ‘Sure, I’m doing no harm.’

‘Sorra the bit,’ he said; ‘but I’m thinking that there’s not many women—nor men ayther, for that matter—who’d care to walk this graveyard at night, when the fairies walk it. Well, tastes differ, and so good luck t’ ye.’

‘And good luck to *you!*’ the woman answered.

The man shouldered his tools and went off, resuming his interrupted whistle. The woman looked anxiously down the road.

‘It’s past the time I named,’ she said to herself, ‘and no sign of him yet.’

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She walked to the low wall which separated the graveyard from the road, and stood there, watching so keenly that the sound of a footstep approaching from the opposite side of the churchyard failed to wake her attention. The unseen wayfarer, who was no other than Mr. Feagus, returning homewards after a wettish evening with a client beyond the village, caught sight of her tall, gaunt figure clearly outlined against the pale flood of moonlight which deluged the sky.

‘Who’s that, now?’ he asked himself, with a start,—‘a woman, or a taisch?—a Christian soul, or an ugly spirit? Wake my soul to glory! I’m sorry I took this road, for it’s lonesome for a lawyer with long arrears of conscience to make up; and, faith, here’s another of ’em coming the way I came myself. No, ’tis a man this time, a living man, bless the saints! I’ll step along with him for company. Am I drunk or dreamin’? ’Tis that old

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omadhaun, Peebles the steward! 'Tis mighty queer! What can bring a quiet man like that down here at night-toime? If it's an assignation with that female? The old rascal! I'll keep out of his way, and watch what he's after.'

He slid cautiously over the wall, and established himself in the deepest shadow, just as Peebles' lean figure emerged into clear moonlight.

The old man paused at the wicket-gate.

'I saw someone here—I'd swear till it, and noo there's nae sign of any living thing. Lord save us! it's a gruesome place. Well, gruesome or no gruesome, I'll e'en see it through. She's there!' he exclaimed, catching sight of the woman's figure. 'Ahem! Was't you, lass, that sent the message to Mr. Peebles?'

The woman turned eagerly.

'Yes, sir!' she cried. 'I sent for you!'

'Good e'en t' ye, whoever ye are,' said

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Peebles. 'I'm here at your service, though I ken little enough what it is ye want o' me. 'Twas of Moya Macartney ye wanted to speak—the puir lassie that died lang syne?'

'Of Moya Macartney, sure enough,' answered the woman. 'But she never died, sir. She's alive this day, and nearer than ye think!'

'Lord save us!' exclaimed Peebles. 'You say she's living! Moya Macartney living?'

The woman turned her face to the moonlight, and let her shawl, which had hidden it, fall back upon her shoulders. The old man stepped nearer, peering on her with a look of mingled expectation, incredulity, and superstitious horror. The face was white, thin, and wrinkled, but he recognised it in a moment; and as the great black eyes dwelt on Peebles' face, the thin lips murmured a name which struck on

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his astonished ears like a veritable echo from the grave.

‘Moya!’ he cried. ‘Moya Macartney! No! It can’t be!’

‘It is, sir,’ said Moya. ‘I’m Moya Macartney. Old and gray now, Mr. Peebles, but the same colleen ye knew once in Kenmare.’

The hidden listener raised his head cautiously.

‘Saints preserve us!’ he muttered, and taking advantage of Peebles’ wonder and consternation, crept nearer to him and his companion.

‘Meeracle of meeracles!’ cried the old man. He extended a trembling hand, and took that which Moya held out in answer. It was as real as, and warmer and steadier than, his own. ‘Ay! ye’re flesh and blood; but—what does it mean?’

‘Sure, it’s a long story,’ said Moya; ‘but I’ll tell it ye in as few words as I can. When I left my child and went away

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broken-hearted, I little thought to live another day ; but my courage failed me, and I feared to face my Maker before my time. I lived on, unknown and far away. But I heard news from time to time of my son. I knew that he was growing up happy, and ignorant, thank God, of his mother's shame.'

'Puir lass !' said Peebles. 'Puir lass ! And it's been for his own sake that ye've held aloof from him all these years—never shown your face or spoke a word !'

'Sure, why should I ? 'Twas enough for me to think that maybe, when he thought that I was dead, my lord's heart might be turned to the poor friendless boy, and that he might crape into his father's heart and earn his love. I said to myself a thousand times, "God bless him ! I'll never disgrace him. He shall never learn that his mother's still living on this weary earth."'

'But ye've come at last, Moya,' said

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Peebles, wiping his eyes; 'ye've come at last to——'

'Only to hear of his happiness—only, maybe, to get one glimpse of his face. Oh, sir, if I could do that same, I'd die happy, for the heaviness of years is on me, and I've not long to live. Speak to me! Tell me of him! Is he well and happy?'

'Weel?' repeated Peebles. 'Ay, he's weel enough. Happy? Ay, he's as happy as most folk, for it's a wearyin' world.' He paused, looking pityingly at Moya, and then resumed in a hesitating manner: 'I've news for ye that I fear will not be over welcome to ye. 'Twas only yesterday he learned the truth. He found oot that Lord Kilpatrick was his father, and with that, poor lad, he shook the dust from his feet and fled away from his father's house.'

'My God!' cried Moya. 'But who tould him? Not you, sure?'

'I?' cried Peebles—'I, that hae guarded

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the secret these eighteen years, and burdened my conscience with endless lees for the poor lad's sake and yours! No, no, Moya. He was taunted wi' his birth by a wicked whelp—his cousin, Richard Conseltine's son, and a' came oot.'

'And then?' cried Moya.

'My lord begged him to stay, offered to make him his lawful heir, but he refused the siller and cursed his father in his mother's name. Ah, don't greet, woman, or I'll be greeting too. Your name's deepest in the lad's heart, and first upon his lips.'

'God bless him!' sobbed the heartbroken mother. 'But what shall I do? What shall I do?'

'Let me take ye to him,' said Peebles. 'Eh, lass, but the boy's heart will leap for joy to know ye're alive.'

'No!' said Moya, shrinking back. 'No, no! Let things be as they are. It's betther, far betther, that he should think me dead.'

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Alive, I shall only shame him more. Just let me see him, let me look into his eyes and hear his voice—'tis all I ask of the blessed saints, and I'll go back to where I came from and never trouble him again.'

At that moment, as if in answer to the impassioned prayer of that lonely heart, a voice rose at a hundred yards' distance. Peebles started at the sound :

'Tho' I lave thee for ever, my darling, and go,
Thine image shall haunt me in sunshine and
snow;
Like the light of a star shining over the foam,
Thy face shall go with me wherever I roam.'

'Lord save us !' cried Peebles. ' 'Tis himself.'

'Who?' cried Moya wildly. 'Desmond? My son?'

'Ay! your son Desmond. Wheest, woman! He's coming this way.'

'Though waves roll between us, sweet star of my
love,
Thy voice calls unto me——'

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Desmond's voice rose again as he spoke, nearer and more distinct.

'Mr. Peebles!' he cried, pausing in his song to scrutinize his old friend's figure in the moonlight. 'It's late for you to be out here among the graves. Who's that with ye?'

Peebles hesitated. Moya touched him lightly on the arm.

'It's just a poor peasant body. She's strange to these parts, and was asking the way.'

Moya had gathered her shawl about her face again, and a sob broke from her.

'Sure she's in trouble,' Desmond added pityingly.

'Yes, sir,' said Moya, conquering herself, 'I'm in bitter trouble. And by the same token there's trouble in *your* heart too.'

'In mine?' said Desmond, forcing a laugh, not very successfully.

'Ye favour one I used to know,' said Moya. 'Will ye tell me your name, sir?'

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‘My name?’ said Desmond hesitatingly. ‘Well, why not? My name’s Desmond Macartney.’

‘Desmond Macartney!’ the woman repeated. ‘I’ll not forget it. Sure I’d once a boy of me own, as swate to look upon as yourself. It’s proud your mother should be of such a son.’

‘My mother is dead,’ said Desmond. ‘She died long ago—when I was but a child. Good-night t’ ye, and God help ye through your trouble.’

‘Where are you going, Desmond?’ asked Peebles.

‘To the farm yonder; they’ll put me up for the night.’

‘Wait for me there to-morrow. I must see you.’

‘I’ll wait,’ said Desmond. He looked again at Moya, who was crying unrestrainedly. ‘Poor soul!’ he said. ‘She seems to have a heavy grief.’

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‘She has,’ said Peebles. ‘She’s lost all the folk she loves.’

‘Like me,’ sighed Desmond. ‘Well, well! “Though I love thee for ever,”’ he began singing again as he turned away, till interrupted by the stranger’s voice.

‘Sir—Mr. Desmond!’ cried the woman suddenly, ‘they say that the blessing o’ one broken heart may help to heal the trouble of another. Will ye bend down in this holy place and take a poor creature’s blessing?’

‘Sure,’ said Desmond, ‘it’s only one blessing in the whole world that I seek, and that I can never have—the blessing of my own dead mother.’

‘Maybe it might come through me! I’m a mother, too!’

‘Humour her, laddie,’ said Peebles gently. ‘Humour her. Her sorrow’s great.’

Desmond took off his cap and knelt with bent head. It seemed long before

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the voice broke the solemn stillness, but when at last it was audible, it was strangely firm.

‘May the Lord watch over ye, now and for ever! May the mouth of the mother that bore ye spake through me, and bring ye happiness, health, and peace. May your days be long in the land, till you’re old and gray like me. But, oh, may ye never know my trouble or lose what I have lost. Amen! Amen!’

‘And may God bless *you!*’ said Desmond, rising, deeply touched by the solemn words and the deep rich voice which had spoken them.

‘And now,’ said Moya, ‘will ye let a poor crathure kiss your forehead, for the sake of her own son that she’ll never see again?’ She took his head between her hands and pressed her lips to his brow in a long embrace. ‘The Lord be with you, Desmond Macartney.’

With no other word, she turned and

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left the graveyard, Peebles following her after a hasty reminder to Desmond of their engagement for the morrow.

It was not till some minutes later, when Desmond's voice rose again on the air at a considerable distance, and the figures of Moya and Peebles had disappeared, that Feagus rose to his feet.

'Monomondiaoul!' he said softly to himself. 'Moya Macartney alive! And what will me lord and Mr. Conseltine say to that, I wonder?'

CHAPTER VII.

BLAKE, OF BLAKE'S HALL.

LADY DULCIE, wending her way back from the shebeen to the Castle under the escort of Rosie and the faithful Larry, dried her tears resolutely, and did her best—no hard task at sweet eighteen, with love as an ally—to look on the bright side of things. Desmond would never leave her for long, of that she felt assured. He might go out into the world to seek his fortune, and, of course, one so brave, generous, handsome, and altogether admirable, could hardly fail to find it; but his success or failure would never, she told herself, make any difference to her. The

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day was not far off when she would be her own mistress, and then no spite of accident or design should hold her from her lover's arms.

As she and her companions came upon the confines of the Castle grounds two dusky figures approached them, and she made out by the faint light of the rising moon that they were Mr. Conseltine and his son Richard. They saluted her silently, to her great relief, and she passed by.

'She's been to meet that blackguard bastard, I suppose,' muttered Richard between his teeth. 'Damn him !'

'With all my heart !' responded his senior. 'Damn him, by all means ! Your blunder of the morning has turned out better than I had dared to hope ; but it was a blunder all the same.'

'It might have been,' returned Richard ; 'but, so far, it has answered. We've got the brute out of the house, and it won't be my fault if he gets in again.'

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‘’Twas too bold a stroke, lad,’ said Conseltine. ‘You show your cards too openly—you play too boldly. If the proud-stomached young ass had only had a little common-sense, he might have consolidated his position with your uncle. Henry was in the mood to do anything, to commit any folly, after you insulted the boy.’

‘I couldn’t help it,’ returned Richard. ‘I hate the cad to such an extent that I’d have shouted his shame in his face if it had cost me every penny I have and every penny I expect from Kilpatrick.’

‘You’re a fool,’ said his father, smoothly as ever. It required a good deal to shake the elder Conseltine from his calm cynicism. ‘And if you think the game’s won just because you’ve insulted the Squireen and got him out of the Castle for a single day, you’re a bigger fool than I ever thought you—and that’s not saying a little. The game’s only begun. Henry’s

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fond of the brat—absence will make him fonder still. It's quite on the cards that he may leave every stick and stone of his property to him and strand you with the barren title. Keep out of his way. He never liked you, and now he likes you less than ever. Leave him to me. Leave Dulcie alone, too. Don't be trying to excuse yourself, or trying to make love to her; you'll only make bad a deal worse. Who's that in front of us?—your eyes are younger than mine.'

'It's that drunken scoundrel Blake.'

'Blake!' repeated Conseltine, and fell into a slower step. 'Well, 'tis lucky, on the whole. 'Tis as well he should know.'

'Know what?' asked Richard.

'Know all there is to be known about this business of the Squireen,' answered the elder.

'What affair is it of his?'

'That you'll not learn from me,' re-

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sponded his father: 'not yet, at least. If it's ever necessary you should know, I'll tell you. Meanwhile, keep a still tongue and an open eye. It's to the shebeen he's going—we'll follow him.'

They were close behind Blake's heels by the time he had reached the door of the alehouse. He lurched round and faced them.

'The divil and his imp,' he remarked, as a polite salutation, and stumbled across the threshold with no further greeting than a drunken laugh.

Peebles was in the kitchen, finishing a drink of whisky, and chatting with the widow.

'Hullo! my king o' Scots,' hiccuped Blake. 'You here? Drinkin', too! Ye've taken to decent habits in your old age. Here! you'll have another drink with me.'

'Indeed but I'll no',' replied the sententious old Scot.

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‘ You won’t ! You won’t drink ?’

‘ Yes, with my friends,’ returned Peebles;
‘ but I see none o’ them *here*.’

He set his glass upon the table, nodded to the widow, and went out to keep his already recorded interview with Moya in the churchyard.

Blake laughed with drunken good humour.

‘ ’Tis a brave boy, old Peebles ! He doesn’t trust me, but, after all, ’tis a question of taste, and no gentleman quarrels on such a ground. Bedad, I’m dry.’ He searched his pockets, and found them empty. ‘ Here, you spalpeen,’ he continued, accosting Richard, ‘ pay for a drink for me. Sure, ’twill be a luxury for you, and one you don’t often enjoy.’

‘ Bring some whisky, if you please, Mrs. Daly,’ said Conseltine smoothly, before Richard could muster his heavy wits to retort. ‘ Sit down, Blake, and listen to me. Are ye sober enough to talk business ?’

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‘I’m as sober as I need be,’ responded Blake; ‘and more sober than I want to be, at this hour o’ the night.’

‘That’s easily cured,’ said Conseltine dryly, handing him a charged tumbler; ‘but don’t go too fast—this is business.’

‘Discoorse,’ said Blake, tossing off the spirit, ‘and I’ll listen.’

The widow still lingered about the room, making pretence of trifling with some household task. Conseltine with a smooth voice bade her leave them to themselves, and she obeyed, after which he rose, and for greater security closed the door leading to the road.

‘Ye’re mighty mysterious,’ said Blake. ‘What is it, at all?’

‘Have you heard what happened at the Castle this morning?’ asked Conseltine, leaning across the rude table at which the two were seated, and speaking in a whisper.

‘How the divil should I?’ asked Blake.

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‘I’ve not been out of bed an hour, and I’d be there still, but the whisky gave out, and I kem here to wet my whistle.’

‘’Tis better ye should hear it from me than from another,’ said Conseltine, in the same tone of extreme caution. ‘My son here made a fool of himself this morning.’

‘Did he, now?’ returned Blake, with a laugh. ‘Sure his Creator did that for him twenty years ago.’

‘He had a row with the Squireen, young Desmond Macartney, and let out what he knew about his birth.’

‘’Tis the first time I knew that he knew anything about it,’ said Blake. ‘Was it you that trusted him with such a secret?’

‘Never mind how he came to know,’ returned Conseltine. ‘He learned the secret. Desmond provoked him, and he blurted it out before everybody—Lady Dulcie, my brother, Peebles and all.’

‘And he’s here to tell the tale?’ said

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Blake, with an air of drunken surprise. 'Bedad, I'm a good man with my fists, but 'tis not I that would like to tell the Squireen that story.'

'Listen ! Listen !' said Conseltine, beating the tops of his fingers on the table a little impatiently.

'D'ye mean to sit there, Dick Conseltine,' said Blake, 'an' tell me that that rip of a son o' yours told the Squireen all that, and there was no fight?'

'Devil a bit of a fight,' answered Conseltine. 'The boy was knocked clean out of time by the information. Well, when he came to, his lordship told him he'd acknowledge him before the world.'

'His lordship's a gentleman !' cried Blake. 'By the Lord, he is ! If only he could hold a dacent skinful o' liquor, he'd be the finest gentleman in Ireland, bar none. And what did the Squireen say?'

'He cursed the father that begot him,'

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returned Conseltine. ‘He shook the dust of the house off his feet, and swore he’d never cross the threshold again!’

‘Then the boy’s like his father—a gentleman!’ cried Blake, with a drunken cheer. ‘Here’s to him, with three times three and all the honours! And what did the old man say to that?’

‘It has made him seriously ill,’ answered Conseltine. ‘He has passed the day in bed, and has refused himself to everybody except Peebles. Now, Blake,’ he leaned further across the table, and fixed his keen eyes on the face of the drunken squire, ‘the time has come for a definite understanding between us.’

‘Well?’ asked Blake. He made an obvious and partially successful attempt to sober himself. ‘Give me that jug o’ water.’ It was passed to him, and he drained it—to the great apparent refreshment and steadying of his wits. ‘A man has need of all his brains, Dick Conseltine,

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when ye speak in that tone of voice. Out with it—what hell-broth are ye brewing now ?’

‘There’s no new development yet,’ answered Conseltine, with a smile, ‘though something may occur at any moment with Henry in his present condition. But I want to know definitely, yes or no, are you for us or against us ?’

‘That just depends on how ye treat me,’ muttered Blake. ‘I don’t know whether it is that I’m getting old, or whether the whisky is playing false with my nerves—which is what I’d call my conscience, if I was one o’ the pious sort—or what it is, but I—I fluctuate ! Sometimes—it’s generally in the morning, when I wake—I feel penitent : I feel that I’d like to go over to the enemy and clear my breast o’ the load I’ve borne this eighteen years and more. What are ye doin’?’ he asked angrily, as Conseltine trod heavily on his foot beneath the table. ‘Oh, the cub ! Sure I said

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nothin' that he has the brains to understand. Yes, Mr. Richard Conseltine, that's how I feel at times, and it comes over me generally in the mornin', when the whisky's out and my pockets are empty. And, by thunder, if I did! if I did tell all I know—Holy Moses! what a racket it would make up at the Castle, and all Ireland over. Faith, I'd live in history! 'Twould be what the play-actors call a fine situation! And let me tell ye, there's them as 'd make it worth me while to do it!

'You drunken hog!' murmured Conseltine under his breath; adding aloud, 'You won't do that, Blake!'

'Won't I?' returned Blake. 'Faith, you're surer about it than I am!'

'No,' said Conseltine, 'you won't do it. I can make it better worth your while to keep silent.'

'Then why the divil don't ye?' asked Blake. 'You're very fond o' talking about

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your gratitude, and you hold out fine promises, but what do ye *do* ?'

'It seems to me,' returned the other, 'that I've done a good deal.'

'And it seems to me,' exclaimed Blake, banging the table to emphasize the personal pronoun, 'that ye do damn'd little. I tell ye, Dick Conseltine, it's not for nothing that I'm going to suffer the torments of an aching conscience!'

'Your aching conscience,' said Conseltine, with a scarcely perceptible sneer, 'has been fairly well salved so far. Is it money that you want?'

'Bedad it is, then!' cried the other. 'I haven't the price of a glass in the wide world.'

'Well,' said his fellow conspirator, 'I'm willing to do what I can, in reason.'

'In reason!' repeated Blake. 'Your notions of what's reasonable and mine may not agree. Look here, now, what d'ye say to two hundred pounds?'

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‘Two hundred pounds!’ cried Conseltine, with well-acted amazement. ‘Oh, come, come, Blake!’

‘Come, come!’ echoed Blake. ‘’Tis you that has to come—I’ve gone far enough along the road to hell; I’ll go no farther unless I’m paid for it. I want two hundred pounds to-morrow, and I’ll have it, or know the reason why!’

‘I can’t do it, Blake,’ cried Conseltine.

‘Very well, then,’ said Blake, ‘his lordship can, and I’ll not only get two hundred, but ease my aching conscience at the same time.’

‘I think you’re hard,’ said Conseltine. ‘Come, Blake; our interests stand or fall together. Look at the affair all round, pro and con. You might get that two hundred from Henry, but ’twould be all you’d get. Now, serve my interest, and Dick’s here, and you’re safe for life. Have I ever refused you money when you asked for it?’

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‘That’s all right,’ said Blake; ‘don’t refuse me now!’

‘Well,’ groaned Conseltine, ‘if you must have it you must.’

‘Bedad I must,’ returned the other, with a nod full of meaning. ‘Is it a bargain?’

‘Yes, it’s a bargain.’

‘To-morrow, mind.’

‘Yes, to-morrow.’

‘Good! Then I’ll drug my conscience and accept the solatium. And now I’m goin’ home.’

‘Very well,’ said Conseltine; ‘I’ll see you to-morrow.’

‘All right!’ retorted Blake, with a disfavouring eye on Richard. ‘Don’t bring the cub with you. I can stand the old sinner, but not the young one.’

He reeled from the room, and Conseltine’s glance, as it followed him, was full of a dark and concentrated loathing.

‘The insolent scoundrel!’ said Richard, when he was out of hearing. ‘Why do

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you stand him? What is his hold over you?’

‘I hope you’ll never need to know,’ returned his father, draining his glass. ‘Damn him! I wish he was in the grave.’

‘He’s going there as fast as drink can take him,’ said Richard.

‘I feel inclined sometimes,’ said his amiable parent, ‘to give him a lift on the journey.’

CHAPTER VIII.

MOYA MACARTNEY.

PEEBLES, returning home to the Castle after his midnight interview with Moya Macartney in the churchyard, passed a sleepless and troubled night, revolving in his mind all the events of the sad history in which the unfortunate woman had played so strange a part, and canvassing all that her mysterious and unexpected return to life might mean to herself and others. More than once he determined to disregard Moya's strenuous injunction to silence, and at once break to Lord Kilpatrick the news of her existence, and of her presence in the district ;

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but again and again the memory of the solemn promise of secrecy he had given, and the thought that so sudden and heavy a shock might be fatal to one of his lordship's age and feeble health, dissipated that intention.

'Eh!' he murmured to himself as he tossed and tumbled in vain effort to discover a way out of the labyrinth of difficulties the business presented, 'it's a troublous affair. I'd like to do justice, if I could see my way clear to the doing o't. I'd like fine to bowl out that smug-faced hypocrite Conseltine, and that lump o' malignity his son. 'Twould be the grandest day's work I ever did. But I promised, like an old fool, and I must keep my promise, and just await the decrees o' Providence.'

He rose long before his usual hour, early as that was, and went out into the fresh breeze of early morning. Dawn was faintly glimmering on the mountain-tops,

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and the dew was heavy on the grasses of the lawn. He looked up at the light which shone faintly in his master's window.

‘Twill be but a poor night's rest he's had, I'm thinkin', poor old heathen, found out by his sin at last. Eh, but the lad's curses will lie heavy on his heart! Mine's wae for him, and for the callant I've seen grow up from a bairn, and for the lonely woman out yonder.’

A sudden idea struck him ; he drew out his watch and consulted it eagerly.

‘Near hand to four o'clock,’ he murmured. ‘The mill's but four miles awa'. I can do it in an hour, and anither hour to come back. I'll gang and see Moya, and persuade her to hear reason.’

He took his hat and stick, and set out at the briskest pace he could attain towards Moya's lodging place. It was a rough and stony track, and by the time he came in sight of the mill the old man was fain

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to sit upon a chance boulder and pant his breath back. Caution was necessary; he wished to do nothing that could by any chance give gossip or conjecture a handle, and he walked cautiously round the mill, glad of the babble of the stream which covered the sound of his footsteps on turf and gravel. Nobody was stirring; the place and all the countryside lay still and gray under the morning mist, now faintly touched here and there with threads of opalescent colour by the yet invisible sun. He threw a small pebble cautiously at the window shutter of Moya's sleeping place, and a minute later it opened and revealed her pale, lined face. He made a gesture, cautioning her to silence, and then by another invited her to join him. She nodded to show comprehension of his pantomime, and a minute later stood beside him.

They walked on side by side in silence till they reached a little glen between

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two hills which hid them from all chance of observation, and then Peebles spoke.

‘Moya, woman,’ he said, ‘tell me why, after all these years, you come here now?’

‘I came to see my son,’ she answered.

‘Ay,’ he said, ‘that’s natural eneuch, na doubt. But is that *all* you came for?’

She darted a keen look at him—a look in which question and surprise were both expressed.

‘Moya,’ he went on, ‘since I saw you last night I’ve no’ closed my eyes for thinking o’ you and the lad your son. Eh, woman, but it’s clear impossible that after that one glimpse o’ his bonny face, and that one sound o’ his voice, ye should be content to gang back to solitude—it’s clear impossible! Let me tell him you’re alive and near him. *He’s* alone, too, noo! His place is by your side; your duty is to comfort him under the trouble he’s suffering, ye ken that weel?’

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‘Mr. Peebles,’ said Moya steadily, ‘the path of duty is not always plain; but I’m going to clear mine if I can, by your help. God knows my very bones are full of desire for the child I love; I was near crying out who I was last night when I kissed him; but I’ve borne the bitter pain of solitude now for eighteen years, and sure my time here will not be so long. I’ll bear it to the end rather than disgrace and shame my child!’

‘But, Moya, he kens!’ cried Peebles. ‘He kens you were not married to his father. I winna say but, if he had never learned that, ye wad no’ be in the right to keep apart from him; but he knows it. He’s cast off his father; he has barely a friend in the world, barring me, and how can *I* help him. He has need o’ ye! Ye’ll heal his sair heart, and he’ll love ye and cherish ye and comfort your declining years.’

Moya shook her head.

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‘He’s young,’ she replied, with a world of meaning in her tone. ‘A heart as young as his won’t break for such a trouble as he’s suffering now. He’ll go out into the big world, where the shame’s not known, and win his way. What would *I* be to him—a nameless vagabond, a poor, ignorant ould woman! I should only kape him down and disgrace him. No; ye must tell Desmond nothing—yet. Ye asked me just now,’ she went on after a pause, ‘if I had no other reason to come here afther all these years but just to see my boy?’

‘Weel?’ asked Peebles.

‘I had—I had another reason, or I’d have resisted the temptation now as I have fought it down all that long, dreary time. I’ve a question to ask ye, Mr. Peebles?’

She paused there for so long a time that the old man snapped out suddenly, with excusable irritation :

‘Weel, weel, lassie! What is’t?’

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‘There’s so much depends on the answer that I hardly dare to ask,’ said Moya, with a voice suddenly gone tremulous. ‘Tell me,’ she continued, after another pause, ‘if ye know a gintleman in this part of the counthry that calls himself Blake—one Patrick Blake, of Blake’s Hall?’

‘Do I know him?’ echoed Peebles. ‘Ay, I know him fine, the drunken scoundrel! A’body kens him for miles round. But what depends on my knowing Patrick Blake, lassie?’

‘Much may depend on it,’ said Moya. ‘Desmond’s own future may depend on it.’

‘Desmond’s future? Why, what in the name of a’ that’s meaning can Pat Blake hae to do wi’ Desmond’s future?’

‘Was Mr. Blake,’ asked Moya slowly, and with an amount of effort which helped the old man to understand the importance she attached to the answer—‘was Mr. Blake ever a clerk in holy orders?’

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Peebles stared at her in sheer bewilderment. Had she asked if he himself had ever been Pope of Rome, the question could hardly have seemed more ludicrous; but there was a painful solemnity in her manner which would have stayed a man less grave than he from laughter.

‘Holy orders!’ he muttered. ‘Holy orders! Patrick Blake! By my soul, but it’s an odd question!’

‘Not under that name, I mane, but another—Ryan O’Connor.’

‘He’s borne no name but Patrick Blake that I ever kenned o’,’ said Peebles, still groping painfully for any meaning in Moya’s queries. ‘She’s haverin’,’ he muttered to himself; but the calm intentness of Moya’s glance, though contradicted by the heaving bosom and irregular breath with which she spoke, did not accord with the explanation. ‘What if he ever was a priest under that or any other name?’ he asked at last.

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‘I was married to Lord Kilpatrick,’ said Moya, ‘by a man calling himself the Reverend Father Ryan O’Connor.’

‘Lord guide us!’ ejaculated the old Scot. ‘And do ye think ’twas Patrick Blake?’

‘I *know* it was Patrick Blake,’ replied Moya. ‘That much I’m sure of.’

‘But how do you ken it?’ asked the bewildered Peebles.

‘Sure ’twould be too long a story to tell ye now. ’Twas only lately that an accident put me on the track. It took time and trouble to get Ryan O’Connor and Patrick Blake into the same skin, but I did it. And now, all that remains to be learned is just whether Blake was ever a priest, or whether his office was as false as his name. Will ye do that for me, Mr. Peebles? ’Tis not for my sake I ask it, but for my son’s—for Desmond’s!’

Peebles had fallen into a sitting posture

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on a low stone dyke, and sat staring at her like a man bewitched.

‘Moya! Moya Macartney! D’ye ken what ye’re sayin’? Oh! my head will rive with the dingin’ ye’ve started in my brains. Blake married ye! Blake a priest! Why, woman!’ he cried, suddenly straightening himself, ‘if that’s so, ye’re Lady Kilpatrick!’

‘Desmond would be Lord Kilpatrick,’ Moya answered simply. ‘’Tis for his sake, Mr. Peebles, that I ask you for help; not for mine, God knows. There were times,’ she went on, after another long pause, ‘long, long ago, when I’d have given my life to hold him—Henry Kilpatrick—in my arms for just one minute—times when all the shame and sorrow he’d brought on the poor ignorant girl who’d loved him seemed nothing—when, if the broad sea had not been betwixt us, I’d have gone to him and said, “Take me as your mistress, your servant, anything—

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let me see your face and hear your voice now and then, one day in the year, and I'll follow ye barefoot through the world." But they've gone, long since, and all my love and all my anger are gone with them. As to bein' Lady Kilpatrick,' she went on, with a short and mirthless laugh, ' 'tis not the chance of that that brings me here. A fine lady I'd make for any lord, wouldn't I? and much at me aise I'd be among the grand folk he'd introduce me to? But Desmond's a gintleman—as good a gintleman as any in Ireland, as Henry himself—and if the title's his by rights, he shall have it. *I* shan't trouble him. I shall go as I came, when I've seen him happy and honoured in his place. The thought has been food and drink, fire and shelter, to me these months past, since God sent the message that it might be so. Will you help me, Mr. Peebles?'

'Will I help ye?' cried Peebles, springing to his feet with the vivacity of

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a young man. ‘Deil hae me, but I’ll know the truth in four-and-twenty hours. But, eh, lass, if ye’re mistaken? If it’s not sae? I’d just gang clean daft in the disappointment. But it must—it must be true, eh, lass? To see the faces o’ they two Conseltines! To see the bonny lad, that they denounced as a beggar and a bastard, established wi’ title and estates! To see Lady Dulcie Lady Kilpatrick and Desmond’s wife! Oh! if it’s no’ true there’ll be a braw end o’ one good Scot, for I’ll just gang neck and crop into Limbo for sheer vexation. Dawm it! that I should say so—it *must* be true! It shall be true, if I squeeze it oot o’ yon scoundrel Blake wi’ my ain old hands, and his worthless life along wi’ it! But I maun awa’, lass—I maun awa’. There’s a hantle o’ things to be done at the Castle, and the lazy loons o’ servants are at sixes and sevens if they haven’t me about their lugs. I’ll see yon drunken ne’er-do-weel this day, and I’ll

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hae news for ye the morn's morn. Keep a good heart, woman. The king shall enjoy his ain again. Eh, I'm just daft!

Indeed, anybody who had witnessed the scene might have thought so,—he was so topful of excitement.

‘God bless ye, Mr. Peebles,’ said Moya. ‘Ye’re a true friend to me and the boy.’

‘Ay, am I,’ returned Peebles, ‘and that ye shall see ere long. Gang hame, lass, and pray for Desmond.’

‘Pray for him!’ cried Moya. ‘Has there been a day this eighteen years I’ve not prayed for him? No, nor a waking hour. God go with ye, sir, but——’

She checked him with an outstretched hand as he turned to go, and laid her finger on her lips as a signal for absolute silence.

‘Don’t fear me,’ said the old man; ‘I’m nae chatterbox, wi’ business like this afoot.’

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH MISCHIEF IS BREWING.

IT was late in the forenoon of the same day when Mr. Blake rose from his bed in the tenement to which he gave the sonorous and impressive title of Blake's Hall—a tumbledown hut of two stories, which long years of neglect had reduced to a condition of almost complete ruin. The ground-floor was occupied by Blake himself; the upper portion by an ancient peasant woman, who acted as his cook, housemaid, caterer, and general factotum. There was not a whole pane of glass or an unbroken article of furniture in the whole building, and the little plot of ground in which it stood was a wilderness of stones and weeds.

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Biddy was made aware of her employer's awakening in the fashion familiar to her for years past—by his roaring at the full stretch of his lungs for a draught of whisky. That draught despatched, he arose, and proceeded with shaking limbs to shave and dress. He was still occupied with his toilet when the voice of the elder Conseltine was heard in the outer room.

‘Give him a glass of punch,’ Blake called out to Biddy. ‘I’ll be with him in the squazing of a lemon. So,’ he continued, reeling out of his bedroom a minute later, ‘ye’ve brought the cub with ye, though I forbade ye.’

Richard, sullenly flicking at his boot with his riding-whip, looked at Blake from under his lowering eyebrows, but took no further heed of his ambiguous welcome. Blake unsteadily poured out a second bumper of spirit, and the glass rattled against his teeth as he drained it.

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‘And what’s the news with his lordship this day?’ he asked.

‘Still very ill,’ answered Conseltine. ‘He’s been upset by that old fool Peebles, who’s been hammering at him all day long to recall that brat of a by-love of his.’

‘Faith!’ returned Blake, ‘and he might do worse, by a great deal. ’Tis a fine lad, Desmond, as clever and handsome as that cub of yours is stupid and ugly. Don’t stand there, ye imp of perdition, glowering at me like a ghost. Sit down and drink like a Christian.’

Richard obeyed a scarcely perceptible motion of his father’s eyebrows, sat at the battered table, and poured out for himself a glass of whisky, to which he put his lips with an awkward affectation of goodfellowship.

‘Have ye got that two hundred pounds?’ asked Blake.

‘I have,’ said Conseltine; ‘I’ve brought it with me.’

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He unbuttoned his coat, and took a bundle of bank papers from the inner breast-pocket. Blake took it with shaking hands, and rammed it in a crumpled mass into his breeches pocket without counting.

‘You’re as good as your word, Dick Conseltine, for once in your life,’ said he. ‘Have another drink.’

Conseltine profited by Blake raising his glass to his lips to fling the contents of the tumbler which Bidy had filled for him on to the earthen floor of the hut, and filled it again, principally with water.

‘Why,’ said Blake, ‘ye’re gettin’ friendly and neighbourly in your old age. Ye’ll be a dacent man before ye die, if ye live long enough.’

‘Blake,’ said Conseltine, ‘I want to talk to you. Did ye ever think of emigration?’

‘Did I ever think o’ *what?*’ asked Blake, pausing with his tumbler half-way to his lips.

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‘Emigration,’ repeated Conseltine.

‘I never did,’ returned Blake. ‘Why would I?’

‘Well,’ said his companion, ‘there are many reasons why ye might think of it. Ye’re just spoiling here—wasting yourself. If ye’d go out West, a man of your abilities, with a little capital, would do well. Land and hiring are cheap; it’s a lovely climate, and there are no end of chances of making money. I’ll tell ye what, now. ’Tis a sin and a shame to see a man like you wasting yourself in this cursed country. I’ll make that two hundred five, and pay your passage out, if ye’ll take the next steamer to New York.’

‘By the saints!’ cried Blake, ‘ye’re mighty generous all of a sudden. Ye want to get rid of me? Spake the truth, now, isn’t that it?’

‘Well,’ said Conseltine, with a great appearance of candour, ‘that is it! I’d rather have you out of the country. You’re

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dangerous here, Blake—dangerous to us and to yourself.’

‘To myself!’ echoed Blake. ‘And how am I dangerous to meself?’

‘Ye’ll be splitting some day on a certain matter that we know of—easy now, we needn’t name names—and if ye did speak, ’twould be worse for you than for us.’

‘Make that good,’ said Blake.

‘Well,’ said Conseltine, ‘you’d very likely get a sum of money down from the other parties; but that once spent—ye’d get no more, and you’d spend the rest of your days in an Irish gaol. Now, so long as you’re faithful to our cause, you know you have a faithful friend in me. I’ll give ye five hundred down to go to America, and another two hundred a year as long as you live. Don’t answer now,’ he continued, as Blake opened his lips to speak. ‘Think it over, and I’m sure ye’ll see things as I see

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them, and admit that it's best for you to be out of the way of temptation.'

Blake swallowed another tumbler of punch.

'Tis a mighty fine idea,' he said thoughtfully, with a thickening of the voice which showed that he was fast nearing his normal pitch of intoxication. He rubbed his head dubiously, and, to clear his wits, poured out and drank a half-glass of neat whisky. 'Leave my ancestral possessions! Desert Blake's Hall! What are ye grinning at, ye thief of darkness?' he demanded angrily of Richard, who had glanced round the barren room with a smile of pitying contempt; then he lurched forward in his chair, with bloodshot eyes glaring at Conseltine, who, having thrown away his second glass of whisky, filled a third. 'Tell me, now,' he said, 'is the whisky good out there?'

Conseltine smiled and nodded.

'Well,' said Blake, 'an Irish gentleman

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ought to travel. Five hundred pounds, ye said?' Conseltine nodded again. 'Five hundred on the nail, and two hundred a year for life?' Conseltine nodded a third time. 'Hand over the bottle,' said Blake. 'Twill take a dale o' whisky to settle this question.'

His wavering hand had scarcely steered his glass to his mouth, when a hurried step was heard in the garden, and a moment later the lawyer Feagus burst into the room, panting and perspiring. Blake stared at him for a moment without recognising him, and then rose, with the obvious intention of falling foul of this unwelcome visitor.

'Hold him back!' cried Feagus. 'Hold him back, for the love of heaven!'

'Ye sneaking coward!' cried Blake, trying to get past Conseltine. 'How dare ye intrude into my apartments? I'll have your life!'

Feagus, who, under ordinary circumstances, would have at once accepted the

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challenge, once more called to Conseltine to keep Blake back, and, unbidden, filled and drank a glass of spirits.

‘I’ve no time to waste with *you*, Mr. Blake. I’ve news, Mr. Conseltine; we’re cooked entirely!’

Conseltine thrust Blake into his chair, and turned.

‘What d’ye mean?’ he asked.

‘Moya Macartney’s *alive!*’ cried the lawyer.

Conseltine staggered as if he had been shot, and Blake, who had risen to his feet to make a rush at Feagus, checked himself, and stood still, swaying heavily on his feet, as he glared at the bearer of this extraordinary news.

‘Are ye mad or drunk?’ asked Conseltine, with an ashen face.

‘I’m neither, sir,’ answered Feagus. ‘God be good to me, I’m too sober for my pace of mind! I tell ye Moya Macartney’s alive. I’ve seen her.’ Con-

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seltine stared at him like a man newly awakened from a nightmare, as he went on : " 'Twas last night, in the churchyard down by the lake. I was passin' by, and I saw a woman standing there among the graves, and old Peebles coming along the road. Thinks I, "I'll have a fine story to tell my lord next time I dine with him," and I just slipped behind a gravestone and listened. He didn't know her till she *told* him who she was—Moya Macartney, who's been drowned and in her grave this eighteen years! Holy Moses! I'm wringing wet only to think of it!"

'Get on, man, get on!' said Conseltine hoarsely.

'I kept as still as death,' continued Feagus, 'though 'twas all I could do to hold meself from cryin' out when I heard her say "I'm Moya Macartney." Then she went on to say that she'd come back to the old place to see the boy, and at that very minute he kem along the road singin'.'

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‘Desmond?’ cried Conseltine.

‘Desmond himself,’ said the lawyer.
‘Peebles cried out to him, and he comes into the churchyard and talks with Moya.’

‘For God’s sake go on,’ cried Conseltine; ‘what did they say?’

‘She never let on who she was. She said she was a poor wandering creature who wanted to give him her blessin’. And she did; and she cried, and he cried, and Peebles cried, and I was near cryin’ meself,—it was so affectin’!’

‘Well?’ said Conseltine. ‘And what was the upshot of it all?’

‘Faith, there was no upshot at all,’ said Feagus. ‘The boy went away no worse than he kem, promisin’ not to lave the district till he’d seen ould Peebles once more.’

‘If this is true——’ cried Conseltine, shaken out of his ordinary cynical calm by the news; then he stopped short, staring before him with a haggard face.

‘True, is it?’ cried Feagus. ‘Go and

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see for yourself. She's staying incog. at Larry's mill.'

'And Peebles knows it,' said Conseltine. 'By Heaven! I thought something had happened. The old rascal's been going about all day long as full o' mystery as an egg's full o' meat. If Henry hears of this!'

'He won't yet awhile,' returned Feagus. 'She swore Peebles to silence till she herself gave him leave to speak.'

'My God!' said Conseltine, scarcely above his breath. 'What's to be done? We're standing on a mine of gunpowder while that woman's in the district.'

Blake laughed. He had been as much astonished at the first hearing of the news as either of his companions, but by this time had shaken himself back into his usual condition of half-sodden, half-ferocious humour.

'Faith,' said he, 'tis a case of the divil among the tailors. By the Lord, Conseltine, but things are looking mighty

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quare. I'm thinkin' I won't emigrate just yet. Sure, I'll stop and see the fun! There'll be great doin's at the Castle by-and-by, I'm thinkin'.'

He laughed again, and drank another glass of whisky.

Conseltine took no notice of the interruption, which he seemed scarcely to hear.

'What are ye goin' to do, sir?' asked Feagus.

'I don't know yet,' answered Conseltine slowly. He sat down, and leant his head upon his hand, Feagus and Richard watching him keenly. 'She's living at Larry's mill, you say?' he said presently, without raising his eyes from the floor.

'At Larry's mill,' repeated Feagus. 'She's living all alone, under a false name, at that ould antiquated rat-trap.'

'Alone?' repeated Conseltine meaningly.

'Alone!' repeated Feagus.

'It's ruin,' said Conseltine, looking up,

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—‘it’s ruin for all of us if we don’t get that woman out of the way.’

‘Bedad it is, then,’ said Feagus. His pale face went whiter as he looked from Conseltine to Richard, and then back again, before stealing a look at Blake, who, with his chin propped in his hands and his elbows on the table, followed their dialogue as well as his muddled wits would allow, with his habitual expression of dogged humour slightly deepened. ‘See here, now,’ continued the lawyer; ‘we’re all friends here. The danger’s pressin’, and what’s goin’ to be done has got to be done quick.’

Conseltine’s generally smooth and expressionless face was as a book in which he read strange matter. Richard’s heavy hangdog countenance was white with rage and distorted with apprehension. Blake was the only one of the trio who preserved anything like his customary appearance.

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‘I was thinking,’ said Feagus, ‘as I came along, unless—you see now, the mill’s a mighty old place, worm-eaten and dry as tinder, and if—by an accident intirely—in the night, when there’s nobody about to render help—a stray spark ’d do it, for there’s hay and sthraw scattered all round convanient—and if—of course by accident—the old place were to catch fire, powers alive! wouldn’t it be an odd happening? and if it did, what fault o’ yours or mine would it be, and who’d be the wiser?’

‘God in heaven!’ cried Blake, rising to his feet, ‘’tis murder ye mean! Now, mark me, Conseltine, I’ll be no party to this. The curses of the son, the remorse of the old lord, and the spirit of that poor woman, would haunt me to me grave. I’ll have neither art nor part in such a plan.’

‘Of course not,’ said Conseltine, turning his white face from the last speaker to Feagus. ‘It’s only Feagus’s fun!’

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Feagus, looking at him, read more in his glance than could Blake and Richard, from both of whom his face was hidden. What it was he did not yet know, but in the score of years during which he had known Conseltine, he had never seen in his eyes such an expression.

‘We must find legal means,’ Conseltine continued. ‘Good-day, Blake; you’ll think of what I said to ye just now?’ Except for an added shade of gloom, for which Feagus’s news of the presence of Moya Macartney in the countryside would quite well have accounted, his face now was the face of every day. ‘I’ll see ye again before long. Come, Dick; come, Feagus.’

The three left the hut.

‘By the powers!’ said Blake, as he filled his seventh glass that day, ‘if the devil wants a fourth he’ll have to come *in propria persona* himself an’ join them. I’m more than half inclined to take Dick Conseltine’s offer, and go across

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the water. Your sins are finding ye out, Pat Blake. You've lived on his money for years past; 'twould be shabby conduct if ye turned on him now. But then, there's Moya. Poor colleen! Eh, the handsome slip of a girl she was—a long sight too good for Kilpatrick, and 'twas I that ruined her—or helped. And the boy? A fine lad, that; a handsome lad. Sure, many a time I've seen his mother lookin' out of his eyes at me, and heard her spake to me wid his voice. Ah, be damn'd to me, now, I'm gettin' ould and crazy! 'Tis an ould story—eighteen years ago. You might have got used to the thought of it by now, Pat Blake. Put more of the right stuff into ye, and forget it.'

He obeyed his own prescription so promptly that, half an hour after his guests had left him, he fell into a sodden sleep, with his head upon the table.

Conseltine and his two companions had meantime walked on at a rapid pace, and

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in dead silence, for the first half-mile. It was Conseltine who was the first to speak.

‘That’s a good idea of yours, Feagus.’

‘It would be,’ responded the lawyer, ‘if it were not for that cowardly drunken villain, who stops us puttin’ it into execution.’

‘But he won’t,’ said the other. ‘My mind’s made up. It’s that or nothing.’

‘But if he splits?’ said Richard.

‘Split!’ repeated Conseltine. ‘The job once done, he has my leave to split as wide as the Liffey. It’s one oath against three—the oath of a drunken blackguard and beggar against the oaths of three men of substance and position.’

‘And sure that’s true,’ said Feagus. ‘By the Lord, Mr. Conseltine, ye should have taken to our profession. Ye’d have been an honour to it.’

‘Besides,’ said Conseltine, ‘he’ll *not* split. He has his own skin to save, and he’s as deep in the mud as we are in the

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mire.' He paused, and looked round cautiously. The plain stretched to the mountains on the one side and the sea on the other, empty of any possible observer. 'We mustn't be seen together,' continued Conseltine. 'We'd better separate here. But before we part, we'll just arrange the details.'

CHAPTER X.

ANOTHER INTERVIEW.

THE shades of evening were beginning to envelop the landscape as Peebles made his slow and toilsome way towards Blake's Hall. The old man had been in a ferment of excitement all day long, and nothing but his long years of habit as chief officer and general director of Lord Kilpatrick's household had sufficed to hold him back from fulfilling his momentarily recurring desire to throw his duties to the winds for that day, and at once proceed to put to Blake the question dictated to him by Moya Macartney. His discomposure had not escaped the notice

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of his master, who, since the shock occasioned by Desmond's renunciation of him and his abrupt departure from the house, had kept his room, and had resented all approaches, even that of his favourite Dulcie, with an exaggeration of his usual snappish ill-temper.

'What the deuce are you dreaming about, Peebles?' he had asked, as the old servitor made some slight blunder in the service at his master's solitary dinner-table.

'If ye had an inkling of what I am dreaming about,' Peebles had responded, with his customary drawl, 'ye'd be in nae such a hurry to speer, maybe.'

At which his lordship had muttered an angry 'Pshaw!' and turned his face away.

'Is there any news of—of Desmond?' he asked a minute later.

'No, my lord,' answered Peebles; 'none that I ken o'.'

He was in so mortal a dread of prematurely letting slip the secret of Moya's

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presence in the neighbourhood that he would not trust himself to approach the subject at all.

‘Where is he?’ asked Kilpatrick.

‘They say he’s at Doolan’s farm,’ answered Peebles.

‘They say!’ snapped his lordship. ‘As if you didn’t know where the boy is, you disingenuous old brute!’

‘Oh ay!’ said Peebles tranquilly. ‘Swear at me, wi’ a’ my heart, if it will ease your lordship’s heart, or your conscience.’

Kilpatrick pushed his plate aside.

‘Take these things away and bring the wine.’

Peebles obeyed, and filled his master’s glass, after which he lingered for a moment.

‘Well, Peebles, well? Have you anything to say?’

‘Just that I’m going oot for an hour or twa. I hae a visit to make. If ye want anything in my absence the flunkey will look after ye.’

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‘Very good,’ answered Kilpatrick, who thought he knew the object of Peebles’ visit. ‘Peebles!’ he called, as the old man reached the door.

‘My lord!’

‘Has—has the boy any resources—any funds?’

‘Not that I ken o’,’ answered Peebles. ‘He was aye too open-handed.’

‘Well, if he wants money—he wouldn’t take it from me, I suppose—lend him what he asks, and look to me for repayment. There, there, that will do.’

Peebles saluted and retired, and set out half an hour later for Blake’s Hall. Entering the rude sitting-room, he made out, through the gathering shadows, the figure of Blake leaning on the table.

‘In his general condition, the drunken wastrel!’ said Peebles. ‘’Tis odd but he’s sae drunk he’ll not understand me when I speak to him. Mr. Blake! Mr. Blake!’ He shook the recumbent figure gently at

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first, and then more roughly, and at last elicited a husky growl. 'Mr. Blake! Wake up, and speak to me. Man, I've news for ye, and a question to ask o' ye. Wake up, wake up, for the love o' Heaven!'

Blake swayed back in his seat and opened his eyes. His first act, half unconscious, was to hold out his hand towards the bottle, which Peebles snatched from him with the quickness of a conjurer.

'Ye've had enough o' that for one while, ye disgraceful object,' he said. 'Wake up, I tell ye! Wake up, and tell me what I want to know.'

'Oh, 'tis you, Mither Peebles!' cried Blake.

'Ay, 'tis mysel',' returned Peebles. 'I've news for ye, when ye're sufficiently sober to hear it.'

Blake, like the practised toper he was, pulled himself together, and succeeded in looking solemnly and preternaturally sober.

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‘We’re alone?’ asked the old Scot, glancing cautiously round.

‘We are,’ said Blake. ‘Biddy’s gone to the village for more whisky.’

‘Then listen,’ said Peebles. ‘Moya Macartney’s alive!’ He made the communication slowly and distinctly, and paused to mark its effect.

‘Bedad! that’s true!’ returned Blake, as calmly as if Peebles had said ‘Good-day.’

‘Ye ken it!’ cried the old man. ‘And how the deil d’ye ken it?’

‘That’s my business, sir,’ said Blake. ‘I *do* know it. She was in the churchyard last night wid a Scotch gentleman of your acquaintance!’

It was difficult to throw Peebles off his mental balance for long at a time, and, surprised as he was at Blake’s knowledge of the interview of the preceding night, he went on with a perfect apparent calm :

‘Weel, it should lighten your heart! Ay! ye should fall on your knees and thank

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God, who's kinder to ye than ye deserve, that ye have not that puir lassie's death on your conscience !'

'Have ye come here to preach?' asked Blake.

'Na, na !' said Peebles. 'That's not my business, but it's yours, Mr. Ryan O'Connor, if a' tales are true !'

There could be no mistaking the effect of this speech on Blake. He half rose from his seat, clutching the sides of the table with trembling hands, and stared at Peebles with his eyes standing out of his head with surprise.

'And how the thunder did you know *that* ?' he asked.

'That's *my* business,' retorted the old Scotchman dryly.

'Holy powers !' muttered Blake, falling back into his chair, and passing his hand across his eyes in a bewildered fashion. 'Tis dreamin' I am !'

'Listen to me, Patrick Blake,' said

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Peebles solemnly. 'I met Moya Macartney last night. Poor lass! Her spirit's sadly broken. Says she to me—"Peebles, it's eighteen years since I spread the report of my own death; my hair is white, and my heart is broken; gang to Mr. Blake and ask him, as he values his own soul, to tell ye if ever he was in holy orders.'

Blake breathed hard, staring at Peebles with a face gone white.

'Answer!' cried the old man, 'and for God's sake answer truly!'

'Well, then,' said Blake, 'I was; but not when I married Moya Macartney to Lord Kilpatrick.'

'Had they unfrocked ye?' asked Peebles. 'Tell me that!'

'I'd unfrocked myself,' answered Blake. 'The Bishop said I was a disgrace and scandal to the Church, and took from me the only cure of souls I ever had.'

'But at the time ye married Moya were ye drummed out o' the Kirk?'

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‘ Devil the drum about it,’ responded Blake. ‘ The Bishop persuaded me to quit, so I just civilly retired. ’Twas convanient at the time, for sure I had creditors enough to man a Queen’s ship.’

‘ But ye had been a priest, and properly ordained?’ asked Peebles.

‘ Faith, I was as well ordained as any priest need be. What the divil’s the matter wid ye?’ he asked, as Peebles sprang from the seat he had taken and broke into a Highland fling. ‘ Is it mad ye are?’

‘ Clean daft wi’ joy!’ cried the old man. ‘ Gie’s your hand, man!’ He seized Blake’s hand and wrung it heartily. ‘ By the piper that played before Moses, ye’re the Reverend Mr. Blake still!—and by that same token Moya Macartney is Lady Kilpatrick, and Desmond Macartney is Desmond Conseltine, his lordship’s son and heir!’

The mention of the name of Conseltine electrified Blake. He clutched his whisky-

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muddled head in both hands, staring wildly before him.

‘My God!’ he cried suddenly, ‘is it dreamin’ that I am? No, by the Lord, ’tis no dream, sir! Get up, man, get up! ’Tis no time to be sittin’ here! They mean mischief—already it may be too late!’

‘Too late! Too late for what?’ cried the old man.

‘Richard Conseltine and his boy, and Feagus the attorney—bad cess to the lot of ’em—were here this forenoon. They know Moya’s alive! They know where she lives! Oh, my head, my head! what was it the blackguards said? Ah!’ he screamed, ‘the mill! ’Tis at Larry’s mill that Moya’s living!’

‘Yes!’ cried Peebles. ‘She’s there. But what of that? Speak, man! what is it?’

‘They mean to burn the mill, and her with it!’ cried Blake. ‘For the love o’ God, run and find Desmond, and get Moya out o’ the place. ’Twas here that

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they plotted it. Man alive, I believe they mean murder !

‘ Murder ! ’ gasped Peebles.

‘ Isn’t it life or death to them to keep Moya out o’ the way ? Run, man ! Run every step o’ the road ! Ye’ve time to save her yet. They daren’t try it before night-fall. Doolan’s farm is on the way, and ye’ll find Desmond there. If ever ye loved him, run ! ’

Peebles, knowing the men with whom he had to deal, needed no further warning, but after a few more hasty words with Blake, ran rather than walked from Blake’s Hall.

CHAPTER XI.

MOTHER AND SON.

PEEBLES, though weary with his unwonted vigil in the early morning and the anxiety of the day, made good speed to Doolan's farm, urged as he was by those most powerful of stimulants, love and fear. It was a long and rough road, but a younger and stronger man than the old Scot might have been satisfied with the speed at which he covered it. He arrived panting at the humble cabin, where the farmer and his family, with Desmond among them, were just sitting down to the plain but plentiful evening meal of potatoes and buttermilk, supplemented by a rasher of bacon in

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honour of the guest, whom Doolan felt a great pride in entertaining, and who would have found a welcome equally warm at almost any house in the district.

‘By my soul!’ said the hospitable farmer, as Peebles broke into the room and fell exhausted into the nearest chair; ‘’tis me lord’s butler—’tis Mr. Peebles! The top o’ the evening to ye, sor. Bridget, I’m thinkin’ Mr. Peebles will be takin’ a dhrop o’ whisky. Saints above! what’s wrong wi’ ye, sor?’

Peebles slowly panted his breath back, while the farmer and his wife—the latter a ruddy, handsome peasant woman, who had been Desmond’s nurse eighteen years before—stood solicitously over him.

‘Get the bottle, Bridget,’ said the farmer. ‘The poor gentleman’s clane blown.

Peebles took a mouthful of the liquor, and felt the better for it.

‘What is it at all?’ asked Desmond.

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‘Faith, ye look as if you’d seen a ghost. What is it, old friend?’

‘You must come with me, Desmond,’ said the old man. ‘I’ve news for ye—news that will keep no longer.’

‘If ’tis good news,’ said Desmond, ‘sure ’tis welcome, and all the more welcome for being unexpected.’

‘Good!’ cried Peebles—‘it’s the best! It’s better than I ever dared to hope!’

‘Faith, then,’ returned the boy, ‘let’s have it!’

‘Not here, laddie, not here!’ said Peebles. ‘’Tis only in your private ear that I can whisper it yet.’

‘We’ll lave ye alone,’ said the honest farmer. ‘Come, Bridget; come, children.’

‘No, no!’ said Peebles. ‘I’ve no time to bide. Ye must come wi’ me, Desmond. It’s not a’ good news I bring ye. There’s danger near one ye love, laddie.’

‘Dulcie?’ cried Desmond.

‘No—Lady Dulcie’s safe, for a’ I ken,

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and I saw her not three hours syne, the bonnie doo, blooming like the rose o' Sharon. Come, lad, put on your hat—I'm rested noo. We'll gang together, and I'll tell ye as we gang.'

Desmond obeyed, in a great state of bewilderment, and Peebles, when they were some hundred yards away from the farm, began his story by a question :

'Ye'll remember the poor woman ye met last night in the kirkyard?'

'Yes,' answered Desmond.

'Man,' said Peebles, 'I scarce know how to tell ye, or if ye'll believe me when I've tellt ye. Maybe ye'll think I'm daft or dreaming. You've just got to prepare yourself for the greatest shock ye ever had in your life. It well-nigh dinged the soul oot o' me wi' surprise when I heard it, and it will hit ye sairer still, I'm thinking.'

The old man's voice was so tremulous with emotion that Desmond stopped short, and peered into his face questioningly in

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the pale moonlight which was struggling with the thick dust of the summer night.

‘For God’s sake, Peebles,’ he said, ‘what is it?’

‘It’s just this,’ returned the Scot. ‘That poor woman was Moya Macartney—your own mother!’

For some seconds Peebles’ speech carried no emotion to Desmond’s mind.

‘My mother!’ he repeated, in a voice whose only expression was one of pure bewilderment. ‘My mother? — Moya Macartney?’

‘Ay,’ said Peebles. ‘She that was dead is alive. ’Tis a long story, and I’ve neither time nor breath to tell you all. She spread the report of her own death eighteen years ago, and went across the seas to America. All these long, weary years, she’s denied her heart the only pleasure it could ever know—the pleasure of seeing her son’s face and hearing his voice. At last she could bear it no longer

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—she came. It was she you talked wi' last night in the kirkyard, she who kissed your forehead and gied you her blessing.'

Desmond clutched at his throat with a choking sob.

'For God's sake, laddie,' cried the old man, 'don't break down noo! There's work to be done. You don't know all yet, nor the half o't.'

'My mother!' cried Desmond. 'My mother!' He took off his soft felt hat, crushing it in his hand, and pulled his collar open, stifling with surprise and emotion. Peebles, seeing it vain to continue his story for the moment, paused, waiting till the first shock of his communication should have passed away. 'My mother!' Desmond repeated again, after an interval. He spoke mechanically, with an utter lack of emotion in voice and manner. 'My mother! Well?'

'The laddie's stunned wi' the intelligence,' said Peebles to himself, 'and

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small wonder. Can you understand what I'm saying, Desmond?' he asked, taking the lad's arm. 'We must gang on, lad. There'll maybe be serious work for us this night. D'ye understand me?'

'Yes,' said Desmond slowly, his mind still feeling numbed and dim. 'I can hear what you say, Mr. Peebles, but it—it all seems so strange. Is it dreaming that I am?'

''Tis no dream,' answered Peebles. 'It's as real as the soil beneath your feet, and as true as God's above ye. Pull yerself together, lad, pull yerself together!'

'Well,' said Desmond, resuming his way in obedience to the impetus of Peebles' hand, 'go on—I'll try to understand.'

'She came back,' continued Peebles—speaking slowly, that the words might better penetrate the stunned intelligence of his companion—'she came back a' that weary way just to see the face and hear the voice o' the bairn she'd suffered for eighteen years ago. But, laddie, she's had strange

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news! You don't ken all the sorrowfu' story. I tauld you, when that young cub, your cousin, taunted you wi' the accident o' your birth, never to think shame o' your mother. I've had no chance since to tell you more; I must tell it noo. Your mother was entrapped by a sham marriage—or, at least, the marriage was believed to be a sham. It was Blake of Blake's Hall who officiated as priest. Somehow, Moya surmised that Blake might really have been a priest, and asked me to gang till him and speer if it was so. I went this afternoon and saw him, and he confessed that he had been in holy orders, and that, though the Bishop had ta'en his cure o' souls from him, he had never been legally unfrocked. D'ye ken what *that* means, laddie?'

'My brain's reeling,' said Desmond; 'I understand nothing.'

'It means,' cried the old man, his voice breaking with glad emotion—'it means that

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you're Desmond Conseltine, my master's legitimate son and heir, the next Lord Kilpatrick! Oh, laddie, it's brave news—it's brave news—and my heart was just bursting to tell it!

Desmond spoke no word, and his silence after the communication of the tidings a little frightened his old friend, who peered into his face as they walked on quietly side by side.

'Hae ye nothing to say, Desmond?' he asked.

'What can I say?' asked Desmond. 'Where is my mother?' he asked suddenly. 'Is it to her that ye're taking me?'

'Ay,' said Peebles. 'We're gaun to Larry's mill, and there we'll find her. Desmond, my man, she mustn't stay there. There's danger abroad.'

They were in the middle of the wide, waste country, but the old man could not repress the searching look he cast around him.

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'She has ill-wishers, blackguards, who'll stick at nothing to gain their cruel ends. Blake told me this afternoon of a thing I find it hard to credit. Your uncle, Richard Conseltine, and his son, and that scoundrel Feagus, *know* that Moya's alive, and where she's living. Feagus saw her wi' me in the kirkyard, and listened to our talk. Blake thinks they might molest her while she's there asleep! We'll just hope it's nothing but one of his drunken havers, but I've kent Richard Conseltine for well-nigh thirty years, and, man, he's a mean creature. There's not much he'd stick at, I'm thinking, for the price is the title and estates of Kilpatrick. Anyway, 'tis just sober prudence to warn Moya and get her awa' oot o' danger. Her proper place is the Castle, but if she'll no consent to gang there, we'll just find her another shelter for awhile.'

While Peebles and Desmond were ear-

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nestly discussing the strange news of her resurrection and reappearance, Moya Macartney was seated alone in the desolate tenement known to the country people as 'Larry's Mill.'

It was a dreary, tumble-down place, ill-fitted for human habitation, and the 'Larry' by whom it had been owned had long gone the way of all flesh. The house itself was built on wooden pillars, and consisted of an upper and a lower chamber; the former utterly abandoned, save in the spring of the year, when it was temporarily occupied by an old shepherd; the latter now and again used as a sort of byre, or shelter-place for cattle. A rough ladder, several rungs of which had fallen away, led from the under to the upper room.

The mill-wheel itself, choked with filth and weeds, stood still and broken, the waters of the stream which had once turned it forcing their way through its torn fissures and gaps, and forming a slimy

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pool. On the night of which we write there had been heavy rains, and the stream, swollen and black, was pouring through the moveless wheel with the force and the roar of a torrent.

A truckle-bed with a coarse straw mattress, and a few coarse utensils, were the only furniture of the upper room. The floor was strewn with straw. A rude window looked down on the wheel and on the dismal pool beneath, and as the water roared, and the wind blew, the whole building shook as if about to be swept away.

The sound of someone stirring below startled the woman as she stood at the window gazing silently out into the night.

‘Who’s there?’ she cried, turning and looking down the open trap-door which opened on the ladder.

‘Sure it’s only me, ma’am,’ said a voice—‘Larry Monaghan! I’ve a message to ye from my mother, at the new mill beyant.’

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As the man spoke, his head protruded through the trap-door.

‘I see ye’ve a light convanient,’ he said, pointing to a tallow candle which stood above the disused fireplace.

‘Yes, sure,’ answered Moya.

‘Kape it burning, to drive away the rats, but mind the sparks — the ould timber’s like touchwood. But sure it’s not that I came to say. My mother bids ye come over with me to the new mill, and shelter there, for sure this is no place for a decent woman.’

‘It’s only for one more night,’ replied Moya, ‘and then I’ll be laving for my own home in the south. Though I thank your kind mother all the same.’

‘Saints above!’ murmured Larry. ‘It’s not a wink of shleep I could get here! They’re sayin’ the place is haunted by the fairies.’

‘Sure they won’t harm a poor soul like me!’ cried Moya, with a musical laugh.

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‘Thin ye won’t come? It’s only a short stretch down the hillside.’

‘I’ll stay where I am, thank you,’ was the reply. ‘I’m a sound sleeper, and even when I’m waking, I’ve my thoughts for company. It will be getting late?’

‘Past ten o’clock,’ said Larry, ‘and the rain’s falling heavily. I’m concerned to leave ye here, in a place so lonesome!’

‘The Lord will watch over me!’ answered Moya, crossing herself.

‘Amin!’ said the man. ‘Then I’ll say good-night!’

‘Good-night!’

With a dubious shake of the head, Larry disappeared, and immediately afterwards she heard the sound of his retreating footsteps below. He was whistling as he went, doubtless to keep up his courage, for, like most of his class, he was superstitious. Presently all was silent, save for the dismal murmur of wind and water.

Left alone, Moya sat on the bedside,

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looking at vacancy and thinking. Presently, with a deep sigh, she rose, placed the lighted candle for safety in a tin bowl on the floor close to the bedside, and then, kneeling down, covered her face with her hands and prayed.

For a long time she remained thus, praying silently. The wind howled, and the water roared, but she did not stir. When at last she rose, her fair face looked calm and peaceful, as if the hand of an angel had been placed upon her suffering brow. Then she threw herself on the bed, and after a time fell asleep.

How long she slept she never knew; but she was wearied out, and her sleep was sound. Suddenly, with a start of terror, she awakened. The candle had gone out, and the place was in total darkness. As she lay trembling and listening, she heard, above the moan of the elements, the sound of something moving in the room below, and saw, through the trap-

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door, a gleam like the light from a lantern.

‘Who’s there?’ she cried.

There was no answer, but the light immediately disappeared.

Moya was not superstitious, and much sorrow had given her unusual courage. She sat up in bed, listening, and heard again a sound from below—this time like retreating footsteps.

‘Sure it was only my fancy,’ she thought, ‘when I seemed to see a light yonder. ’Twill only be some of the poor mountain cattle sheltering from the storm.’

But at that moment a red gleam came from the room below, and before she could spring from her bed and look down the gleam had become a flame, lighting up the place like dawn. Conscious now of a real and awful peril, she endeavoured to descend the ladder, but a column of mingled smoke and flame drove her back, suffocating.

The room below was a sheet of fire,

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and piled against the walls was a heap of dry hay and straw, burning brightly, with flames that leapt up and caught the rotten timber. With a scream she again attempted to descend, but was instantly driven back. Then, scarcely knowing what she did, she closed the trap-door, and rushing to the window, threw it open.

She realized the truth now. The sounds she had heard, the light she had seen, had been made by human beings, and whether by design or by accident, the mill had been set on fire. Poor soul, she did not yet understand that there were men living in the world who would do even a deed like that to compass a fellow-creature's death.

As she stood terror-stricken, a tongue of fire crept through the floor and caught the loose straw with which it was strewn. At this fresh horror she uttered a piercing shriek, for escape seemed impossible. As her voice rose on the night, it was answered by another from the darkness.

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‘Mother! mother!’

Her heart stood still. Was she dreaming? Whose voice could it be that uttered that holy name? She leant out over the mill-wheel, and saw beyond her in the darkness the glimmer of a lanthorn.

‘Help! help!’ she cried; and as she cried the whole place seemed rocking beneath, and thick clouds of smoke and tongues of fire came up through the heating floor. Then again she heard the voice, crying and imploring.

‘Mother! mother!’

‘Who’s that?’ she cried.

‘Desmond—your son Desmond!’

Desmond! Her son! Even in her dire and awful peril she felt a thrill of delicious joy.

‘Save me, Desmond, save me!’ she cried.

‘The water-wheel!’ answered Desmond.
‘Climb out from the window, stand on

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the wheel, and lape for your life into the pool below !

Moya hesitated, and again, as the flame and smoke thickened behind her, uttered a despairing scream.

‘’Tis your only chance for life,’ called the voice. ‘Jump, mother darling ! Sure I’ll be near to help ye ! Jump, for the love of God !’

It was that or being burned alive. The whole mill was now one sheet of flame, and the fire scorched her as she stood, while the wooden floor crackled and split beneath her feet. Crossing herself, and consigning her soul to God, she scrambled out on the wheel and clung there on hands and knees, exposed to the full force of wind and rain.

‘Jump, mother !’ cried Desmond once more. She fluttered forward with a cry, and slipped rather than fell with a heavy splash into the boiling waters of the pool. As she did so her senses left her ; she

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seemed to be sucked down, down into some awful abyss; then she was conscious of nothing more.

When her eyes opened, she was lying on the bank of the stream, with the light from a lanthorn flashing into her face.

‘Mother! mother!’ cried the voice she had heard before. ‘It’s Desmond—your son Desmond!’

His arms were round her neck, her head was on his bosom. Peebles, holding the lanthorn, bent over them, tears streaming down his wrinkled face.

‘Desmond—my boy!’ she murmured.

‘Mother, my mother!’ he answered, sobbing over her.

He had watched her drop into the mill-pool, and then had plunged in to her rescue, catching her as she was swept down towards the fall below the mill, and swimming with her to the bank whereon she now lay.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. PEBBLES PREPARES FOR WAR.

FOR a long, sacred space the mother and son thus strangely reunited knelt together, their arms about each other, their hearts full of a whirl of many mingled emotions which made speech impossible. When at last Moya broke the long silence, it was with a voice curiously calm, despite the deep underlying tremor which told by what an heroic effort she was able to speak at all.

‘Desmond! My son!’

‘Mother!’ was all Desmond could sob in return.

‘Ye know me? Ye know who I am?’

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‘Yes; Peebles has told me,’ returned Desmond.

‘Ye don’t shrink from me? Ye don’t despise the poor woman that loves ye?’

‘Shrink from you! Despise you!’ cried the boy, straining her to his heart, and speaking between the kisses with which he covered her face, her hands, her dress. ‘I’m like to burst with joy for finding ye! I was alone in the world, with scarce a friend, nameless and hopeless and homeless, and God has sent me *you!*’

He raised her to her feet, and fell on his knees again before her, looking up at her with eyes bright with fast-running tears.

‘Mother! mother! mother!’

It was all that he could say, and there was at once infinite pleasure and poignant grief in his repetition of the word. He fell forward, embracing her knees.

‘God’s good, after all!’ said Moya.

MR. PEBBLES PREPARES FOR WAR

‘Many and many has been the bitter hour all these weary years when I thought He had forgotten me. Oh, my son, my son!’

She lifted him from his kneeling posture, and fed her hungry eyes upon his face.

‘Ye’re my own boy, Desmond. I can see the face that I remember years ago, smilin’ at me from the glass, when I little thought of the bitter trouble in store for me. I can die happy now. There’s nothing more that God can give me, now that I’ve held you in my arms and heard you call me mother.’

‘Not for many a long year yet, please God,’ sobbed Desmond; ‘not for many a long, happy year that you and I will pass together. I’ve something to live for, now—something to work for. We’ll go away together, back to the place you came from, and forget the past and all its misery.’

‘*His* face, too!’ said Moya, who, in her

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passionately loving scrutiny of Desmond's features had let his words pass unheeded; 'his face, as it was when I first knew him !'

'You mean my father ?' cried Desmond. 'I've disowned him ! I've cast him off ! I have no father !—nobody in the world but you, mother !'

'Hoots, man !' said Peebles, who stood blinking and looking on like an intelligent raven, 'are ye going to retreat just when the battle's in your hand ? That's mighty poor generalship, laddie !'

The events of the last quarter of an hour had quite banished from Desmond's memory the story the old man had told him as they had walked from the farmer's cottage towards the mill. At this sudden interruption he stared at Peebles with the empty look of one aroused from a day-dream by words which bear no meaning to his mind.

'All this trouble has turned the poor

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lad's brain,' said Peebles to Moya. 'Hae ye forgotten,' he continued to Desmond, 'all that I told ye not an hour syne?'

The boy gave a sudden cry of recollection, and again threw his arms about his mother's neck.

'Come!' he cried, 'come to the Castle, and take the place that's yours by right.'

'Not yet, laddie, not yet,' said Peebles. 'Soft and cunning goes far. My lord's no in a condition to hae sic a surprise sprung on him wi' no sort o' warning. 'Deed, 'twould kill him, I'm thinking.'

'And serve him right!' cried Desmond hotly.

'Hoots, man!' said Peebles again, 'ye're in o'er much of a hurry to inherit.'

'I?' cried Desmond. 'I never thought of myself. 'Tis for her, Peebles. Think of the long years of misery she's endured, of all the anguish—the—the——' His voice broke.

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‘Ay!’ said Peebles. ‘Ye think as the young, who have never kenned sorrow, are apt to think. She has suffered so long that anither day or twa will hardly matter much, I’m thinking. You must bide a wee, laddie. You must trust to Peebles. I’m just as anxious to see you and your mother get your rights as ye can be yersel’; but lookers-on see most of the game, and my lord’s head is cooler than yours is like to be.’

‘He is right, Desmond,’ said Moya. ‘We must think of—of your father, and then—’tis myself, too, that has need of time and need of prayer. If the news had come years back, I couldn’t have held myself back. I should have run to him at once. But now—’tis not of him I think; ’tis of you. ’Tis little enough pleasure to me to know that I am Lady Kilpatrick, and the love that would have carried me to him is gone—gone all to you, Desmond.’

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She fell silent for a time, looking straight before her with an expression which her two companions strove vainly to interpret till she spoke again.

‘Those villains think that they have killed me,’ she said presently, speaking quietly, almost dreamily. ‘I was thinkin’ that maybe——’

‘Yes, lassie—I mean Lady Kilpatrick,’ said the old man, substituting the title for the more familiar form of address, with all the respect of a good Scot for the upper ranks of the social hierarchy.

‘They think I’m dead,’ she said again, in the same slow and dreamy fashion. ‘Wouldn’t it be better if I were dead?’

‘God guide us!’ exclaimed the old man, ‘her wits are wandering.’

‘No,’ she said. ‘But couldn’t I go away quietly to some place where Desmond could come and see me at odd times? I’d not disgrace him, then, nor—nor Henry. If Blake will spake the truth,

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Desmond will be the next Lord Kilpatrick, and that will make me as happy as I can ever be this side o' the grave.'

'Disgrace me!' cried Desmond. 'Oh, mother! how can ye speak so?' What is it to me that I am to be Lord Kilpatrick? Sure, I'd rather be the poor Squireen, and have you to love and work for, than be king of all Ireland.'

'Weel said!' cried Peebles. 'Eh, there's the real grit in ye, laddie! But I'm thinking that maybe ye'll find mair virtue in the title o' Lord Kilpatrick than ye think for. Think o' Lady Dulcie, Desmond. Can ye ask her, the bonnie doo, to share sic a life as ye'd hae to live for years and years to come, before ye've made a name and position for yersel'? It looks easy at your age to conquer the world, but the fight's a long and bitter one. And then, there's the plain justice of the case. Let right be done. Your mother's Lady Kilpatrick, and you're Desmond Conseltine,

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my lord's heir, and I'll see them damn'd—the Lord forgive me for swearin' !—before I'll let yon brace o' murderin' thieves prosper at your expense. No, no, Moya, my lass. There's nae hurry for the moment. We can afford the time to bide and turn it over till we've hit on the best means o' gettin' your rights—but hae them ye shall, and Desmond, too, or my name's no' Peebles. But save us a', here are ye twa poor creatures standing here drippin' water. Ye'll be takin' yer deaths o' cauld. I must find ye anither shelter, my lady, where ye may bide quiet and canny till matters are arranged. I'll hae to find how the land lies, and prepare my lord's mind. I hae't! There's Patsy Maguire's cottage. He's gone to Dublin to sell his stock for emigrating to America. He'll not be back for a week, and the bit sticks o' furniture are a' there. 'Tis a lonesome place. Ye'll not be disturbit, and nobody need ken that ye're there. I'll send ye all ye can

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want by a sure hand. Kiss your son, and say good-bye to him for a day or twa. Trust to me !

Desmond and his mother took each other again in their arms, and for a minute the deep silence of the night was broken only by the babble of the brook and the sound of their sobs and kisses. Then the old mill, which had been blazing furiously, though unheeded, fell in upon itself with a thunderous crash.

‘ Lord save us !’ cried Peebles, ‘ come awa’ if ye don’t want the countryside about us ! It’s jest a wonder that naeboddy’s come already. Hoot ! they’re coming !’

A noise of distant voices and the clatter of feet became audible.

‘ Quick, quick !’ cried the old man. ‘ Get back hame, Desmond ; I’ll see to your mother.’

He took Moya by the arm, and with gentle violence forced her from the scene,

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while Desmond moved off in the contrary direction. Once or twice he had to hide behind trees and boulders from the people who were now passing towards the mill attracted from all quarters by the blazing timbers.

Once clear of them, and out again in the wide silence of the summer night, he tried hard to fix his mind on the events of the evening, but his brain was bewildered, and seemed like a screw too worn to bite ; he could think to no satisfactory result. Half mechanically, his feet bore him in paths he had travelled thousands of times, and he found himself at last on the outskirts of Kilpatrick Castle. Then his wandering wits fixed themselves on one image—Dulcie! He stole noiselessly as a thief about the great house. It was still as a tomb, and dark, but for a single ray of light which shone from a window which he knew to be Dulcie's. His heart glowed with love and hope. At last she should be his!

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There was no question now of accepting her heroic self-sacrifice. He could give her the position that she had a right to aspire to. She had descended from her lofty station like a pitying angel to love the poor, nameless boy. He could raise her to a higher. His heart was so full of love and pride and triumph that he knelt on the turf beneath that friendly gleam of light, and prayed to it as a devotee would pray to the shrine of his favourite saint, the happy tears running down his face.

‘God bless my darling!’ he said softly.
‘God bless her!’

The desire again to see her face, to hear her voice, was too strong to be resisted. He threw a few pebbles of gravel against the glass, and a moment later the blind was drawn aside. Lady Dulcie saw him standing pale and still in the broad moonlight, and softly raised the window.

‘Desmond, is it you?’

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‘Yes, Lady Dulcie. Speak low. Maybe they’re listening. I couldn’t stay away longer; I longed so to see you.’

‘I’ll come down to you,’ she whispered; ‘go to the west door.’

He slipped away, and a minute or two later Dulcie issued from the house, enveloped in a white dressing-gown, her naked feet glistening in rose-coloured slippers. Desmond made an irrepressible motion to take her in his arms, but, remembering his soaked condition, drew back.

‘Why,’ said Dulcie, ‘you’re all dripping wet, you silly boy! What have you been doing with yourself?’

‘I’ve been fishing,’ said Desmond.

‘Fishing?’ repeated Dulcie.

‘Yes, sure,’ said the boy, with a happy laugh. ‘I’ve landed the biggest fish of the season. I’ll tell ye all about it by-and-by, Dulcie. Not yet. ’Tis a secret. Haven’t ye a kiss for me?’

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Dulcie pecked at the cheek he extended towards her, making a comic little face.

‘What is your secret, Desmond?’ she asked. ‘Can’t you trust me?’

‘Not yet, my jewel,’ said Desmond. ‘Trust *me* a bit. I’ll tell you this much, dear. Our troubles are over, and I’ll be coming in a day or two to claim ye! Is that as sweet to you to hear as it is to me to say, I wonder?’

‘This is all very mysterious,’ said Dulcie. ‘But you seem very happy, Desmond. Won’t you tell me what has happened?’

‘Not yet. Wait a bit, and be as happy as your curiosity will let you.’

‘You provoking wretch!’ cried Dulcie. ‘I’m sure something has happened; you seem so ridiculously happy.’

‘Then I look as I feel. Tell me,’ he went on, to stave off further questioning on her part, ‘how are things going on here at the Castle? How is Lord Kilpatrick?’

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‘He’s better in health,’ replied Dulcie, ‘but he’s very glum and silent, and he keeps his room. He has seen nobody but Peebles, and Mr. Conseltine, and me. He’s dreadfully changed—quite sullen and disagreeable. Oh, by the way, Mr. Conseltine and that son of his were out nearly all day, and when they came back, about an hour ago, I happened to pass them in the hall. They were both dreadfully pale, and looked awfully disturbed and frightened. Has your secret anything to do with *them*?’

‘Maybe,’ said Desmond. ‘Sure, ’tis no use you asking questions. But ’tis good news I have for you, when the time comes to speak. And now, darling, give me another kiss, and go back indoors.’

He tried hard to hold himself from embracing her, but his arms were round her before he knew it and he strained her to his breast with all his strength.

‘I’ve ruined your gown,’ he said peni-

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tently, when the embrace was finished, 'but I couldn't help it. You'd draw the soul out of a stone when you look like that. The mischief's done now, so I'll take another! Good-night, my angel. Sweet dreams, and a happy waking for ye! If I stay any longer I'll be breaking down and telling you all, and' tis best you shouldn't know for a while.'

CHAPTER XIII.

FATHER AND SON.

DURING breakfast next morning at the Castle the two Conseltines, father and son, who were usually punctual in their appearance at meal hours, descended late. They were pale and quiet; and Richard, who had his nerves very much less under control than had his astute and resolute parent, was so obviously ill at ease as to bring down upon himself the notice and comments of his lordship. The old nobleman, sick of the seclusion of his solitary chamber, had appeared at the breakfast table, in hopes that a little cheerful society might aid in dissipating the unwelcome

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reflections which, since Desmond's departure from the Castle, had beset his waking hours and broken his nightly rest. At no time gifted with the most equable temper in the world, he was particularly snappish and irritable that morning.

'Your lordship will no' hae heard the news, I'm thinking,' said Peebles, standing at the sideboard and breaking in upon the uneasy silence. His eyes dwelt, as if by accident, upon Richard Conseltine's face as he spoke, and the young man's pale complexion assumed a greenish hue.

'What news are you talking about?' asked Kilpatrick.

'There was a fire last night,' answered Peebles.

Richard, conscious of his father's coldly threatening eye, spilled half the contents of the glass of brandy-and-soda by which he had that morning replaced the soberer beverages usually in demand at the break-

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fast table, and conveyed the remainder to his lips with a shaking hand.

‘A fire! Where?’ asked Kilpatrick.

‘At the old mill up by the burn,’ said Peebles. ‘’Twas burned to the ground, I’m told, and there’s some talk of an old peasant woman, a gangrel strange body that they had gien shelter to, having been burned wi’ it.’

‘God bless my soul!’ murmured his lordship. ‘Has the body been found?’

Richard emitted an involuntary gasp, and clung with his feet to the leg of the table.

‘No,’ returned Peebles, ‘not yet. There’s just the chance it never may be. A good part o’ the blazing timbers fell into the burn and were carried awa’, and it’s like enouch the body went wi’ them—or maybe they’ll come upon it digging among the ruins.’

‘Who was the woman?’ asked Dulcie, ‘Does anybody know her?’

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‘Nobody that I ken o’,’ returned Peebles, with an immovable face. ‘A bit tramp body.’

‘Deuced odd,’ said Kilpatrick. ‘How could a place like that, miles away from anywhere, catch fire? Is there any suspicion of arson?’

‘Deed,’ said Peebles, ‘I don’t know why there should be. Who is there that wad do siccan mischief? To be sure,’ he added, with a reflective air, ‘the woman might have enemies. Those tramps are a waesome lot to deal wi’—but it’s most likely that she did it hersel’ by accident, poor thing. We’ll just hope so, for the sake o’ human charity—till we get further information, anyway.’ He looked at Richard again as he spoke the last words, and had some difficulty in repressing any sign of the angry scorn he felt at sight of the young man’s livid face. ‘It’s hard on Larry, dacent lad,’ he continued.

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‘I’m thinking that your lordship might do worse than start a subscription for him.’

‘Certainly, certainly,’ said Kilpatrick. ‘I’ll give five pounds. You have my leave, Peebles, to say so, and to ask for subscriptions in my name.’

‘I’ll give five,’ said Dulcie.

‘I shall be glad to follow so good an example,’ said Conseltine. He strove hard to speak in his usual smooth fashion, but his voice sounded harsh and unsteady to his own ears. He gave Richard an angrily prompting look, and the boy tried to speak, but his tongue rattled against the roof of his mouth. ‘I thought you would,’ said Conseltine, quickly interpreting the inarticulate sound issuing from his son’s throat as an expression of charitable sympathy. ‘Put Richard and myself down for ten pounds, if you please, Mr. Peebles.’

‘I thank ye, Lady Dulcie and gentle-

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men,' said Peebles. 'It's good to hae feeling hearts, and the means of proving that ye hae them. I'll let ye know any later news—if the body's found, or anything o' that kind.'

'What the devil's the matter with you?' his lordship asked of Richard, with sudden acerbity. Richard was as white as death, and shivering like a leaf.

'It's the heat, or—or something,' he managed to stammer out.

'Let me help you to your room, my boy,' said his father.

He rose, and supported Richard from the table, hiding as well as he could his pitiable condition.

'You cowardly fool!' he hissed in his ear, when he had got him to his own chamber and locked the door. 'Do you want to ruin us? What are ye afraid of, ye shaking poltroon?'

'He knows!' gasped Richard; 'I could see it in his eye; he knows.'

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‘ Knows !’ echoed Conseltine scornfully.
‘ What does he know ?’

‘ He knows that the woman at the mill was Moya Macartney.’

‘ And if he does,’ said Conseltine, ‘ what then? What can he prove?’

‘ He knows more than that, I’ll swear!’ cried Richard. ‘ I saw him look at me. He knows enough to hang us.’

‘ Hang us!’ repeated the elder. ‘ By the saints, I’ve a mind to save the hangman half his work, you white-livered, croaking coward!’

‘ If *he* doesn’t know, Blake does,’ said Richard.

‘ Leave Blake to me,’ said his father. ‘ I’ll look after Blake. ’Twill be a question of money ; he’ll bleed us pretty freely, I expect ; but if he opens his mouth too wide I’ll bluff him, and swear he dreamt it. ’Tis two against one, any way ; two men of good position and unblemished record against one drunken vagabond.

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They can prove nothing, let them talk as they may. Feagus will hold his tongue for his own sake, for if the case comes before the court there are three to swear that he suggested the business. There's no danger at all, except from your cursed cowardice. Pull yourself together, and trust to me. They can prove no motive. Why should you and I go burning mills and killing old peasant women? Feagus is the only creature alive who knows that we were aware of Moya's identity. Keep a cool head, and you'll be Lord Kilpatrick before long.'

The task which Peebles had undertaken was no easy one, and the more he contemplated it, the more difficult it seemed to grow. He racked his brains over the problem of how to make known to one in so precarious a condition of health as Lord Kilpatrick the secret of Moya's continued existence, and of her presence in the neighbourhood. The difficulty was com-

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plicated by the cowardly and criminal attempt on her life by two members of his lordship's family, for the honour of which the faithful old servant was deeply concerned. That two such scoundrels should still be permitted to prey on the kindness of his master, and diminish Desmond's patrimony, was intolerable; that they should be publicly charged with their crime was impossible. Feagus, too, was in the same boat, and must also be permitted to escape, for it was impossible to denounce him without bringing the crime of the Conseltines to light. But, then, there was the chance—the strong chance—of the gossip of the countryside bringing to their ears the knowledge of Moya's continued existence, and what three such scoundrels might do to cover their unsuccessful attempt, and to secure their endangered booty, it was hard to say.

The need for decisive action was press-

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ing, but in what direction was that action to be taken? One course, and one course only, seemed to Peebles clear for the moment. It was in his power to secure Moya's safety from any further attempt. That could be done by simply telling the two villains now in the house that their nefarious proceeding of the night before was known. Once resolved, Peebles was as bold a man as any that ever trod shoe-leather; and with such a weapon as was furnished by his hold over the two Conseltines he would have faced an army. His resolution taken, he walked with an assured foot upstairs to Richard's bedroom, and knocked at the door; it was opened by the elder man.

'I'd like a word with you, if you please, Mr. Conseltine,' he said.

'Presently, Mr. Peebles, presently,' said the other, who did not care to expose his son and confederate to the old man's keen eye in his present pitiful condition of

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nervous excitement. 'We have business of importance together.'

'It must be business o' very great importance,' said Peebles, 'if it can't wait till mine is finished.'

Conseltine's hard eye dwelt on the old man's face, and his lips twitched in a hopeless attempt to maintain their impassivity.

'You are importunate, my old friend,' he said.

'Ye'd better listen to me,' returned the grim old servitor.

Conseltine stood aside to allow him to enter, and closed and locked the door behind him. Richard was seated on the bed. He made a terrible and clumsy effort to seem at ease as Peebles' gaze passed lightly over him before it settled again on his father.

'Well, sir?' said Conseltine as calmly as he could.

'Before making the communication I

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hae to make,' said Peebles, his usual slow and deliberate drawl more slow and deliberate than ever, 'I hae to tell ye that, but for the honour o' the house I've served man and boy for five-and-forty years, I should have conseedered it my duty as a good citizen to hand you and your son, Mr. Richard Conseltine, here present, into the hands o' justice.'

Neither of the persons he addressed making any reply to this preamble, Peebles continued :

'When Larry's mill was burned down last night, the woman once known as Moya Macartney, best known to you and me, Mr. Conseltine, as Lady Kilpatrick, was leeving there.'

That Conseltine knew of Moya's claim to the title Peebles gave her was only a shrewd guess of the latter's, but the start and pallor with which Conseltine heard the words showed the old man that the shaft had struck home.

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‘The mill,’ continued Peebles, ‘was fired by you and your son there, in complicity wi’ one Feagus, the lawyer, wi’ the object of destroying the unfortunate lady, your brother’s wife.’

Richard gave a sort of feeble gulp at this, and cowered terror-stricken on the bed.

‘It’s by no virtue o’ yours, Mr. Conseltine, that your wicked will was not worked. Moya Macartney, Lady Kilpatrick, is alive and safe. She was rescued from death by her son, Desmond Conseltine, sole lawfully begotten son and heir of my master, Lord Kilpatrick.’

‘Damn you!’ cried Richard, leaping from the bed at these words with a flash of hysteric anger conquering his fears. ‘You come and tell us this ! Father——!’

‘Hold your tongue!’ said the elder man quietly. ‘Don’t play the fool, Richard Conseltine.’

Peebles looked at him with a kind of

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loathing admiration of his courage and coolness.

‘If you’ve any more to say, Mr. Peebles,’ Conseltine continued, ‘you’d better get it over.’

‘Just this,’ said the old man : ‘ye’ll hold your tongue about the business till I see fit to speak. Ye’ll cease to trade on his lordship’s generosity, and rob the poor lad ye’ve kept out of his rights all these years, and the poor woman ye’ve tried to murder. And if in a day or two ye can manage to find some business o’ sufficient importance to tak’ ye awa’ oot o’ this place, and to keep ye awa’ oot o’t for the rest o’ your natural lives, so much the better. I don’t think,’ he added reflectively, as he scraped his lean jaws thoughtfully with his long fingers—‘I don’t think there’s any ither thing to be arranged. Ye’d better keep clear o’ Blake, perhaps.’

‘One word, Mr. Peebles,’ said Conseltine, as the old man turned to go.

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‘When do you intend to break to my brother the news of—of that woman being alive?’

‘I canna preceesely tell ye,’ returned Peebles. ‘As soon’s I think he’s strong enough to hear it. In the mean time, Mr. Conseltine, ye’d best ca’ cannie. I’m secret in the game till ye try another move; but if ye do, I’ll split on ye, as sure as God’s in heaven!’

CHAPTER XIV.

LADY KILPATRICK.

PEEBLES had left the Conseltines barely half an hour when a message was brought to him in his pantry that Mr. Blake of Blake's Hall would be glad to have the pleasure of a word with him. Blake, being ushered into the old man's private room, immediately demanded whisky, and, having been supplied, inquired of Peebles what was the news concerning Moya.

'I met Larry as I was coming here. Sure, he's like a madman, raving about the poor woman that must have been burned wid the mill, though sorra a chip of her bones or a rag of her dress have they found.'

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‘They’re no likely to find anything,’ said Peebles. ‘I went straight to Desmond last night, and he was just in time to rescue her from the awfu’ death the villains had plotted for her.’

‘Glad am I to know it,’ said Blake. ‘Are the rogues laid by the heels yet?’

‘No,’ said Peebles, ‘nor will they be, wi’ my good will. Man, ’twould break my lord’s heart! His ain brother, Mr. Blake! his ain brother’s son! No, no. They must be let gang, for the honour o’ the family, though it’s a hard lump to swallow, and goes terribly against my conscience, that twa such wretches should be free while many a decent man’s in prison. But there’s just no help for it. And noo, just tell me, Mr. Blake, are ye sober—sober enough, I mean, to know the value of what ye’re saying?’

‘Sober, is it?’ cried Blake. ‘Soberer than I’ve been this five-and-twenty years, bad luck to me!’

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‘Then listen to me,’ said Peebles.
‘’Twas you that married his lordship to Moya Macartney?’

‘’Twas so,’ returned Blake.

‘And ye had really been ordained a clerk in holy orders before that time?’

‘I had, but when I performed the ceremony I used a false name.’

‘That makes no difference,’ returned Peebles. ‘You were a clergyman, you are a clergyman, and a clergyman you’ll die. Holy orders are indelible! I ken that much, though I’m no churchman mysel’. Noo, Moya’s safe, and it’s my intention, jest as soon as it can be done without chance of damage to my lord’s health, to break the news to him, and I’ll look to you to put all possible assistance in the way o’ proving your possession o’ the necessary power to perform a legal marriage.’

‘H’m!’ said Blake doubtfully.

‘And what the deil d’ye mean by “h’m”?’ asked Peebles.

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‘You’re talkin’ mighty aisy,’ said Blake, ‘of my givin’ up the only means o’ livelihood I’ve had these years past.’

‘Means o’ livelihood,’ repeated Peebles. ‘You’re doited, man alive ! What has this question to do wi’ your means of livelihood?’

‘Just the blackmail that Dick Conseltine has paid me to hold my tongue,’ replied Blake with a beautiful candour.

‘That’s all o’er now,’ said Peebles. ‘He kens that Moya’s alive, and he kens that *I* ken it. Eh, Patrick Blake,’ he continued, shaking his head reproachfully at the burly figure opposite him, ‘ye’ve been a sad scoun’rel in your time, I doubt. But ye helped to save that puir lass’s life, and I’ll no be hard on ye. What can be done for ye in reason shall be done. Maybe the wages o’ honesty won’t amount to as much as the wages o’ sin, but ye’ll hae a clearer conscience to mak’ up the balance. I can promise naething, but I’ll

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speak to Desmond and my lord. I'm thinking ye'd be best oot o' the country. Some hundred pounds and a passage to America would suit ye fine.'

'Emigration !' said Blake. 'Twas that Dick Conseltine was advising the other day. Faix, ye're all in a mighty hurry to get rid o' poor old Pat Blake. Well, Peebles, I'll trust ye. I've always found ye square and honest, and I like the boy. I'd rather see him with the title than that ape cub o' Dick Conseltine's, any day of the year. As for the help I can give ye, well, there's me licence to preach, marry, and bury, signed by the Bishop, and granted at Maynooth College. I've got it at home at Blake's Hall to this day, and faith, if that's not enough, I can find a score o' people at my old cure who'll remember me and swear to my identity.'

At this moment he was interrupted by a rap at the pantry door, and a servant

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announced that Peebles was needed in my lord's chamber.

‘Wait here,’ said the old man to Blake. ‘I’ll no’ be long.’

Peebles mounted the stairs, and found Kilpatrick seated at the open window of his room. He gave some commonplace instructions which could quite easily have been fulfilled by any other servant in the house. Peebles, who knew his master's mind as though he had made him, obeyed the orders, and stood at his elbow silently.

‘Well, Peebles? well?’ asked Kilpatrick.

‘Well, my lord?’ said Peebles.

‘What are you waiting for?’

‘For your lordship's orders.’

Kilpatrick sat twisting his fingers in a nervous silence for a second or two, and then abruptly asked :

‘Where's Desmond? I suppose you've seen him lately?’

‘Ay!’ said Peebles, ‘I saw him last night.’

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‘And what had the young scamp to say for himself? Still on the high horse, I suppose? When does he propose to honour my house with his presence again?’

‘God forgive us!’ said Peebles, shaking his head at his master with a mournful reproof. ‘“Still on his high horse,” quotha! ’Tis you that are walking wi’ the bare feet o’ conscience in the mire o’ repentance, if your silly pride would let ye own till it.’

Kilpatrick tried to look angrily at the old man, but the continued slow shake of Peebles’ head, and the calm penetration of the eyes that dwelt on his, cowed him.

‘I ask you, Peebles,’ he cried suddenly, ‘is not my position a hard one?’

‘Sair hard,’ said Peebles; ‘but ye made it yoursel’, and ye hae nae right to grumble.’

‘It’s harder than I deserve,’ cried Kilpatrick. ‘If—if it was the—the just measure of punishment for—for that silly

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indiscretion of years ago, I should not complain, but——’

‘ My lord !’ said Peebles, ‘ dinna gang beyond God’s patience. “ Just measure o’ punishment !” “ too hard !” I wonder ye hae the presumption to sit in that chair, and talk to me that ken the circumstances.’

‘ Hold your tongue, confound you !’ said his master.

‘ That will I no’,’ returned Peebles, ‘ till as your speeritual weelwisher and your carnal servant I hae done my best to purge your heart o’ the black vanity ye cherish.’

‘ Go to the devil, you canting old scoundrel !’ screamed Kilpatrick.

‘ After your lordship,’ said Peebles suavely, and flowed on before the angry old gentleman could stop him. ‘ You say your lot’s a hard one ? You complain that Providence is punishing you too severely ? Man, ye are just like a spoiled child, that

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sets a house afire in his wantonness, and then thinks he's badly treated because he gets his fingers burnt. Your lot a hard one ! What about the lot o' the innocent lass that trusted ye, and that ye ruined and slew ? What about the bright bonny lad that God put it into his mither's heart to send here t' ye, that should hae been a sound o' peace in your ears, a light unto your eyes, a sermon to your understanding, ilka day this eighteen years bygone ? What about his shame and anguish, his loss of respect and belief in all his kind, because you, the one man he loved and trusted most, turned to base metal in his sight ? And ye are hardly treated ! Gin ye had your deserts, Henry Conseltine, Lord Kilpatrick, ye'd be on the treadmill at this minute. There's many an honest man than you that's praying God this minute for bread and water to stay his carnal pangs, while ye sit here, full o' meat, and puffed out wi' idleness. Ill-

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treated ! Ma certie !' cried the old man, with a fall from an almost Biblical solemnity of phrase to latter-day colloquialism which would have seemed ludicrous to any third person. 'Ye're no blate ! Perhaps ye'd like a step up in the peerage for havin' ruined an honest lassie and broken a poor lad's heart ?'

'Upon my soul,' said Kilpatrick, twisting in his chair, 'I don't know why I stand your infernal impudence.'

'For the same reason,' returned Peebles, 'that you stand the infernal impudence o' your ain conscience. Ye've been trying to drug and bully *that* into quiet a' these years, and ye've no succeeded yet, and ne'er will, the Lord be praised ! Ye ask,' he continued, 'if Desmond's on his high horse yet ? Ay, is he—on a higher horse than ever.'

'What do you mean ?' asked Kilpatrick.

'Circumstances have come to light this last day or twa,' said Peebles, 'that put a new complexion on a' this business.'

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‘What circumstances?’ asked his lordship wonderingly.

‘Strange circumstances,’ said Peebles. ‘I’ve news for ye that’ll mak’ your ears to tingle, I’m thinking.’

‘Curse you!’ cried the old man; ‘can’t you speak out, instead of jibbering and jabbering in this fashion, you old death’s-head!’

‘Ye’re a foul-mouthed person, Lord Kilpatrick,’ said Peebles dryly, ‘but let that flea stick to the wall. I’ve news for ye that it will tak’ courage to listen to.’

‘Man alive!’ cried Kilpatrick; ‘for the love of God don’t waste your time and my patience in this fashion! What is your news?’

‘Just this,’ said the old man slowly and deliberately: ‘The marriage with Moya Macartney, that ye believed to be a sham marriage—the more shame to ye for it—was no’ a sham at all, but as good a marriage as was ever made between

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man and maid on this earth, and as binding !

Kilpatrick stared at him like one distraught, breathing heavily, and grasping the side-pieces of his armchair with twitching fingers.

‘’Tis sooth I’m tellin’ ye,’ returned Peebles. ‘Blake was in holy orders. He’d been deprived of his cure and he performed the ceremony under a false name, but he’d ne’er been disrobed. Desmond is your lawfully begotten son—your heir !’

Kilpatrick’s reception of this astounding news fairly astonished the old man. After the first dumfounding effect of the communication had passed, Kilpatrick sprang from his chair, his face flushed, his eyes glittering.

‘Is it true? Is it true?’

‘True as death!’ responded Peebles.

‘Where is he?’ cried the old man. ‘For God’s sake, Peebles, bring him here! Let me see him!’

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His face darkened with a sudden expression of doubt.

‘Peebles,’ he cried brokenly; ‘you’re not playing with me? You’re not deceiving me? I’ve been a good master to you these years past; you couldn’t—you wouldn’t——’

‘God forbid!’ said Peebles. ‘It’s gospel truth.’

‘But,’ asked Kilpatrick, ‘why has Blake been silent all these years?’

‘Because,’ said Peebles, ‘Richard Conseltine has made it worth his while.’

‘By Heaven!’ cried the old lord, ‘I’ll break every bone in Dick’s body! Peebles, you don’t know what I’ve suffered all these years. Even from you I’ve hidden my miseries. I’ve looked at Desmond, standing side by side with that ugly cub of Dick’s, and ground my teeth to think that I couldn’t leave the title to him. God bless you, Peebles—God bless you for the news! ’Fore Gad! I shall go

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mad with joy. Peebles, I'll double your wages if you'll get the boy here in an hour from now. What are you standing glowering there for? Run, you old rascal, run, and bring Desmond to me! My eyes are hungry for him! I'll acknowledge him before the world! He shall marry Dulcie before the week's out, and I'll live to nurse my grandson yet! Dick's face will be a sight to see when he learns that I know this.'

Peebles did not move. He was revolving in his mind the wisdom of at once breaking to Kilpatrick the news that the wife he deemed dead was living.

'Desmond shall do that,' he said to himself. 'Ay, Desmond shall do that. 'Twill come better from him. My lord's heart will be softened. 'Twill be less of a shock than if *I* told him. Ay, ay,' he said aloud, as Kilpatrick impatiently bade him begone and fetch Desmond. 'He shall be here inside an hour, my lord.'

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‘God bless you, old friend,’ said his lordship, shaking hands with him. ‘You’re a pragmatical old Puritan, but you’ve taken ten years off my age to-day.’

Peebles descended to the pantry, where he found Blake still in intimate converse with the whisky bottle.

‘Mr. Blake, would ye do my lord and me a service?’

‘By my troth, I will, then,’ said Blake.

Peebles called a groom, and bade him prepare a horse and carriage.

‘I want ye, Mr. Blake, to drive to Maguire’s cottage over at Cornboy. There you’ll find Moya Macartney—tell her she must come with you. Then drive on to Doolan’s Farm, and pick up Desmond. Bring them both here, and I’ll have a boy posted in the road to warn me that ye’re coming.’

CHAPTER XV.

THE MOVING BOG.

IN a state of mind bordering as closely on frenzy as was possible in so very cold and calculating a nature, Conseltine made his way to the neighbouring village of Cordale, where, in a disreputable inn bearing the pretentious title 'Hotel,' his confederate Feagus was waiting the issue of events. He found the worthy seated in a parlour leading off the main chamber, or taproom, playing cards with the landlord, a truculent-looking ruffian in shirt-sleeves.

As Conseltine entered, Feagus looked up with a grin, but, seeing at a glance by the expression of Conseltine's face that

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something unusual had occurred, he threw down his cards and rose to his feet.

‘Business before pleasure, Pat Linney,’ he said. ‘Here’s a client, good luck to him! Will ye be seated, Mr. Conseltine?’

‘No, no,’ was the reply. ‘Come out into the fresh air; this place is stifling’—as indeed it was, from the combined effects of bad ventilation, bad tobacco, and bad whisky.

‘What’s the matter now?’ sharply demanded the lawyer, as they stood together in the open street. An Irish ‘mist’ was falling from skies dark with heavy clouds, and the prospect all around the few miserable huts which constituted the ‘village’ was miserable in the extreme.

In a few hurried words Conseltine recounted the facts of the interview with Peebles.

‘So that’s it, is it?’ cried the lawyer, scowling savagely. ‘If I’d been in your place, I’d have coaxed the ould villain into

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some convenient corner, and knocked him on the head.'

'Nonsense !' said Conseltine.

'Nonsense, ye call it ?' snapped Feagus, showing his teeth like a savage dog about to bite. 'When you're cooling your heels in gaol ye'll pipe to a different tune.'

'And you ?'

'Don't couple my name with yours in that connection, Conseltine. I forbid ye. My hands are clane, and the only thing on my conscience is that I didn't inform against ye.'

Conseltine's face was livid with anger, as the other continued :

'And it's nice of ye to bring me out into the wet to talk with me, as if I wasn't a dacent man, except for my dealing with the likes of you. I'm tired of doing dirty work for one that hasn't the brains of a brent goose, or the pluck of a louse—I am, sir ! How will ye get out of it all ? tell me that.'

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‘We sink or swim together,’ answered Conseltine. ‘I didn’t come here to listen to abuse. I want your advice.’

‘Then come in to the fireside,’ snarled Feagus, moving towards the inn.

‘No! Can’t you understand that something must be done at once? That old fool is against us, so is Blake; and when Desmond Macartney hears that we’re concerned in his mother’s death, he’ll never rest till he’s hunted us down. Come away with me to Blake’s at once, and see what can be done with him.’

For some time Feagus was obdurate, but at last he listened to his companion’s arguments, and agreed to accompany him to Blake’s Hall. The way thither led by a track across the open moor or ‘mountain,’ and, after refreshing himself with one stiff tumbler of Jamieson at the inn, Feagus followed Conseltine through the drizzling rain.

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A dreary day, a dreary prospect. The ground was covered with a soft, soaked blanket of mud, moss, and heather, and low, gray vapours were trailing on every side across the rain-washed hills. Not one ray of sunlight broke the gloom, but far away to seaward moved a white mass like smoke, ever shifting and changing. The air was strangely still, for the rain was too thin and mist-like to produce the slightest sound.

It was a miserable walk of three Irish miles from the village of Cordale to the valley inhabited by Blake. The two men hastened along in gloomy silence until they had covered half the distance. Then Feagus paused with an oath, and looked fiercely into the pale, determined face of his companion.

‘I’m a fool to follow ye!’ he cried. ‘I’d be a wiser man if I took the car to Sligo, and left ye here to fight the devils you’ve raised.’

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‘I tell you that we stand or fall together,’ said Conseltine.

‘That’s a lie! If I was an accessory before the fact, I can plade insufficiency of motive, and turn Queen’s evidence. What d’ye say to that, now?’

Conseltine’s face went a shade whiter, and its expression a shade uglier, as he glanced down at Feagus, and then surveyed the gloomy prospect surrounding him. For the moment his impulse was to spring upon his accomplice, and strangle him then and there; but Feagus, though small, was wiry, and fierce as a wild cat, and would have taken a great deal of killing. Momentary as the impulse was, it expressed itself clearly on his countenance, and was at once understood and appreciated by Feagus, who said with a savage and spiteful grin:

‘Wouldn’t ye like to get rid of me now, as ye got rid of poor Moya Macartney? So I’m a thorn in your side, Dick Con-

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seltine? By the powers, I'll be a bigger thorn yet, if ye don't mind what you're after !'

'You're drunk,' returned Conseltine, 'and you talk like a child. Come along !'

And he walked slowly on.

'A child, am I, and drunk?' muttered Feagus, irresolute whether to follow or turn back. 'Well, I'm neither too young nor too drunk to guess what game you're after, my fine gintleman. If I'm not before ye, 'tis you that will be blowing the gaff, and denouncing me, to save your own skin. So I won't leave ye yet awhile, I'm thinking.'

He followed Conseltine at a short distance, grumbling and cursing at every footstep of the way. From time to time Conseltine glanced back to assure himself that he was following.

At last, soaked to the skin and splashed with mud, they came in view of Blake's Hall. By this time the rain had almost

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ceased, but above the heights which rose seaward, beyond the flat valley in which the Hall lay, a great mass of vaporous cumuli, black and ominous, hung like a pall. Between this mass and the hill summits was a white space filled with smoke-like vapour, with gleams of shimmering silver. The silence had grown deeper, but when the slightest sound arose it travelled with startling distinctness for miles. Here and there, between the valley and the hills, were scattered cottages, bright patches of green pasture, and clumps of woodland. From these, at intervals, came the lowing of cattle, the crowing of a cock, the cry of a solitary human voice—each and all of which seemed to make the silence more intense.

Down to the cottage, or hall, went the two men, only to find that they had come upon a useless errand. The door stood open, but when they entered there was no sign of anybody within. Tired with his

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long walk, Feagus threw himself on a stool, and, lighting his pipe, began smoking furiously, while Conseltine, returning to the door, searched the prospect in vain for any trace of the man he sought.

A hundred yards from the threshold ran the river, a narrow and shallow stream in ordinary weather, but now broadened and deepened by the rain. It was boiling along at lightning speed, stained deep brown by the clay and peat of the moorlands whence it flowed. The stepping-stones at the ford, by which one gained the road to Castle Fitzpatrick, were covered, and to cross at all a man would have had to wade nearly waist-deep, at the risk of being carried away by the current.

Like a man lost in thought, Conseltine walked over to the bank, and stood looking at the water. His mind was in as great a tumult as the raging stream. All his plans had failed, the whole world seemed leagued against him, and he was now full

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of a nameless dread, a horror of discovery, of punishment, and of the accompanying shame. Recent events had developed everything that was harsh and even savage in his nature. He had passed from one crime to another, till the blackest of all crimes cast its shadow on his soul ; not that he felt any pity for the victim of his evil deed—his dominant feeling was one of fierce rage that the deed had been done in vain. How to act now he knew not. His only hope was in the silence of Peebles, whose regard for the honour of the family he well knew. His greatest fear was of Desmond, should the Squireen learn that his mother's life had been attempted.

He stood so long brooding there, that Feagus grew impatient, and came to the door to look after him.

‘What the devil are ye doing there?’ shouted the lawyer.

Conseltine looked round, and made no

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reply. At that moment a strange sound, like the faint shock of an earthquake, came from the distant hills. Both men instinctively glanced thither, and saw, stretching from the black mass or pile of cloud behind the hill-tops, a silhouette of solid black, in the form of an enormous waterspout, its apex in the clouds, its base hidden somewhere in the unseen ocean. Even as they gazed it burst, and for a moment it seemed as if night had come, the whole skies being wrapt in blackness, and the rain falling in a deluge, lashing the ground.

‘Powers of heaven!’ cried Feagus, clinging to the lintel of the open door, and feeling, almost for the first time in his life, a ghastly sense of fear. Before he could realize his own dread, Conseltine stood by him, panting for breath.

‘Look yonder!’ Conseltine gasped, gripping his companion by the arm, and pointing up the mountains.

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Light now broke from the clouds—gloomy light with livid rays; and it fell full on a great green stretch of bogland covering the mountain side. The mountain itself seemed rocking as if with earthquake, and simultaneously the bog itself, like thick and slimy lava, seemed to be moving downward!

‘Holy saints defend us!’ cried Feagus.

As he spoke, the sound of human cries came from the distance, and figures were seen wildly moving to and fro. A white cottage of stone rocked, crumbled like sugar in water, and disappeared from sight, washed over by the moving earth.

Tempest on sea and earthquake are dreadful enough, but there is no phenomenon more portentous than that of the moving bog, when the very earth seems to become liquid lava, shifting and changing, obliterating landmarks, and swallowing up whatever stands in the way of its fatal course. Such was the phenomenon the

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two men were now contemplating—a whole hillside shifting from its place and moving downward like a great slow, ever-broadening stream, engulfing rocks, trees, and human dwellings, bearing fragments of these in its course, urging stones and rocks along like a river in full flood, now halting and pausing to destroy obstacles, again rolling relentlessly on.

In the present case, it was fed with the rain of a thousand torrents, which gushed along with it and hastened it along.

Louder and shriller cries soon broke upon the air, and groups of men, women, and children were seen flying down the valley, some driving before them cattle as terror-stricken as themselves, many bearing blankets, bedding, and domestic utensils, all moaning and shrieking in fear. Very slowly, but surely and terribly, the bog crept behind them, devouring and destroying, yet now and then, as if in caprice, leaving some dwelling or clump of trees

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untouched, like an island in a slimy, moving pool.

As emotion spreads from one to another in a crowd of living beings, so does trouble grow by some elemental sympathy of nature among inanimate things. The terror and the tumult of the scene we are describing seemed to communicate itself to the whole landscape. The very river, flowing from the opposite direction, and winding away seaward by the base of the mountains, seemed to boil up ominously, surging tumultuously along. A mile away there was a wooden bridge, over which many of the panic-stricken peasants had now crossed, gaining the open vale beyond. Suddenly, the supports of this bridge yielded to the fury of the waters; the bridge, covered with sheep and cattle, with men and women about to follow, tottered, yielded, and was swept away with its load.

All this time Feagus and Conseltine had

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stood fascinated, forgetful of themselves in the extraordinary scene they were contemplating ; but now, as the excitement culminated, they realized their own danger.

‘ We must get out of this,’ said Feagus. ‘ If we don’t cross the ford, we’ll be buried alive !’

He flew rather than ran towards the river, and reached the place of crossing, only to stand in abject terror above a boiling torrent.

‘ Saints save us !’ he groaned. ‘ No man can cross here.’

He turned trembling, and saw Conseltine standing by his side, pale but comparatively calm.

‘ What’s to be done ?’ gasped Feagus.

Conseltine smiled grimly.

‘ Plunge in, man, wade to the other side, or swim to it ! It’s not twenty yards from bank to bank.’

‘ I should drown !’ cried the lawyer.

‘ Better that than live to betray the man

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that has fed and kept you so many years. You talked of turning Queen's evidence—go and do it !'

Feagus recoiled.

'I didn't mane it, Conseltine—'twas only my little joke. For God's sake, tell me what's to be done !'

'I neither know nor care,' returned the other. 'Perhaps it's God's vengeance upon us for what we've done. Are you afraid to die ?'

Without replying, Feagus looked round in despair. The whole mountain-side seemed now descending on that portion of the valley where he stood, while the river wound round and round, between Blake's Hall and the open moor by which they had gained the lonely vale. There was only one way of escape—to gain the opposite bank of the river.

'Tell me this—if we escape out of this alive, do you mean to stand by me or to turn against me ?'

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‘To stand by ye, to stand by ye !’ cried Feagus.

‘Then strip off your coat, and follow me !’ said Conseltine. ‘I’m going across. If the water takes me off my feet, I shall swim to the point below yonder—the current swirls that way, and it’s shallow close to the bank. You’d better come—it’s your only chance.’

Suiting the action to the word, Conseltine took off his outer garments, and stood in trousers and shirtsleeves; then, stooping down, he unlaced his mud-clogged boots, and threw them off. Trembling with fear, Feagus followed his example.

Conseltine crept down to the water’s edge, and leaning forward, tried the depth with a heavy blackthorn stick which he carried.

‘We can do it,’ he said. ‘Mind you stand firm against the current, or you’re a dead man.’

Feagus groaned and prayed. All his

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natural courage had deserted him, and he looked an abject picture of human wretchedness.

‘Stop a minute,’ he cried ; ‘I’m out o’ breath !’

‘Stop if you please,’ returned Con-seltine contemptuously. ‘I’m going across!’

Then steadying himself for the struggle, and using his stick as a partial support, he stepped into the stream, and in a moment was fighting with the current. With slow, long strides he moved from the bank, his feet set upon the slippery bottom. For several yards the water reached no higher than his knees, but gradually deepened ; it at last surged wildly to his waist ; but he was a tall man of unusual strength, and nature favoured him. For a few moments, as he stood in mid-stream, it seemed as if he must be swept away, but, facing the current and leaning forward, he held his own—then, putting out all his strength,

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he leaped rather than walked until he gained the shallower water on the farther side. He had passed safely, and stood soaked and dripping, but secure, upon the further bank.

Feagus, who had watched his progress with wondering eyes, but with an increasing sense of hope, still stood crouching by the riverside.

‘Come,’ cried Conseltine, waving his stick and laughing; ‘it’s easier than I thought!’

‘Your staff! Throw me your staff!’ shrieked Feagus, and glancing round he saw the bog descending like a snake towards Blake’s Hall. Then an extraordinary phenomenon took place. The bog, meeting the river just where the bridge had fallen, blocked it like an enormous dam and then crawled like a monster over it. The result was instantaneous. The river, arrested in its course, began to swell up, deepen, and push backward on

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itself. There was not a moment to be lost if it was to be crossed again.

‘ Throw me your staff, for the love of God !’ cried Feagus.

Conseltine hesitated for a moment, then cast the stick across the flood with all his might ; it fell close to Feagus, who gripped it eagerly, and then, with a cry, plunged forward into the water. His progress was at first comparatively easy, but as the water deepened, it became more and more difficult to keep his foothold. With face set hard and eyes protruding, he struggled on.

After watching him for a moment, Conseltine ran from the bank, followed the side of the stream, and stood on the point of land of which he had spoken, some forty yards below. Standing there, he waited for results.

Straining every nerve, and praying aloud, the lawyer reached the middle of the stream, and paused for a moment, gasping for breath. Then the roar of the flood, and

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the rush of water and wind, seemed to blind and confuse him, and he seemed giving way. But with a mighty effort he kept his feet, and even then all might have gone well with him but for an accidental impediment—the half-submerged trunk of a tree, which rolled over and over, struck the staff from his hands and took him off his feet. With a shriek, he was swept headlong into the flood, and disappeared.

Only for a few moments—then, haggard and ghastly, his head re-emerged, drifting towards the point where Conseltine stood. A good swimmer, he struck boldly out, and was helped by the current. All he was conscious of was the rushing water around him, and the figure of Conseltine coming nearer and nearer.

As Conseltine had explained, the current swept right to the point, close to which there was some shallow water. Strong and wiry as a terrier, Feagus made his way thither, fighting for his life. He was

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close to the point, his feet touched solid ground, and he could see Conseltine close to him, looking calmly down, when his force failed him and he was whirled round like a straw.

‘Save me!’ he shrieked, reaching out his hands.

By wading forward, and gripping the hands so outstretched, Conseltine, with little or no danger to himself, could have drawn him into the shallows, but, instead of so doing, he looked at the miserable man and made no effort to assist him. The opportunity of the moment passed, and with a shriek of despair Feagus was swept away.

Pale as death, Conseltine watched him until he disappeared altogether, and then, pale as a spectre, walked up the riverside. He was safe now, and the only man who could denounce him and bring any certain proof of his guilt was silenced for ever.

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‘The drunken fool!’ he muttered. ‘That threat has cost him his life. Had he lived, he would have done what he threatened to do—so he’s better where he is!’

He looked back across the river. Blake’s Hall stood untouched, but all around it was the dark mass of the moving bog, still creeping across the vale. Where the bridge had fallen, a great lake of water, fed by the river, was spreading and spreading. The rain still fell heavily, adding to the general desolation.

He turned and hastened till he reached the road leading to the village and Castle of Kilpatrick. As he strode along, he passed numbers of men, women, and children hurrying in the same direction, but spoke to none and was heeded by none, until he was close upon the village, when he came suddenly face to face with his son.

‘Father!’ cried Richard, aghast at the

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wild figure before him. 'I've been looking for you everywhere. What has happened?'

In a few brief words, Conseltine related what had occurred—the search for Blake, the strange convulsion of nature, his own escape, and the death of Feagus. Then Richard, on his side, had something to tell which made Conseltine sick with rage and dread. What that 'something' was will be known in the sequel. The result of the communication was that father and son made no attempt to return to Kilpatrick Castle, but within a few hours of their meeting had gained the nearest railway-station and were on their way to Dublin.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN WHICH LORD KILPATRICK NAMES
HIS HEIR.

IT was not till Blake was half-way on the road to Maguire's cottage that the personal significance to himself of the errand with which Peebles had entrusted him dawned upon him. His first impulse was to tell the driver to return to the Castle, and to request Peebles to find another messenger.

'By the Saints, but 'tis a fine business I'm in for—a two-mile ride with Moya Macartney and Desmond—and 'tis a comfortable quarter of an hour I'll be after having.'

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His habitual recklessness prevailed, however, aided by the thought that, as the bearer of the message of peace, he might have a better chance of pardon for past peccadilloes. He arrived at Maguire's cottage, which had a lonely and deserted aspect, in the bright mid-day sunshine. No curl of smoke from the chimney announced the presence of an occupant, and the door was fast shut. It opened at his knock, and disclosed Moya.

'God save all here !' said Blake, with his customary swagger rather broadened.

'Amen to that, Patrick Blake,' said Moya calmly, 'for some of us need His mercy. What is it ye want here ?'

'Just yourself,' said Blake. 'I'm from the Castle with a message from Mr. Peebles. Ye're asked for there.'

Moya turned a shade paler.

'Is he there—Desmond ?'

'I'm going on to Doolan's farm to take him,' said Blake. 'I've the carriage waitin'

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here.' He hesitated for a moment, and then added, with more show of feeling than was common with him: 'I'm a quare sort o' messenger to send on this errand, and God knows ye're little likely to relish my society. It's no sort o' use in the world to say I'm sorry, or to offer apologies for what's past, but I hope it's good news I'm bringin' ye. In fact, I *know* it's good news.' He took off his hat with a gesture that was almost dignified. 'Will ye do me the honour to accompany me, Lady Kilpatrick?'

Moya drew her shawl about her face and walked to the carriage, the door of which Blake held open for her. He mounted beside the driver, and another ten minutes saw them at the farm. Desmond was in the yard, seated on a bench and engaged in splicing a fishing-rod. At the sound of the approaching wheels he checked the pensive whistle with which he accompanied his work; and at the sight of

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Blake on the box of the carriage, he dropped the rod to the ground and strode forward at a quickened pace and with heightened colour. Blake descended and confronted him.

‘Tell me this, Mr. Blake,’ said the boy ; ‘I’m in a bit of a quandary. There is a man I know who’s a villain, but he’s old enough to be my father, and I hear that he’s a clergyman, so I can neither call him out nor lay a stick across his back. What would ye do in my place?’

‘Faith,’ answered Blake, ‘’tis a troublesome question. ’Twill take thinking over. In the mean time, I’ve news for ye. Ye’re wanted at the Castle.’

‘Am I?’ said Desmond. ‘And who wants me?’

‘Mr. Peebles.’

‘Then tell him,’ said Desmond, ‘that when I enter my father’s doors again ’twill be either to find my mother there, or with her on my arm.’

LORD KILPATRICK NAMES HIS HEIR

‘Sure,’ said Blake, ‘she’s in the carriage at this minute, and going to the Castle with ye. Your troubles are over, Desmond—and hers.’

‘*You* have a right to congratulate me on that, haven’t ye?’ asked the boy with scornful anger.

‘Faith! and if *I* haven’t, who has?’ replied Blake unabashed. ‘And look here, Desmond Conseltine; in regard to the matter ye mentioned just now, sure there’ll be no difficulty whatever. ’Tis not myself that’ll take refuge behind a black coat and a white choker. Twenty paces or a six-foot ring will do for me, and so, my service to ye. ’Twould ease your heart and end the bad blood between us, maybe. But there’s things more important than divarsions o’ that sort on hand.’

Moya’s white face appeared at the carriage window, and Desmond, with a final angry look at Blake, joined her. Blake remounted the box and gave the

LADY KILPATRICK

word for home. The coachman, who had received his instructions from Peebles, made a *détour* in order to approach the Castle from the back. Moya trembled like a leaf as they approached the house, and clung tight to Desmond's hand.

They found Peebles standing bareheaded at the back door, waiting to receive them.

'Moya,' he said—'I beg your pardon, Lady Kilpatrick, but the old name comes easiest—his lordship has asked for Desmond. He kens that he is his lawful son, and the way he took the news was just joyful to see. He repents his past sin, he'll welcome the boy back to his hearth and home. But he doesna ken—I hadna the courage to tell him—that you are living. I thought 'twould come best from Desmond. Desmond, lad, be gentle wi' him! We a' hae much to forgive each other, and—he's your father, man, when a' is said and done. Mak' your peace wi' him, and then break it to him as gently as ye can.

LORD KILPATRICK NAMES HIS HEIR

He's in the library. I'll get your mother upstairs cannily into the anteroom, to be at hand. Eh?' he cried, with a quiver in his voice and a flash of moisture in his eyes which did more than all his entreaties to soften Desmond. 'Hech, laddie,' but this is a grand day! I can lay down my old bones in thankfulness, praising God for his mercies. It's a grand day this, and I never thought to live to see the like!

The old man fairly broke down. Desmond took his hand and pressed it, with the tears in his own eyes, and it was in a much kindlier mood than that in which he had entered the house that he mounted the stairs leading to the library. He stood for a minute outside the door. His breath was heavy, and the beating of his heart filled his ears like the pulse of a muffled drum. When he knocked, Kilpatrick's voice answered from within, bidding him enter.

The old man was standing near the

LADY KILPATRICK

window, with the light streaming on his face, which was very worn and haggard. Desmond thought even that his hair had whitened a little since he last saw him, though so short a time had elapsed. Kilpatrick advanced a pace or two with outstretched hands, and then paused with bent head. A strange mingling of many nameless and some nameable emotions welled up in Desmond's heart—memories of a thousand kindnesses and generousities, pity for the proud man humbled—and before he knew it his arms were round the old man's neck, and they were mingling their tears together. Kilpatrick was terribly agitated.

‘My son, my son!’ was all he could say for a time. He repeated the words again and again, each time more passionately, as if at this moment their wonderful significance had become dear to him for the first time. ‘You forgive me, Desmond?’

The boy took the gray head between

LORD KILPATRICK NAMES HIS HEIR

his hands, and kissed his father on the forehead, wetting his face with his tears.

‘It is more than I deserve,’ said the old man. ‘I was a scoundrel, a villain! I broke your mother’s heart, Desmond, the sweetest, purest heart that ever beat. Ye can’t forgive me for that! Nothing can ever take that load from my heart, nothing, till I die and she asks God to pardon me.’

‘Father!’ said Desmond. ‘I have strange news for you. Are you well and strong enough to bear it?’

‘Nothing can hurt me now,’ replied Kilpatrick.

‘You don’t know what it is,’ replied Desmond. ‘I’m afraid ’twill be a dreadful shock to you at first, but a happy one after, I hope.’

‘Well,’ said the father, with a faint touch of his old quickness of temper, ‘what is it? Speak out, my boy, and tell me. Some scrape you’ve got into, eh? Well, that’s forgiven before you tell me.’

LADY KILPATRICK

‘You regret the past?’ asked Desmond. ‘You would make amends for it to the utmost extent in your power?’

‘I *will* make amends for it, Desmond. There is nothing you can ask me I will not do, no burden that you can lay upon me that I will not gladly bear.’

‘I hope,’ said Desmond, after a short pause, ‘that you won’t think what I’m going to tell ye is a burden. Faith, ’tis hard to know where to begin! Supposing—mind, I only say supposing—supposing my mother were not dead at all, supposing she were alive, and came back here, would you make the same amends to her as you say you’ll make to me?’

‘You—you torture me!’ cried Kilpatrick. ‘Why rake up these painful recollections? Why ask questions of this sort, when they can do no good? Every day of my life, for eighteen years past, I have repented the wrong I did. God knows, if it were possible, I would repair it.’

LORD KILPATRICK NAMES HIS HEIR

‘Ye mean that?’ cried Desmond.

‘God knows I do!’ said Kilpatrick; ‘but of what avail is it to speak of such things now?’

‘Of more avail than you may think, father. Strange things have happened this last day or two.’

Kilpatrick searched his son’s face with distending eyes.

‘Desmond! For God’s sake, tell me what you mean!’

‘I mean,’ said Desmond, taking his father’s hand, ‘that God has been very good to us both, father. If I tell it to you too suddenly, forgive me—I don’t know how to break it properly. My mother is alive!’

Kilpatrick staggered as if the words had shot him.

‘Alive!’ he gasped. ‘Moya Macartney alive!’

‘Yes, sure,’ said Desmond, ‘and in a little while she’ll be here, in Ireland.’

LADY KILPATRICK

Kilpatrick sank into a seat, and sat trembling like a man ague-struck.

‘ In fact,’ said Desmond, ‘ she is in Ireland already, and on her way here.’

The old man sprang to his feet.

‘ She is here—she is in the house !’

Desmond walked to the ante-room door, and made a sign. Moya advanced into the library, and let slip the shawl from her face.

‘ God of Heaven !’ cried Kilpatrick, falling to his knees. ‘ Moya !’

She stood still, looking down on him, the broad light falling on her wrinkled face and whitening hair. Kilpatrick bent his head beneath her gaze, an awful sob broke from his throat. Desmond closed the door, leaving them together : the meeting was too sacred to be witnessed even by him.

A long time had gone by, and the shadow of the Castle had blotted out the

LORD KILPATRICK NAMES HIS HEIR

shaft of sunshine which had spread its glory of golden green on the lawn when the carriage had reached the Castle. Desmond still sat alone as a light step crossed the floor, and a soft arm was slipped round his neck. He looked up and saw Dulcie.

‘You needn’t say anything, Desmond,’ she said. ‘Peebles has told me. I am so happy, dear, for your sake.’

He drew her to his side.

‘You loved me, Dulcie, when I was the poor Squireen : will you love me the less now that I’m to be the next Lord Kilpatrick ?’

‘Not less,’ answered Dulcie, ‘nor more. Sure,’ she added, with the most musical of brogues, ‘’twould be impossible !’

THE END.



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