THE REAL CHARLOTTE

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VOLUME II.

CHAPTER XVI.

FRANCIE felt an unsuspected weakness in her knees when she walked downstairs next day. She found herself clutching the stair-rail with an absurdly tight grasp, and putting her feet down with trembling caution on the oil-cloth stair covering, and when she reached the drawing-room she was thankful to subside into Charlotte's arm-chair, and allow her dizzy head to recover its equilibrium. She thought very little about her nerves; in fact, was too ignorant to know whether she possessed such things, and she gave a feeble laugh of surprise at the way her heart jumped and fluttered when the door slammed unexpectedly be-

hind her. The old green sofa had been pulled out from the wall and placed near the open window, with the Dublin *Express* laid upon it; Francie noticed and appreciated the attention, and noted too, that an arm-chair, sacred to the use of visitors, had been planted in convenient relation to the sofa. "For Mr. Dysart, I suppose," she thought, with a curl of her pretty lip, "he'll be as much obliged to her as I am." She pushed the chair away, and debated with herself as to whether she should dislodge the two cats who, with faces of frowning withdrawal from all things earthly, were heaped in simulated slumber in the corner of the sofa. She chose the arm-chair, and, taking up the paper, languidly read the list of places where bands would play in the coming week, and the advertisement of the anthem at St. Patrick's for the next day.

How remote she felt from it all! How stale appeared these cherished amusements! Most people would think the Lismoyle choir a poor substitute for the ranks of white surplices in the chancel of St. Patrick's, with the banners of the knights hanging above them, but Francie thought it much

better fun to look down over the edge of the Lismoyle gallery at the red coats of Captain Cursiter's detachment, than to stand crushed in the nave of the cathedral, even though the most popular treble was to sing a solo, and though Mr. Thomas Whitty might be waiting on the steps to disentangle her from the crowd that would slowly surge up them into the street. A heavy-booted foot came along the passage, and the door was opened by Norry, holding in her grimy hand a tumbler containing a nauseous-looking yellow mixture.

"Miss Charlotte bid me give ye a bate egg with a half glass of whisky in it whenever ye'd come downstairs." She stirred it with a black kitchen fork, and proffered the sticky tumbler to Francie, who took it, and swallowed the thin, flat liquid which it contained with a shudder of loathing. "How bad y'are! Dhrink every dhrop of it now! An empty sack won't stand, and ye're as white as a masheroon this minute. God knows it's in yer bed ye should be, and not shtuck out in a chair in the middle of the flure readin' the paper!" Her eye fell on the apparently unconscious Mrs. and Miss

Bruff. "Ha, ha! thin! how cozy the two of yez is on yer sofa! Walk out, me Lady Ann!"

This courtesy-title, the expression of Norry's supremest contempt and triumph, was accompanied by a sudden onslaught with the hearth-brush, but long before it could reach them, the ladies referred to had left the room by the open window.

The room was very quiet after Norry had gone away. Francie took the evicted holding of the cats, and fell speedily into a doze induced by the unwonted half glass of whisky. Her early dinner, an unappetising meal of boiled mutton and rice pudding, was but a short interlude in the dullness of the morning; and after it was eaten, a burning tract of afternoon extended itself between her and Mr. Dysart's promised visit. She looked out of the window at the sailing shreds of white cloud high up in the deep blue of the sky, at the fat bees swinging and droning in the purple blossoms of the columbine border, at two kittens playing furiously in the depths of the mignonette bed; and regardless of Charlotte's injunctions about the heat of the sun, she said to herself that she would go out into the

garden for a little. It was three o'clock, and her room was as hot as an oven when she went up to get her hat; her head ached as she stood before the glass and arranged the wide brim to her satisfaction, and stuck her best paste pin into the sailor's knot of her tie. Suddenly the door burst unceremoniously open, and Norry's grey head and filthy face were thrust round the edge of it.

"Come down, Miss Francie!" she said in a fierce whisper; "give over making shnouts at yerself in the glass and hurry on down! Louisa isn't in, and sure I can't open the doore the figure I am."

"Who's there?" asked Francie, with flushing cheeks.

"How would I know? I'd say 'twas Misther Lambert's knock whatever. Sich galloppin' in and out of the house as there is these two days! Ye may let in this one yerself!"

When Francie opened the hall-door she was both relieved and disappointed to find that Norry had been right in the matter of the knock. Mr. Lambert was apparently more taken by surprise than she was. He did not speak at once, but, taking her

hand, pressed it very hard, and when Francie, finding the silence slightly embarrassing, looked up at him with a laugh that was intended to simplify the situation, she was both amazed and frightened to see a moisture suspiciously like tears in his eyes.

"You—you look rather washed out," he stammered.

"You're very polite! Is that all you have to say to me?" she said, slipping her hand out of his, and gaily ignoring his tragic tone. "You and your old yacht nearly washed me out altogether! At all events, you washed the colour out of me pretty well." She put up her hands and rubbed her cheeks. "Are you coming in or going out? Charlotte's lunching at the Bakers', and I'm going into the garden till tea-time, so now you can do as you like."

"I'll come into the garden with you," he said stepping aside to let her pass out. "But are you sure your head is well enough for you to go out in this sun?"

"Sun your granny!" responded Francie, walking gingerly across the gravel in her high-heeled house shoes, "I'm as well as ever I was."

"Well, you don't look it," he said with a con-

cerned glance at the faint colour in her cheeks and the violet shadows under her eyes. "Come and sit down in the shade; it's about all you're good for."

A path skirted the flower-beds and bent round the evergreen-covered slope that rose between the house and the road, and at the bend a lime-tree spread its flat, green boughs lavishly over the path, shading a seat made of half-rotten larch poles that extended its dilapidated arms to the passer-by.

"Well now tell me all about it," began Lambert as soon as they had sat down. "What did you feel like when you began to remember it all? Were you very angry with me?"

"Yes, of course, I was angry with you, and I am now this minute, and haven't I a good right, with my new hat at the bottom of the lake?"

"I can tell you we were both pretty nearly at the bottom of the lake along with it," said Lambert, who disapproved of this frivolous way of treating the affair. "I don't suppose I ever was nearer death than I was when the sail was on top of me."

Francie looked at him for one instant with awe-struck eyes, and Lambert was congratulating himself on having made her realise the seriousness of the situation, when she suddenly burst out laughing.

"Oh!" she apologised, "the thought just came into my head of the look of Mrs. Lambert in a widow's cap, and how she'd adore to wear one! You know she would, now don't you?"

"And I suppose you'd adore to see her in one?"

"Of course I would!" She gave him a look that was equivalent to the wag of the tail with which a dog assures the obtuse human being that its worrying and growling are only play. "You might know that without being told. And now perhaps you'll tell me how poor Mrs. Lambert is? I hear she was greatly upset by the fright she got about you, and indeed you're not worthy of it."

"She's much better, thank you."

He looked at Francie under his lowered lids, and tried to find it in his heart to wish that she

could sometimes be a little more grown up and serious. She was leaning back with her hat crushed against a trunk of the tree, so that its brim made a halo round her face, and the golden green light that filtered through the leaves of the lime moved like water over her white dress. If he had ever heard the story of "Undine" it might have afforded him the comforting hypothesis that this delicate, cool, youthful creature, with her provoking charm, could not possibly be weighted with the responsibility of a soul; but an unfortunate lack of early culture denied to Mr. Lambert this excuse for the levity with which she always treated him—a man sixteen years older than she was, her oldest friend, as he might say, who had always been kind to her ever since she was a scut of a child. Her eyes were closed; but an occasional quiver of the long lashes told him that she had no intention of sleeping; she was only pretending to be tired, "out of tricks," he thought angrily. He waited for a moment or two, and then he spoke her name. The corners of her mouth curved a little, but the eyelashes were not raised.

"Are you tired, or are you shamming?"

"Shamming," was the answer, still with closed eyes.

"Don't you think you could open your eyes?"

"No."

Another short period of silence ensued, and the sound of summer in the air round them strengthened and deepened, as the colour strengthens and deepens in a blush. A wasp strayed in under the canopy of the lime and idled inquisitively about Francie's hat and the bunch of mignonette in her belt, but she lay so still under this supreme test that Lambert thought she must be really asleep, and taking out his handkerchief prepared to rout the invader. At the same moment there came a sound of wheels and a fast-trotting horse on the road; it neared them rapidly, and Miss Fitzpatrick leaped to her feet and put aside the leaves of the lime just in time to see the back of Mr. Hawkins' head as his polo-cart spun past the Tally Ho gate.

"I declare I thought it was Mr. Dysart," she said, looking a little ashamed of herself; "I won-

der where in the name of fortune is Mr. Hawkins going!"

"I thought you were so dead asleep you couldn't hear anything," said Lambert, with a black look; "he's not coming here, anyhow."

She dropped back into the corner of the seat again as if the start forward had tired her.

"Oh! I was so frightened at the wasp, and I wouldn't let on!"

"I wonder why you're always so unfriendly with me now," began Lambert suddenly, fixing his eyes upon her; "there was once on a time when we were great friends, and you used to write to me, and you'd say you were glad to see me when I went up to town, but now you're so set up with your Dysarts and your officers that you don't think your old friends worth talking to."

"Oh!" Francie sat up and faced her accuser valiantly, but with an inwardly-stricken conscience. "You know that's a dirty, black lie!"

"I came over here this afternoon," pursued Lambert, "very anxious about you, and wanting to tell you how sorry I was, and how I accused my-

self for what had happened—and how am I treated? You won't so much as take the trouble to speak to me. I suppose if I was one of your swell new friends—Christopher Dysart, for instance, who you are looking out for so hard—it would be a very different story."

By the time this indictment was delivered, Francie's face had more colour in it than it had known for some days; she kept her eyes on the ground and said nothing.

"I knew it was the way of the world to kick a fellow out of the way when you had got as much as you wanted out of him, and I suppose as I am an old married man I have no right to expect anything better, but I did think you'd have treated *me* better than this!"

"Don't," she said brokenly, looking up at him with her eyes full of tears; "I'm too tired to fight you."

Lambert took her hand quickly. "My child," he said, in a voice rough with contrition and pity, "I didn't mean to hurt you; I didn't know what I was saying." He tenderly stroked the hand that

lay limply in his. "Tell me you're not vexed with me."

"No," said Francie, with a childish sob; "but you said horrid things to me—"

"Well, I never will again," he said soothingly. "We'll always be friends, won't we?" with an interrogatory pressure of the hand. He had never seen her in such a mood as this; he forgot the inevitable effect on her nerves of what she had gone through, and his egotism made him believe that this collapse of her usual supple hardihood was due to the power of his reproaches.

"Yes," she answered, with the dawn of a smile.

"Till the next time, anyhow," continued Lambert, still holding her hand in one of his, and fumbling in his breast pocket with the other. "And, now, look here what I brought you to try and make up to you for nearly drowning you." He gently pulled her hand down from her eyes, and held up a small gold bangle, with a horse-shoe in pearls on it. "Isn't that a pretty thing?"

Francie looked at it incredulously, with the tears still shining on her eyelashes.

"Oh, Mr. Lambert, you don't mean you got that for me? I *couldn't* take it. Why, it's real gold!"

"Well, you've got to take it. Look what's written on it."

She took it from him, and saw engraved inside the narrow band of gold, her own name and the date of the accident.

"Now, you see it's yours already," he said. "No, you mustn't refuse it," as she tried to put it back into his hand again. "There," snapping it quickly on to her wrist, "you must keep it as a sign you're not angry with me."

"It's like a policeman putting on a handcuff," said Francie, with a quivering laugh. "I've often seen them putting them on the drunken men in Dublin."

"And you'll promise not to chuck over your old friends?" said Lambert urgently.

"No, I won't chuck them over," she replied, looking confidingly at him.

"Not for anybody?" He weighted the question with all the expression he was capable of.

"No, not for anybody," she repeated, rather more readily than he could have wished.

"And you're sure you're not angry with me?" he persisted, "and you like the bangle?"

She had taken it off to re-examine it, and she held it up to him.

"Here, put it on me again, and don't be silly," she said, the old spirit beginning to wake in her eyes.

"Do you remember when you were a child the way you used to thank me when I gave you anything?" he asked, pressing her hand hard.

"But I'm not a child now!"

Lambert, looking in her face, saw the provoking smile spread like sunshine from her eyes to her lips, and, intoxicated by it, he stooped his head and kissed her.

Steps came running along the walk towards them, and the fat face and red head of the Protestant orphan appeared under the boughs of the lime-tree.

"A messenger from Bruff's afther bringing this here, Miss Francie," she panted, tendering a letter in her fingers, "an' Miss Charlotte lef' me word I

should get tea when ye'd want it, an' will I wet it now?"

Christopher had shirked the expression of Miss Fitzpatrick's gratitude.

CHAPTER XVII.

"TALLY HO LODGE.

"MY DEAREST FANNY,

"Although I'm nearly dead after the bazaar I must write you a line or two to tell you what it was like. It was scrumshous. I wore my white dress with the embroidery the first day and the pink dress that you and I bought together the second day and everybody liked me best in the white one. It was fearful hot and it was great luck it was at the flower stall Mrs. Gascogne asked me to sell. Kathleen Baker and the Beatties had the refreshments and if you saw the colour of their faces with the heat at tea-time I declare you'd have to laugh. The Dysarts brought in a lovely lot of flowers and Mr. Dysart was very nice helping me to tie them up. You needn't get on with any of your nonsence about him,

he'd never think of flirting with me or anyone though he's fearfully polite and you'd be in fits if you saw the way Miss Hopedrummond the girl I told you about was running after him and anyone could see he'd sooner talk to his sister or his mother and I don't wonder for their both very nice which is more than she is. Roddy Lambert was there of course and poor Mrs. L. in a puce dress and everybody from the whole country round. Mr. Hawkins was grand fun. Nothing would do him but to come behind the counter with me and Mrs. Gascogne and go on with the greatest nonsence selling buttonholes to the old ladies and making them buy a lot of old rotten jeranium cuttings that was all Charlotte would give to the stall. The second day it was only just the townspeople that were there and I couldn't be bothered selling to them all day and little thanks you get from them. The half of them came thinking they'd get everything for nothing because it was the last day and you'd hear them fighting Mrs. Gascogne as if she was a shopwoman. I sat up in the gallery with

Hawkins most of the evening and he brought up tea there and strawberries and Charlotte was shouting and roaring round the place looking for me and nobody knew where we were. 'Twas lovely—"

At this point Miss Fitzpatrick became absorbed in meditation, and the portrayal on the blotting-paper of a profile of a conventionally classic type, which, by virtue of a moustache and a cigarette, might be supposed to represent Mr. Hawkins. She did not feel inclined to give further details of her evening, even to Fanny Hemphill. As a matter of fact she had in her own mind pressed the possibilities of her acquaintance with Mr. Hawkins to their utmost limit, and it seemed to her not impossible that soon she might have a good deal more to say on the subject; but, nevertheless, she could not stifle a certain anxiety as to whether, after all, there would ever be anything definite to tell. Hawkins was more or less an unknown quantity; his mere idioms and slang were the language of another world. It was easy to

diagnose Tommy Whitty or Jimmy Jemmison and their fellows, but this was a totally new experience, and the light of previous flirtations had no illuminating power. She had, at all events, the satisfaction of being sure that on Fanny Hemphill not even the remotest shadow of an allusion would be lost, and that, whatever the future might bring forth, she would be eternally credited with the subjugation of an English officer.

The profile with the moustache and the cigarette was repeated several times on the blotting-paper during this interval, but not to her satisfaction; her new bangle pressed its pearly horse-shoes into the whiteness of her wrist and hurt her, and she took it off and laid it on the table. It also, and the circumstances of its bestowal, were among the things that she had not seen fit to mention to the friend of her bosom. It was nothing of course; of no more significance than the kiss that had accompanied it, except that she had been glad to have the bangle, and had cared nothing for the kiss; but that was just what she would

never be able to get Fanny Hemphill to believe.

The soft, clinging tread of bare feet became audible in the hall, and a crack of the dining-room door was opened.

"Miss Francie," said a voice through the crack, "th' oven's hot."

"Have you the eggs and everything ready, Bid?" asked Francie, who was adding a blotted smoke-wreath to the cigarette of the twentieth profile.

"I have, miss," replied the invisible Bid Sal, "an' Norry says to be hurrying for 'tis short till Miss Charlotte 'll be comin' in."

Francie closed the blotter on her half-finished letter, and pursued the vanishing figure to the kitchen. Norry was not to be seen, but on the table were bowls with eggs, sugar, and butter, and beside them was laid a bunch of twigs, tied together like a miniature birch-rod. The making of a sponge-cake was one of Francie's few accomplishments, and putting on an apron of dubious cleanliness, lent by Louisa, she began operations by breaking the eggs, separating the yolks from the

whites, and throwing the shells into the fire with professional accuracy of aim.

"Where's the egg-whisk, Bid?" she demanded.

"'Tis thim that she bates the eggs with, miss," answered Bid Sal in the small, bashful voice by which she indicated her extreme humility towards those in authority over her, handing the birch-rod to Francie as she spoke.

"Mercy on us! What a thing! I'd be all night beating them with that!"

"Musha, how grand ye are!" broke in Norry's voice from the scullery, in tones of high disdain; "if ye can't bate eggs with that ye'd betther lave it to thim that can!" Following her words came Norry herself, bearing an immense saucepanful of potatoes, and having hoisted it on to the fire, she addressed herself to Bid Sal. "Get out from undher me feet out o' this! I suppose it's to make cakes ye'd go, in place of feedin' the pigs! God knows I have as much talked since breakfast as'd sicken an ass, but, indeed, I might as well be playin' the pianna as tellin' yer business to the likes o' ye."

A harsh yell at this point announced that

a cat's tail had been trodden on, but, far from expressing compunction, Norry turned with fury upon the latest offender, and seizing from a corner beside the dresser an ancient carriage whip, evidently secreted for the purpose, she flogged the whole assemblage of cats out of the kitchen. Bid Sal melted away like snow in a thaw, and Norry, snatching the bowl of eggs from Francie, began to thrash them with the birch rod, scolding and grumbling all the time.

"That ye may be happy!" (This pious wish was with Norry always ironical.) "God knows ye should be ashamed, filling yer shtummicks with what'll sicken thim, and dhraggin' the people from their work to be runnin' afther ye!"

"I don't want you to be running after me," began Francie humbly.

"Faith thin that's the thruth!" returned the inexorable Norry; "if ye have thim ofcers running afther ye ye're satisfied. Here, give me the bowl till I butther it. I'd sooner butther it meself than to be lookin' at ye doin' it!"

A loud cough, coming from the scullery, of the peculiarly doleful type affected by beggars, momentarily interrupted this tirade.

"*Sha'se mick*, Nance! Look at that, now, how ye have poor Nance the Fool waitin' on me till I give her the empty bottle for Julia Duffy."

Francie moved towards the scullery door, urged by a natural curiosity to see what manner of person Nance the Fool might be, and saw, squatted on the damp flags, an object which could only be described as a bundle of rags with a cough in it. The last characteristic was exhibited in such detail at the sight of Francie that she retired into the kitchen again, and ventured to suggest to Norry that the bottle should be given as soon as possible, and the scullery relieved of Nance the Fool's dreadful presence.

"There it is for her on the dhresser," replied Norry, still furiously whipping the eggs; "ye can give it yerself."

From the bundle of rags, as Francie approached it, there issued a claw, which snatched the bottle and secreted it, and Francie just caught a glimpse,

under the swathing of rags, of eyes so inflamed with crimson that they seemed to her like pools of blood, and heard mouthings and mumblings of Irish which might have been benedictions, but, if so, were certainly blessings in disguise.

"That poor craythur walked three miles to bring me the bottle I have there on the dhresser. It's yerr'b tay that Julia Duffy makes for thim that has the colic." Norry was softening a little as the whites of the eggs rose in stiff and silvery froth. "Julia's a cousin of me own, through the mother's family, and she's able to docthor as good as e'er a docthor there's in it."

"I don't think I'd care to have her doctoring me," said Francie, mindful of the touzled head and dirty face that had looked down upon her from the window at Gurthnamuckla.

"And little shance ye'd have to get her!" retorted Norry; "'tis little she regards the likes o' you towards thim that hasn't a Christhian to look to but herself." Norry defiantly shook the foam from the birch rod, and proceeded with her eulogy of Julia Duffy. "She's as wise a woman and as

good a scholar as what's in the country, and many's the poor craythure that's prayin' hard for her night and morning for all she done for thim. B'leeve you me, there's plinty would come to her funeral that'd be follyin' their own only for her and her doctherin'."

"She has a very pretty place," remarked Francie who wished to be agreeable, but could not conscientiously extol Miss Duffy; "it's a pity she isn't able to keep the house nicer."

"Nice! What way have she to keep it nice that hasn't one but herself to look to! And if it was clane itself, it's all the good it'd do her that they'd throw her out of it quicker."

"Who'd throw her out?"

"I know that meself." Norry turned away and banged open the door of the oven. "There's plinty that's ready to pull the bed from undher a lone woman if they're lookin' for it for theirselves."

The mixture had by this time been poured into its tin shape, and, having placed it in the oven, Francie seated herself on the kitchen table to superintend its baking. The voice of conscience

told her to go back to the dining-room and finish her letter, but she repressed it, and, picking up a kitten that had lurked, unsuspected, between a frying-pan and the wall during the rout of its relatives, she proceeded to while away the time by tormenting it, and insulting the cockatoo with frivolous questions.

Miss Mullen's weekly haggle with the butcher did not last quite as long as usual this Friday morning. She had, in fact, concluded it by herself taking the butcher's knife, and with jocose determination, had proceeded to cut off the special portion of the "rack" which she wished for, in spite of Mr. Driscoll's protestations that it had been bespoke by Mrs. Gascogne. Exhilarated by this success, she walked home at a brisk pace, regardless of the heat, and of the weight of the rusty black tourists' bag which she always wore, slung across her shoulders by a strap, on her expeditions into the town. There was no one to be seen in the house when she came into it, except the exiled cats, who were sleeping moodily in a patch of sunshine on the hall-mat, and after some passing endearments, their mistress went on

into the dining-room, in which, by preference, as well as for economy, she sat in the mornings. It had, at all events, one advantage over the drawing-room, in possessing a sunny French window, opening on to the little grass-garden—a few untidy flower-beds, with a high, unclipped hedge surrounding them, the resort of cats and their breakfast dishes, but for all that a pleasant outlook on a hot day. Francie had been writing at the dinner-table, and Charlotte sat down in the chair that her cousin had vacated, and began to add up the expenses of the morning. When she had finished, she opened the blotter to dry her figures, and saw, lying in it, the letter that Francie had begun.

In the matter of reading a letter not intended for her eye, Miss Mullen recognised only her own inclinations, and the facilities afforded to her by fate, and in this instance one played into the hands of the other. She read the letter through quickly, her mouth set at its grimmest expression of attention, and replaced it carefully in the blotting-case where she found it. She sat still, her two fists clenched on the table before her, and her face rather redder

than even the hot walk from Lismoyle had made it.

There had been a good deal of information in the letter that was new to her, and it seemed important enough to demand much consideration. The reflection on her own contribution to the bazaar did not hurt her in the least, in fact, it slightly raised her opinion of Francie that she should have noticed it; but that ingenuous confidence about the evening spent in the gallery was another affair. At this point in her reflections, she became aware that her eye was attracted by something glittering on the green baize of the dinner-table, half-hidden under two or three loose sheets of paper. It was the bangle that she remembered having seen on Francie's wrist, and she took it up and looked curiously at the double horse-shoes as she appraised its value. She never thought of it as being real—Francie was not at all above an effective imitation—and she glanced inside to see what the mark might be. There was the eighteen-carat mark sure enough, and there also was Francie's name and the date, July 1st, 189—. A

moment's reflection enabled Charlotte to identify this as the day of the yacht accident, and another moment sufficed for her to determine that the giver of the bangle had been Mr. Hawkins. She was only too sure that it had not been Christopher, and certainly no glimmer of suspicion crossed her mind that the first spendings from her loan to Mr. Lambert were represented by the bangle.

She opened the blotter, and read again that part of the letter that treated of Christopher Dysart. "P'yah!" she said to herself, "the little fool! what does she know about him?" At this juncture, the wheezing of the spring of the passage-door gave kindly signal of danger, and Charlotte deftly slipped the letter back into the blotter, replaced the bangle under the sheets of paper, and was standing outside the French window when Francie came into the room, with flushed cheeks, a dirty white apron, and in her hands a plate bearing a sponge-cake of the most approved shade of golden-brown. At sight of Charlotte she stopped guiltily, and, as the latter stepped in at the window, she became even redder than the fire had made her.

"Oh—I've just made this, Charlotte—" she faltered; "I bought the eggs and the butter myself; I sent Bid for them, and Norry said—she thought you wouldn't mind—"

On an ordinary occasion Charlotte might have minded considerably even so small a thing as the heating of the oven and the amount of flour and sugar needed for the construction of the cake; but a slight, a very slight sense of wrong-doing, conspired, with a little confusion, consequent on the narrowness of her escape, to dispose her to compliance.

"Why, me dear child, why would I mind anything so agreeable to me and all concerned as that splendour of a cake that I see there? I declare I never gave you credit for being able to do anything half as useful! 'Pon me honour, I'll give a tea-party on the strength of it." Even as she spoke she had elaborated the details of a scheme of which the motor should be the cake that Francie's own hand had constructed.

The choir practice was poorly attended that afternoon. A long and heavy shower, coming at the critical moment, had combined with a still longer

and heavier luncheon-party given by Mrs. Lynch, the solicitor's wife, to keep away several members. Francie had evaded her duties by announcing that her only pair of thick boots had gone to be soled, and only the most ardent mustered round Mrs. Gascogne's organ bench. Of these was Pamela Dysart, faithful, as was her wont, in the doing of what she had undertaken; and as Charlotte kicked off her goloshes at the gallery door, and saw Pamela's figure in its accustomed place, she said to herself that consistency was an admirable quality. Her approbation was still warm when she joined Pamela at the church door after the practice was over, and she permitted herself the expression of it.

"Miss Dysart, you're the only young woman of the rising generation in whom I place one ha'porth of reliance; I can tell you, not one step would I have stirred out on the chance of meeting any other member of the choir on a day of this kind, but I knew I might reckon on meeting *you* here."

"Oh, I like coming to the practices," said Pamela, wondering why Miss Mullen should specially want to see her. They were standing in the church

porch, waiting for Pamela's pony-cart, while the rain streamed off the roof in a white veil in front of them. "You must let me drive you home," she went on; "but I don't think the trap will come till this downpour is over."

Under the gallery stairs stood a bench, usually appropriated to the umbrellas and cloaks of the congregation; and after the rest of the choir had launched themselves forth upon the yellow torrent that took the place of the path through the churchyard, Pamela and Miss Mullen sat themselves down upon it to wait. Mrs. Gascogne was practising her Sunday voluntary, and the stairs were trembling with the vibrations of the organ; it was a Largo of Bach's, and Pamela would infinitely have preferred to listen to it than to lend a polite ear to Charlotte's less tuneful but equally reverberating voice.

"I think I mentioned to you, Miss Dysart, that I have to go to Dublin next week for three or four days; teeth, you know, teeth—not that I suppose you have any experience of such miseries yet!"

Pamela did not remember, nor, beyond a sympathetic smile, did she at first respond. Her at-

tention had been attracted by the dripping, deplorable countenance of Max, which was pleading to her round the corner of the church door for that sanctuary which he well knew to be eternally denied to him. There had been a time in Max's youth when he had gone regularly with Pamela to afternoon service, lying in a corner of the gallery in discreet slumber. But as he emerged from puppydom he had developed habits of snoring and scratching which had betrayed his presence to Mrs. Gascogne, and the climax had come one Sunday morning when, in defiance of every regulation, he had flung himself from the drawing-room window at Bruff, and followed the carriage to the church at such speed as his crooked legs could compass. Finding the gallery door shut, he had made his way nervously up the aisle until, when nearing the chancel steps, he was so overcome with terror at the sight of the surpliced figure of the Archdeacon sternly fulminating the Commandments, that he had burst out into a loud fit of hysterical barking. Pamela and the culprit had made an abject visit to the Rectory next day, but the sentence of ex-

communication went forth, and Max's religious exercises were thenceforth limited to the churchyard. But on this unfriendly afternoon the sight of his long melancholy nose, and ears dripping with rain, was too much for even Pamela's rectitude.

"Oh, yes, teeth are horrible things," she murmured, stealthily patting her waterproof in the manner known to all dogs as a signal of encouragement.

"Horrible things! Upon my word they are! Beaks, that's what we ought to have instead of them! I declare I don't know which is the worst, cutting your first set of teeth, or your last! But that's not what's distressing me most about going to Dublin."

"Really," said Pamela, who, conscious that Max was now securely hidden behind her petticoats, was able to give her whole attention to Miss Mullen; "I hope it's nothing serious."

"Well, Miss Dysart," said Charlotte, with a sudden burst of candour, "I'll tell you frankly what it is. I'm not easy in my mind about leaving that girl by herself—Francie y' know—she's very young,

and I suppose I may as well tell the truth, and say she's very pretty." She paused for the confirmation that Pamela readily gave. "So you'll understand now, Miss Dysart, that I feel anxious about leaving her in a house by herself, and the reason I wanted to see you so specially to-day was to ask if you'd do me a small favour, which, being your mother's daughter, I'm sure you'll not refuse." She looked up at Pamela, showing all her teeth. "I want you to be the good angel that you always are, and come in and look her up sometimes if you happen to be in town."

The lengthened prelude to this modest request might have indicated to a more subtle soul than Pamela's that something weightier lay behind it; but her grey eyes met Miss Mullen's restless brown ones with nothing in them except kindly surprise that it was such a little thing that she had been asked to do.

"Of course I will," she answered; "mamma and I will have to come in about clearing away the rest of that awful bazaar rubbish, and I shall be only too glad to come and see her, and I hope she

will come and lunch at Bruff some day while you are away."

This was not quite what Charlotte was aiming at, but still it was something.

"You're a true friend, Miss Dysart," she said gushingly, "I knew you would be; it'll only be for a few days, at all events, that I'll bother you with me poor relation! I'm sure she'll be able to amuse herself in the evenings and mornings quite well, though indeed, poor child, I'm afraid she'll be lonely enough!"

Mrs. Gascogne, putting on her gloves at the top of the stairs, thought to herself that Charlotte Mullen might be able to impose upon Pamela, but other people were not so easily imposed on. She leaned over the staircase railing, and said, "Are you aware, Pamela, that your trap is waiting at the gate?" Pamela got up, and Max, deprived of the comfortable shelter of her skirts, crawled forth from under the bench and sneaked out of the church door. "I wouldn't have that dog's conscience for a good deal," went on Mrs. Gascogne as she came downstairs. "In fact, I am beginning

to think that the only people who get everything they want are the people who have no consciences at all."

"There's a pretty sentiment for a clergyman's wife!" exclaimed Charlotte. "Wait till I see the Archdeacon and ask him what sort of theology that is! Now wasn't that the very image of Mrs. Gascogne?" she continued as Pamela and she drove away; "the best and the most religious woman in the parish, but no one's able to say a sharper thing when she likes, and you never know what heterodoxy she'll let fly at you next!"

The rain was over, and the birds were singing loudly in the thick shrubs at Tally Ho as Pamela turned the roan pony in at the gate; the sun was already drawing a steamy warmth from the bepuddled road, and the blue of the afternoon sky was glowing freshly and purely behind a widening proscenium of clouds.

"Now you might just as well come in and have a cup of tea; it's going to be a lovely evening after all, and I happen to know there's a grand sponge-cake in the house." Thus spoke Charlotte,

with hospitable warmth, and Pamela permitted herself to be persuaded. "It was Francie made it herself; she'll be as proud as Punch at having you to—" Charlotte stopped short with her hand on the drawing-room door, and then opened it abruptly.

There was no one to be seen, but on the table were two half-empty cups of tea, and the new sponge-cake, reduced by one-third, graced the centre of the board. Miss Mullen glared round the room. A stifled giggle broke from the corner behind the piano, and Francie's head appeared over the top, instantly followed by that of Mr. Hawkins.

"We thought 'twas visitors when we heard the wheels," said Miss Fitzpatrick, still laughing, but looking very much ashamed of herself, "and we went to hide when they passed the window for fear we'd be seen." She paused, not knowing what to say, and looked entreatingly at Pamela. "I never thought it'd be you—"

It was borne in on her suddenly that this was not the manner in which Miss Dysart would have acted under similar circumstances, and for the first

time a doubt as to the fitness of her social methods crossed her mind.

Pamela, as she drove home after tea, thought she understood why it was that Miss Mullen did not wish her cousin to be left to her own devices in Lismoyle.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THERE was no sound in the red gloom, except the steady trickle of running water, and the anxious breathing of the photographer. Christopher's long hands moved mysteriously in the crimson light, among phials, baths, and cases of negatives, while uncanny smells of various acids and compounds thickened the atmosphere. Piles of old trunks towered dimly in the corners, a superannuated sofa stood on its head by the wall, with its broken hind-legs in the air, three old ball skirts hung like ghosts of Bluebeard's wives upon the door, from which, to Christopher's developing tap, a narrow passage forced its angular way.

There was presently a step on the uncarpeted flight of attic stairs, accompanied by a pattering of broad paws, and Pamela, closely attended by the inevitable Max, slid with due caution into the room.

"Well, Christopher," she began, sitting gingerly down in the darkness on an old imperial, a relic of the period when Sir Benjamin posted to Dublin in his own carriage, "mamma says she *is* to come!"

"Lawks!" said Christopher succinctly, after a pause occupied by the emptying of one photographic bath into another.

"Mamma said she 'felt Charlotte Mullen's position so keenly in having to leave that girl by herself,'" pursued Pamela, "'that it was only common charity to take her in here while she was away.'"

"Well, my dear, and what are you going to do with her?" said Christopher cheerfully.

"Oh, I can't think," replied Pamela despairingly; "and I know that Evelyn does not care about her; only last night she said she dressed like a doll at a bazaar."

Christopher busied himself with his chemicals, and said nothing.

"The fact is, Christopher," went on his sister decisively, "*you* will have to undertake her. Of course, I'll help you, but I really cannot face the idea of entertaining both her and Evelyn at the

same time. Just imagine how they would hate it."

"Let them hate it," said Christopher, with the crossness of a good-natured person who feels that his good nature is going to make him do a disagreeable thing.

"Ah, Christopher, be good; it will only be for three days, and she's very easy to talk to; in fact," ended Pamela apologetically, "I think I rather like her!"

"Well, do you know," said Christopher, "the curious thing is, that though I can't talk to her and she can't talk to me, I rather like her, too—when I'm at the other end of the room."

"That's all very fine," returned Pamela dejectedly; "it may amuse you to study her through a telescope, but it won't do anyone else much good; after all, you are the person who is really responsible for her being here. You saved her life."

"I know I did," replied her brother irritably, staring at the stumpy candle behind the red glass of the lantern, unaware of the portentous effect of its light upon his eye-glass, which shone like a ball

of fire; "that's much the worst feature of the case. It creates a dreadful bond of union. At that infernal bazaar, whenever I happened to come within hail of her, Miss Mullen collected a crowd and made a speech at us. I will say for her that she hid with Hawkins as much as she could, and did her best to keep out of my way. As I said before, I have no personal objection to her, but I have no gift for competing with young women. Why not have Hawkins to dinner every night and to luncheon every day? It's much the simplest way of amusing her, and it will save me a great deal of wear and tear that I don't feel equal to."

Pamela got up from the imperial.

"I hate you when you begin your nonsense of theorising about yourself as if you were a mixture of Methuselah and Diogenes; I have seen you making yourself just as agreeable to young women as Mr. Hawkins or anyone;" she paused at the door. "She'll be here the day after to-morrow," with a sudden collapse into pathos. "Oh, Christopher, you *must* help me to amuse her!"

Two days afterwards Miss Mullen left for Dublin

by the early train, and in the course of the morning her cousin got upon an outside car in company with her trunk, and embarked upon the preliminary stage of her visit to Bruff. She was dressed in the attire which in her own mind she specified as her "Sunday clothes," and as the car rattled through Lismoyle, she put on a pair of new yellow silk gloves with a confidence in their adequacy to the situation that was almost touching. She felt a great need of their support. Never since she was grown up had she gone on a visit, except for a night or two to the Hemphill's summer lodgings at Kingstown, when such "things" as she required were conveyed under her arm in a brown paper parcel, and she and the three Miss Hemphills had sociably slept in the back drawing-room. She had been once at Bruff, a visit of ceremony, when Lady Dysart only had been at home, and she had sat and drunk her tea in unwonted silence, wishing that there were sugar in it, but afraid to ask for it, and respecting Charlotte for the ease with which she accepted her surroundings, and discoursed of high and difficult matters with her hostess. It was only

the thought of writing to her Dublin friends to tell them of how she had stayed at Sir Benjamin Dysart's place that really upheld her during the drive; no matter how terrible her experiences might be, the fact would remain to her, sacred and unalterable.

Nevertheless, its consolations seemed very remote at the moment when the car pulled up at the broad steps of Bruff, and Gorman the butler came down them, and solemnly assisted her to alight, while the setter and spaniel, who had greeted her arrival with the usual official chorus of barking, smelt round her politely but with extreme firmness. She stood forlornly in the big cool hall, waiting till Gorman should be pleased to conduct her to the drawing-room, uncertain as to whether she ought to take off her coat, uncertain what to do with her umbrella, uncertain of all things except of her own ignorance. A white stone double staircase rose overawingly at the end of the hall; the floor under her feet was dark and slippery, and when she did at length prepare to follow the butler, she felt that visiting at grand houses was not as pleasant as it sounded.

A door into the hall suddenly opened, and there issued from it the hobbling figure of an old man wearing a rusty tall hat down over his ears, and followed by a cadaverous attendant, who was holding an umbrella over the head of his master, like a Siamese courtier.

"D—n your eyes, James Canavan!" said Sir Benjamin Dysart, "can't you keep the rain off my new hat, you blackguard!" Then spying Francie, who was crossing the hall, "Ho-ho! That's a fine girl, begad! What's she doing in my hall?"

"Oh, hush, hush, Sir Benjamin!" said James Canavan, in tones of shocked propriety. "That is a young lady visitor."

"Then she's *my* visitor," retorted Sir Benjamin, striking his ponderous stick on the ground, "and a devilish pretty visitor, too! I'll drive her out in my carriage to-morrow."

"You will, Sir Benjamin, you will," answered his henchman, hurrying the master of the house along towards the hall door; while Francie, with a new and wholly unexpected terror added to those she had

brought with her, followed the butler to the drawing-room.

It was a large room. Francie felt it to be the largest she had ever been in, as she advanced round a screen, and saw Lady Dysart at an immeasurable distance working at a heap of dingy serge, and behind her, still further off, the well-curled head of Miss Hope-Drummond just topping the cushion of a low arm-chair.

"Oh, how do you do!" said Lady Dysart, getting up briskly, and dropping as she did so a large pair of scissors and the child's frock at which she had been working. "You are very good to have come over so early."

The geniality of Lady Dysart's manner might have assured anyone less alarmed than her visitor that there was no ill intention in this remark; but such discernment was beyond Francie.

"Miss Mullen told me to be over here by twelve, Lady Dysart," she said abjectly, "and as she had the car ordered for me I didn't like—"

Lady Dysart began to laugh, with the large and

yet refined *bonhommie* that was with her the substitute for tact.

"Why shouldn't you come early, my dear child?" she said, looking approvingly at Francie's embarrassed countenance. "I'll tell Pamela you are here. Evelyn, don't you know Miss Fitzpatrick?"

Miss Hope-Drummond, thus adjured, raised herself languidly from her chair, and shook hands with the newcomer, as Lady Dysart strode from the room with her customary business-like rapidity. Silence reigned for nearly a minute after the door closed; but at length Miss Hope-Drummond braced herself to the exertion of being agreeable.

"Very hot day, isn't it?" looking at Francie's flushed cheeks.

"It is indeed, roasting! I was nearly melting with the heat on the jaunting-car coming over," replied Francie, with a desire to be as responsive as possible, "but it's lovely and cool in here."

She looked at Miss Hope-Drummond's spotless white gown, and wished she had not put on her Sunday terra-cotta.

"Oh, is it?"

Silence; during which Francie heard the wheels of her car grinding away down the avenue, and wished that she were on it.

"Have you been out on the lake much lately, Miss Hope-Drummond?"

Francie's wish was merely the laudable one of trying to keep the heavy ball of conversation rolling, but the question awoke a slumbering worm of discontent in her companion's well-ordered breast. Christopher was even now loosing from his moorings at the end of the park, without having so much as mentioned that he was going out; and Captain Cursiter, her own compatriot, attached—almost linked—to her by the bonds of mutual acquaintances, and her thorough knowledge of the Lincolnshire Cursiters, had not risen to the fly that she had only yesterday thrown over him on the subject of the steam-launch.

"No; I had rather more than I cared for the last time we were out, the day of the picnic. I've had neuralgia in my face ever since that evening, we were all kept out so late."

"Oh, my! That neuralgia's a horrid thing," said

Francie sympathetically. "I didn't get any harm out of it with all the wetting and the knock on my head and everything. I thought it was lovely fun! But"—forgetting her shyness in the interest of the moment—"Mr. Hawkins told me that Cursiter said to him the world wouldn't get him to take out ladies in his boat again!"

Miss Hope-Drummond raised her dark eyebrows. "Really? That is very crushing of Captain Cursiter."

Francie felt in a moment an emphasis on the word Captain; but tried to ignore her own confusion.

"It doesn't crush *me*, I can tell you! I wouldn't give a pin to go in his old boat. I'd twice sooner go in a yacht, upsets and all!"

"Oh!"

Miss Hope-Drummond said no more than this, but her tone was sufficient. Her eyes strayed towards the book that lay in her lap, and the finger inserted in its pages showed, as if unconsciously, a tendency to open it again.

There was another silence, during which Francie studied the dark and unintelligible oil-paintings on

the expanses of wall, the flowers, arranged with such easy and careless lavishness in strange and innumerable jars and vases; and lastly, Dinah, in a distant window, catching and eating flies with disgusting avidity. She felt as if her petticoats showed her boots more than was desirable, that her gloves were of too brilliant a tint, and that she ought to have left her umbrella in the hall. At this painful stage of her reflections she heard Lady Dysart's incautious voice outside.

"It's always the way with Christopher; he digs a hole and buries himself in it whenever he's wanted. Take her out and let her eat strawberries now; and then in the afternoon—" the voice suddenly sank as if in response to an admonition, and Francie's already faint heart sank along with it. Oh, to be at the Hemphills, making toffee on the parlour fire, remote from the glories and sufferings of aristocratic houses! The next moment she was shaking hands with Pamela, and becoming gradually aware that she was in an atmosphere of ease and friendliness, much as the slow pleasure of a perfume makes itself slowly felt. The fact that Pamela had on a grass hat of sunburnt

maturity, and a skirt which bore the imprint of dogs' paws was in itself reassuring, and as they went together down a shrubbery walk, and finally settled upon the strawberry beds in the wide, fragrant kitchen-garden, the first terrors began to subside in Francie's trembling soul, and she found herself breathing more naturally in this strange, rarefied condition of things. Even luncheon was less formidable than she had expected. Christopher was not there, the dreaded Sir Benjamin was not there, and Lady Dysart consulted her about the cutting-out of poor clothes, and accepted with an almost alarming enthusiasm the suggestions that Francie diffidently brought up from the depths of past experience of the Fitzpatrick wardrobe.

The long, unusual leisure of the afternoon passed by her like a pleasant dream, in which, as she sat in a basket-chair under the verandah outside the drawing-room windows, illustrated papers, American magazines, the snoring lethargy of the dogs, and the warm life and stillness of the air were about equally blended. Miss Hope-Drummond lay aloof in a hammock under a horse-chestnut tree at the end of

the flower-garden, working at the strip of Russian embroidery that some day was to languish neglected on the stall of an English bazaar ; Francie had seen her trail forth with her arms full of cushions, and dimly divined that her fellow-guest was hardly tolerating the hours that were to her like fragments collected from all the holidays she had ever known. No wonder, she thought, that Pamela wore a brow of such serenity, when days like this were her ordinary portion. Five o'clock came, and with it, with the majestic punctuality of a heavenly body, came Gorman and the tea equipage, attended by his satellite, William, bearing the tea-table. Francie had never heard the word idyllic, but the feeling that it generally conveys came to her as she lay back in her chair, and saw the roses swaying about the pillars of the verandah, and watched the clots of cream sliding into her cup over the broad lip of the cream jug, and thought how incredibly brilliant the silver was, and that Miss Dysart's hands looked awfully pretty while she was pouring out tea, and weren't a bit spoiled by being rather brown. It was consolatory that Miss Hope-Drummond had elected

to have her tea conveyed to her in the hammock; it was too much trouble to get out of it, she called, in her shrill, languid voice, and no one had argued the matter with her. Lady Dysart, who had occupied herself during the afternoon in visiting the garden-beds and giving a species of clinical lecture on each to the wholly unimpressed gardener, had subsided into a chair beside Francie, and began to discuss with her the evangelical preachers of Dublin, a mark of confidence and esteem which Pamela noticed with astonishment. Francie had got to her second cup of tea, and had evinced an edifying familiarity with Lady Dysart's most chosen divines, when the dogs, who had been seated opposite Pamela, following with lambent eyes the passage of each morsel to her lips, rushed from the verandah, and charged with furious barkings across the garden and down the lawn towards two figures, whom in their hearts they knew to be the sons of the house, but whom, for histrionic purposes, they affected to regard as dangerous strangers.

Miss Hope-Drummond sat up in her hammock and pinned her hat on straight.

"Mr. Dysart," she called, as Christopher and Garry neared her chestnut tree, "you've just come in time to get me another cup of tea."

Christopher dived under the chestnut branches, and presently, with what Miss Hope-Drummond felt to be unexampled stupidity, returned with it, but without his own. He had even the gaucherie to commend her choice of the hammock, and having done so, to turn and walk back to the verandah, and Miss Hope-Drummond asked herself for the hundredth time how the Castlemores *could* have put up with him.

"I met the soldiers out on the lake to-day," Christopher remarked as he sat down; "I told them to come and dine to-morrow." He looked at Pamela with an eye that challenged her gratitude, but before she could reply, Garry interposed in tones muffled by cake.

"He did, the beast; and he might have remembered it was my birthday, and the charades and everything."

"Oh, Garry, *must* we have charades?" said Pamela lamentably.

"Well, of course we must, you fool," returned Garry with scriptural directness; "I've told all the men about the place, and Kitty Gascogne's coming to act, and James Canavan's going to put papa to bed early and help us—" Garry's voice sank to the fluent complaining undertone that distinguishes a small boy with a grievance, and Christopher turned to his mother's guest.

"I suppose you've acted in charades, Miss Fitzpatrick?"

"Is it me act? Oh goodness, no, Mr. Dysart! I never did such a thing but once, when I had to read Lady Macbeth's part at school, and I thought I'd die laughing the whole time."

Pamela and Lady Dysart exchanged glances as they laughed at this reminiscence. Would Christopher ever talk to a girl with a voice like this? was the interpretation of Pamela's glance, while Lady Dysart's was a mere note of admiration for the way that the sunlight caught the curls on Francie's forehead as she sat up to speak to Christopher, and for the colour that had risen in her cheeks since his arrival, more especially since his announcement that

Captain Cursiter and Mr. Hawkins were coming to dinner. There are few women who can avoid some slight change of manner and even of appearance, when a man is added to the company, and it may at once be said that Francie was far from trying to repress her increased interest on such an occasion.

"What made you think I could act, Mr. Dysart?" she said, looking at him a little self-consciously; "do you think I look like an actress?"

The question was interrupted by a cry from the chestnut tree, and Miss Hope-Drummond's voice was heard appealing to someone to come and help her out of the hammock.

"She can get out jolly well by herself," remarked Garry, but Christopher got up and lounged across the grass in response to the summons, and Francie's question remained unanswered. Lady Dysart rose too, and watched her son helping Miss Hope-Drummond on to her feet, and strolling away with her in the direction of the shrubbery. Then she turned to Francie.

"Now, Miss Fitzpatrick, you shall come and ex-

plain that Dorcas Society sleeve to me, and I should not be surprised if you could help me with the acrostic."

Lady Dysart considered herself to be, before all things, a diplomatist.

CHAPTER XIX.

DINNER was over. Gorman was regaling his fellows in the servants' hall with an account of how Miss Fitzpatrick had eaten her curry with a knife and fork, and her Scotch woodcock with a spoon, and how she had accepted every variety of wine that he had offered her, and taken only a mouthful of each, an eccentricity of which William was even now reaping the benefit in the pantry. Mrs. Brady, the cook, dared say that by all accounts it was the first time the poor child had seen a bit served the way it would be fit to put into a Christian's mouth, and, indeed, it was little she'd learn of behaviour or dinners from Miss Mullen, except to make up messes for them dirty cats—a remark which obtained great acceptance from her audience. Mr. Gorman then gave it as his opinion that Miss Fitzpatrick was as fine a girl as you'd meet between this and Dublin,

and if he was Mr. Christopher, he'd prefer her to Miss Hope-Drummond, even though the latter might be hung down with diamonds.

The object of this criticism was meantime congratulating herself that she had accomplished the last and most dreaded of the day's ceremonies, and, so far as she knew, had won through it without disaster. She certainly felt as if she never had eaten so much in her life, and she thought to herself that, taking into consideration the mental anxiety and the loss of time involved in the consumption of one of these grand dinners, she infinitely preferred the tea and poached eggs which formed her ordinary repast. Pamela was at the piano, looking a long way off in the dim pink light of the shaded room, and was playing such strange music as Francie had never heard before, and secretly hoped never to hear again. She had always believed herself to be extremely fond of music, and was wont to feel very sentimental when she and one of that tribe, whom it is to be feared she spoke of as her "fellows," sat on the rocks at the back of Kingstown pier and listened to the band playing

"Dorothy," or "The Lost Chord," in the dark of the summer evening; but these minor murmurings, that seemed to pass by steep and painful chromatic paths from one woe to another, were to her merely exercises of varying difficulty and ugliness, in which Miss Dysart never seemed to get the chords quite right. She was too shy to get up and search for amusement among the books and papers upon a remote table, and accordingly she lay back in her chair and regarded Lady Dysart and Miss Hope-Drummond, both comfortably absorbed in conversation, and wondered whether she should ever have money enough to buy herself a tea-gown.

The door opened, and Christopher sauntered in; he looked round the room through his eye-glass, and then wandered towards the piano, where he sat down beside Pamela. Francie viewed this proceeding with less resentment than if he had been any other man in the world; she did not so much mind a neglect in which Miss Hope-Drummond was equally involved, and she was rather frightened than otherwise, when soon afterwards she saw him, in evident obedience to a hint from his sister, get up and come towards her

with a large photograph-book under his arm. He sat down beside her, and, with what Pamela, watching from the distant piano, felt to be touching docility, began to expound its contents to her. He had done this thing so often before, and he knew, or thought he knew so well what people were going to say, that nothing but the unfailing proprietary interest in his own handiwork supported him on these occasions. He had not, however, turned many pages before he found that Francie's comments were by no means of the ordinary tepid and perfunctory sort. The Oxford chapels were, it is true, surveyed by her in anxious silence; but a crowd of undergraduates leaning over a bridge to look at an eight—an instantaneous photograph of a bump-race, with its running accompaniment of maniacs on the bank—Christopher's room, with Dinah sitting in his armchair with a pipe in her mouth—were all examined and discussed with fervid interest, and a cry of unfeigned excitement greeted the page on which his own photography made its *début* with a deep-brown portrait of Pamela.

"Mercy on us! That's not Miss Dysart! What has she her face blackened for?"

"Oh, I did that when I did'nt know much about it last winter, and it's rather over-exposed," answered Christopher, regarding his work of art with a lenient parental eye.

"The poor thing! And was it the cold turned her black that way?"

Christopher glanced at his companion's face to see whether this ignorance was genuine, but before he had time to offer the scientific explanation, she had pounced on a group below.

"Why, isn't that the butler? Goodness! he's the dead image of the Roman Emperors in Mangnall's questions! And who are all the other people? I declare, one of them's that queer man I saw in the hall with the old gentleman—" she stopped and stammered as she realised that she had touched on what must necessarily be a difficult subject.

"Yes, this is a photograph of the servants," said Christopher, filling the pause with compassionate speed, "and that's James Canavan. You'll see him to-morrow night taking a leading part in Garry's theatricals."

"Why, d'ye tell me that man can act?"

"Act? I should think so!" he laughed as if at some recollection or other. "He can do anything he tries, or thinks he can. He began by being a sort of hedge-schoolmaster, but he was too mad to stick to it. Anyhow, my father took him up, and put him into the agency office, and now he's his valet, and teaches Garry arithmetic when he's at home, and writes poems and plays. I envy you your first sight of James Canavan on the boards," he ended, laughing again.

"The boards!" Francie thought to herself; "I wonder is it like a circus?"

The photographs progressed serenely after this. Francie began to learn something of the discreetness that must be observed in inspecting amateur portrait photography, and Christopher, on his side, found he was being better entertained by Miss Mullen's cousin than he could have believed possible. They turned page after page steadily and conversationally, until Christopher made a pause of unconscious pride and affection at a group of photographs of yachts in different positions.

"These are some of the best I have," he said; "that's my boat, and that is Mr. Lambert's."

"Oh, the nasty thing! I'm sure I don't want to see *her* again! and I shouldn't think you did either!" with an uncertain glance at him. It had seemed to her when, once or twice before, she had spoken of the accident to him, that it was a subject he did not care about. "Mr. Lambert says that the upsetting wasn't her fault a bit, and he likes going out in her just the same. I think he's a very brave man, don't you?"

"Oh, very," replied Christopher perfunctorily; "but he rather overdoes it, I think, sometimes, and you know you got the worst of that business."

"I think *you* must have had the worst of it," she said timidly. "I never was able to half thank you—" Even the equalising glow from the pink lampshades could not conceal the deepening of the colour in her cheeks.

"Oh, please don't try," interrupted Christopher, surprised into a fellow-feeling of shyness, and hastily turning over the yachting page; "it was nothing at all."

"Indeed, I wanted to say it to you before," persevered Francie, "that time at the bazaar, but there always were people there. Charlotte told me that only

for you the pike would be eating me at the bottom of the lake!" she ended with a nervous laugh.

"What a very unpleasant thing to say, and not strictly true," said Christopher lightly. "Do you recognise Miss Mullen in this?" he went on, hurrying from the subject.

"Oh, how pretty!" cried Francie, peering into a small and dark picture; "but I don't see Charlotte. It's the waterfall in the grounds, isn't it?"

Pamela looked over from the piano again, amazed to hear her brother's voice raised in loud laughter. There was no denying that the picture was like a water-fall, and Francie at first rejected with scorn the explanation that it represented a Sunday-school feast.

"Ah, go on, Mr. Dysart! Why, I see the white water, and the black rocks, and all!"

"That's the table-cloth, and the black rocks are the children's faces, and that's Miss Mullen."

"Well, I'm very glad you never took any Sunday-school feast ever *I* was at, if that's what you make them look like."

"You don't mean to say you go to Sunday-school feasts?"

"Yes, why wouldn't I? I never missed one till this year; they're the grandest fun out!"

Christopher stared at her. He was not prepared for a religious aspect in Miss Mullen's remarkable young cousin.

"Do you teach in Sunday-schools?" He tried to keep the incredulity out of his voice, but Francie caught the tone.

"You're very polite! I suppose you think I know nothing at all, but I can tell you I could say down all the judges of Israel, or the journeyings of St. Paul this minute, and that's more than you could do!"

"By Jove, it is!" answered Christopher, with another laugh. "And is that what you talk about at school feasts?"

Francie laid her head back on the cushion of her chair, and looked at him from under her lowered eyelashes. "Wouldn't you like to know?" she said. She suddenly found that this evening she was not in the least afraid of Mr. Dysart. There were some, notably Roddy Lambert, who called him a prig, but she said to herself that she'd tell him as soon as she

saw him that Mr. Dysart was a very nice young man, and not a bit stuck-up.

"Very much," Christopher replied, sticking his eye-glass into his eye, "that was why I asked." He really felt curious to know more of this unwonted young creature, with her ingenuous impudence and her lovely face. If anyone else had said the things that she had said, he would have been either bored or revolted, and it is possibly worth noting that, concurrently with a nascent interest in Francie, he was consciously surprised that he was neither bored nor revolted. Perhaps it was the influence of the half-civilised northern music that Pamela was playing, with its blood-stirring freshness, like the whistling wind of dawn, and its strange snatches of winding sweetness, that woke some slumbering part of him to a sense of her charm and youth. But Pamela guessed nothing of what Grieg's "Peer Gynt" was doing for her brother, and only thought how gallantly he was fulfilling her behest.

Before he said good-night to Francie, Christopher had learned a good deal that he did not know before. He had heard how she and Mr. Whitty, paraphrased

as "a friend of mine," had got left behind on Bray Head, while the rest of the Sunday-school excursion was being bundled into the train, and how she and the friend had missed three trains, from causes not thoroughly explained, and how Mr. Lambert, who had gone there with her, just for the fun of the thing, had come back to look for them, and had found them having tea in the station refreshment room, and had been mad. He had heard also of her stay at Kingstown, and of how a certain Miss Carrie Jemmison—sister, as was explained, of another "friend"—was wont to wake her up early to go out bathing, by the simple expedient of pulling a string which hung out of the bedroom window over the hall door, and led thence to Miss Fitzpatrick's couch, where it was fastened to her foot; in fact, by half-past ten o'clock, he had gathered a surprisingly accurate idea of Miss Fitzpatrick's manner of life, and had secretly been a good deal taken aback by it.

He said to himself, as he smoked a final cigarette, that she must be a nice girl somehow not to have been more vulgar than she was, and she really must

have a soul to be saved. There was something about her—some limpid quality—that kept her transparent and fresh like a running stream, and cool, too, he thought, with a grin and with a great deal of reflective stroking of Dinah's apathetic head, as she lay on his uncomfortable lap trying to make the best of a bad business. He had not failed to notice the recurrence of Mr. Lambert's name in these recitals, and was faintly surprised that he could not call to mind having heard Miss Fitzpatrick mentioned by that gentleman until just before her arrival in Lismoyle. Lambert was not usually reticent about the young ladies of his acquaintance, and from Francie's own showing he must have known her very well indeed. He wondered how she came to be such a friend of his; Lambert was a first-rate man of business and all that, but there was nothing else first-rate about him that he could see. It showed the social poverty of the land that she should speak of him with confidence and even admiration; it was almost pathetic that she should know no better than to think Roddy Lambert a fine fellow. His thoughts wandered to the upset

of the *Daphne;* what an ass Lambert had made of himself then. If she could know how remarkably near her friend, Mr. Lambert, had come to drowning her on that occasion, she would not, perhaps, have quoted him so largely as a final opinion upon all matters. No one blamed a man for not being able to swim, but the fact that he was a bad swimmer was no excuse for his losing his head and coming cursing and swearing and doing his best to drown everyone else.

Christopher let Dinah slip on to the floor, and threw the end of his cigarette out of the open window of his room. He listened to the sleepy quacking of a wild-duck, and the far-away barking of the gate-house dog. The trees loomed darkly at the end of the garden; between them glimmered the pale ghost of the lake, streaked here and there with the long quivering reflections of the stars, and in and through the warm summer night, the darting flight of the bats wove a phantom net before his eyes. The Grieg music still throbbed an untiring measure in his head, and the thought of Lambert gave way to more accustomed meditations. He had leaned his elbows on the sill,

and did not move till some time afterwards, when a bat brushed his face with her wings in an attempt to get into the lighted room. Then he got up and yawned a rather dreary yawn.

"Well, the world's a very pretty place," he said to himself; "it's a pity it doesn't seem to meet all the requirements of the situation."

He was still young enough to forget at times the conventionality of cynicism.

CHAPTER XX.

LIEUTENANT GERALD HAWKINS surveyed his pink and newly shaven face above his white tie and glistening shirt-front with a smile of commendation. His moustache was looking its best, and showing most conspicuously. There was, at least, that advantage in a complexion that burned red, he thought to himself, that it made a fair moustache tell. In his button-hole was a yellow rose, given him by Mrs. Gascogne on condition, as she said (metaphorically it is to be presumed), that he "rubbed it well into Lady Dysart" that she had no blossom to equal it in shape and beauty. A gorgeous red silk sachet with his initials embroidered in gold upon it lay on the table, and as he took a handkerchief out of it his eye fell on an open letter that had lain partially hidden beneath one side of the sachet. His face fell perceptibly; taking it up he looked through it

quickly, a petulant wrinkle appearing between his light eyebrows.

"Hang it! She ought to know I can't get any leave now before the Twelfth, and then I'm booked to Glencairn. It's all rot going on like this—" He took the letter in both hands as if to tear it up, but changing his mind, stuffed it in among the pocket handkerchiefs, and hurried downstairs in response to a shout from below. His polo-cart was at the door, and in it sat Captain Cursiter, wearing an expression of dismal patience that scarcely warranted Mr. Hawkins' first remark.

"Well, you seem to be in a good deal of a hurry, old chap. Is it your dinner or is it Hope-Drummond?"

"When I'm asked to dinner at eight, I like to get there before half-past," replied Cursiter sourly; "and when you're old enough to have sense you will too."

Mr. Hawkins drove at full pace out of the barrack gates before he replied, "It's all very fine for you to talk as if you were a thousand, Snipey, but, by George! we're all getting on a bit." His ingenuous brow clouded under the peak of his cap, and his

thoughts reverted to the letter that he had thrust into the sachet. "I've been pretty young at times, I admit, but that's the sort of thing that makes you a lot older afterwards."

"Good thing, too," put in Cursiter unsympathetically.

"Yes, by Jove!" continued Mr. Hawkins; "I've often said I'd take a pull, and somehow it never came off, but I'm dashed if I'm not going to do it this time."

Captain Cursiter held his peace, and waited for the confidence that experience had told him would inevitably follow. It did not come quite in the shape in which he had expected it.

"I suppose there isn't the remotest chance of my getting any leave now, is there?"

"No, not the faintest; especially as you want to go away for the Twelfth."

"Yes, I'm bound to go then," acknowledged Mr. Hawkins with a sigh not unmixed with relief; "I suppose I've just got to stay here."

Cursiter turned round and looked up at his young friend. "What are you up to now?"

"Don't be such an owl, Cursiter," responded Mr. Hawkins testily; "why should there be anything up because I want all the leave I can get? It's a very common complaint."

"Yes, it's a very common complaint," replied Cursiter, with a certain acidity in his voice that was not lost upon Hawkins; "but what gave it to you this time?"

"Oh, hang it all, Cursiter! I know what you're driving at well enough; but you're wrong. You always think you're the only man in the world who has any sense about women."

"I didn't think I had said anything about women," returned the imperturbable Cursiter, secretly much amused at the sensitiveness of Mr. Hawkins' conscience.

"Perhaps you didn't; but you're always thinking about them and imagining other people are doing the same," retorted Hawkins; "and may I ask what my wanting leave has to say to the question?"

"You're in a funk," said Cursiter; "though mind you," he added, "I don't blame you for that."

Mr. Hawkins debated with himself for an instant,

and a confession as to the perturbed condition of that overworked organ, his heart, trembled on his lips. He even turned round to speak, but found something so discouraging to confidence in the spare, brown face, with its uncompromisingly bitten moustache and observant eyes, that the impulse was checked.

"Since you seem to know so much about me and the reasons why I want to leave and all the rest of it, I need say no more."

Captain Cursiter laughed. "Oh! don't on my account."

Hawkins subsided into a dignified silence, which Cursiter, as was his wont, did not attempt to break. He fell into meditation on the drift of what had been said to him, and thought that he would write to Greer (Greer was the adjutant), and see about getting Hawkins away from Lismoyle; and he was doing so well here, he grumbled mentally, and getting so handy in the launch. If only this infernal Fitzpatrick girl would have stayed with her cads in Dublin everything would have been as right as rain. There was no other woman here that signified except Miss Dysart, and it didn't seem likely she'd look at

him, though you never could tell what a woman would or would not do.

Captain Cursiter was "getting on," as captains go, and he was the less disposed to regard his junior's love affairs with an indulgent eye, in that he had himself served a long and difficult apprenticeship in such matters, and did not feel that he had profited much by his experiences. It had happened to him at an early age to enter ecstatically into the house of bondage, and in it he had remained with eyes gradually opening to its drawbacks, until, a few years before, the death of the only apparent obstacle to his happiness had brought him face to face with its realisation. Strange to say, when this supreme moment arrived, Captain Cursiter was disposed for further delay; but it shows the contrariety of human nature, that when he found himself superseded by his own subaltern, an habitually inebriated viscount, instead of feeling grateful to his preserver, he committed the imbecility of horse-whipping him; and finding it subsequently advisable to leave his regiment, he exchanged into the infantry with a settled conviction that all women were liars.

The coach-house at Bruff, though not apparently adapted for theatrical purposes, had been for many years compelled to that use by Garry Dysart, and when, at half-past nine o'clock that night, Lady Dysart and her guests proceeded thither, they found that it had been arranged to the best possible advantage. The seats were few, and the carriages, ranging from an ancestral yellow chariot to Pamela's pony-trap, were drawn up for the use of the rest of the audience. A dozen or so of the workmen and farm labourers lined the walls in respectful silence; and the servants of the household were divided between the outside car and the chariot. In front of a door leading to the harness-room, two clothes-horses, draped with tablecloths, a long ottoman, once part of the furniture of a pre-historic yacht of Sir Benjamin's, two chairs, and a ladder indicated the stage, and four stable-lanterns on the floor served as foot-lights. Lady Dysart, the Archdeacon, and Mrs. Gascogne sat in three chairs of honour; the landau was occupied by the rest of the party, with the exception of Francie and Hawkins, who had followed the others from the drawing-room at a little distance. When

they appeared, the coach-box of the landau seemed their obvious destination; but at the same instant the wrangling voices of the actors in the harness-room ceased, the play began, and when Pamela next looked round neither Francie nor Mr. Hawkins was visible, and from the open window of an invalided brougham that had been pushed into the background, came sounds of laughter that sufficiently indicated their whereabouts.

The most able and accustomed of dramatic critics would falter in the attempt to master the leading idea of one of Garry's entertainments; so far as this performance made itself intelligible, it consisted of nightmare snatches of "Kenilworth," subordinated to the exigencies of stage properties, chiefest among these being Sir Benjamin's deputy-lieutenant's uniform. The sword and cocked hat found their obvious wearer in the Earl of Leicester, and the white plume had been yielded to Kitty Gascogne, whose small crimson face grinned consciously beneath the limp feathers. Lady Dysart's white bernouse was felt to confer an air of simplicity appropriate to the part of Amy Robsart, and its owner could not repress a groan as she

realised that the heroine would inevitably be consigned to the grimy depths of the yacht ottoman, a receptacle long consecrated to the office of stage tomb At present, however, it was employed as a sofa, on which sat Leicester and Amy, engaged in an exhausting conversation on State matters, the onus of which fell entirely upon the former, his companion's part in it consisting mainly of a sustained giggle. It presently became evident that even Garry was flagging, and glances towards the door of the harness-room told that expected relief delayed its coming.

"He's getting a bit blown," remarked Mr. Hawkins from the window of the brougham. "Go it, Leicester!"

Garry's only reply was to rise and stalk towards the door with a dignity somewhat impaired by the bagginess of the silver-laced trousers. The deserted countess remained facing the audience in an agony of embarrassment that might have softened the heart of anyone except her lord, whose direction, "Talk about Queen Elizabeth, you ass!" was audible to everyone in the coach-house. Fortunately for Kitty Gascogne, her powers of soliloquy were not long

tested. The door burst open, Garry hurried back to the ottoman, and had only time to seize Amy Robsart's hand and kneel at her feet when a tall figure took the stage with a mincing amble. James Canavan had from time immemorial been the leading lady in Garry's theatricals, and his appearance as Queen Elizabeth was such as to satisfy his oldest admirers. He wore a skirt which was instantly recognised by the household as belonging to Mrs. Brady, the cook, a crown made of gold paper inadequately restrained his iron-grey locks, a ham-frill ruff concealed his whiskers, and the deputy-lieutenant's red coat, with the old-fashioned long tails and silver epaulettes, completed his equipment.

His entrance brought down the house; even Lady Dysart forgot her anxiety to find out where Mr. Hawkins' voice had come from, and collapsed into a state afterwards described by the under-housemaid as "her ladyship in splits."

"Oh fie, fie, fie!" said Queen Elizabeth in a piping falsetto, paying no heed to the demonstrations in her favour; "Amy Robsart and Leicester! Oh dear, dear, this will never do!"

Leicester still stooped over Amy's hand, but even the occupants of the brougham heard the whisper in which he said, "You're not half angry enough! Go on again!"

Thus charged, Queen Elizabeth swept to the back of the stage, and, turning there, advanced again upon the lovers, stamping her feet and gesticulating with clenched fists. "What! Amy Robsart and Leicester! Shocking! disgraceful!" she vociferated; then with a final burst, "D—n it! I can't stand this!"

A roar of delight broke from the house; the delight always provoked in rural audiences by the expletive that age has been powerless to wither or custom to stale. Hawkins' amusement found vent in such a stentorian "Bravo!" that Lady Dysart turned quickly at the sound, and saw his head and Francie's at the window of the brougham. Even in the indifferent light of the lamps, Francie discerned disapproval in her look. She sat back precipitately.

"Oh, Mr. Hawkins!" she exclaimed, rashly admitting that she felt the position to be equivocal; "I think I'd better get out."

Now, if ever, was the time for Mr. Hawkins to take

that pull of which he had spoken so stoutly to Captain Cursiter, but in addition to other extenuating circumstances, it must be admitted that Sir Benjamin's burgundy had to some slight extent made summer in his veins, and caused him to forget most things except the fact that the prettiest girl he had ever seen was sitting beside him.

"No, you sha'n't," he replied, leaning back out of the light, and taking her hand as if to prevent her from moving; "you won't go, will you?"

He suddenly felt that he was very much in love, and threw such entreaty into the foregoing unremarkable words that Francie's heart beat foolishly, and her efforts to take away her hand were very feeble.

"You don't want to go away, do you? You like sitting here with me?"

The powers of repartee that Tommy Whitty had often found so baffling failed Francie unaccountably on this occasion. She murmured something that Hawkins chose to take for assent, and in a moment he had passed his arm round her waist, and possessed himself of the other hand.

"Now, you see, you can't get away," he whispered,

taking a wary look out of the window of the brougham. All the attention of the audience was engrossed upon the stage, where, at this moment, Queen Elizabeth having chased Amy and Leicester round the ottoman, was now doing her best not to catch them as they together scaled the clothes-horse. The brougham was behind everyone; no one was even thinking of them, and Hawkins leaned towards Francie till his lips almost touched her cheek. She drew back from him, but the kiss came and went in a moment, and was followed by more that she did not try to escape. The loud clapping of the audience on the exit of Queen Elizabeth brought Hawkins back to his senses; he heard the quick drawing of Francie's breath and felt her tremble as he pressed her to him, and he realised that so far from "taking a pull," he had let himself get out of hand without a struggle. For this rash, enchanting evening at all events, it was too late to try to recover lost ground. What could he do now but hold her hand more tightly than before, and ask her unrepentingly whether she forgave him. The reply met with an unlooked-for interruption.

The drama on the stage had proceeded to its climax. Amy Robsart was understood to have suffered a violent death in the harness-room, and her entombment in the ottoman had followed as a matter of course. The process had been difficult; in fact, but for surreptitious aid from the corpse, the burial could scarcely have been accomplished; but the lid was at length closed, and the bereaved earl flung himself on his knees by the grave in an abandonment of grief. Suddenly from the harness-room came sounds of discordant triumph, and Queen Elizabeth bounded upon the stage, singing a war-song, of which the refrain,

> "With me long sword, saddle, bridle,
> Whack, fol de rol!"

was alone intelligible. Amy Robsart's white plume was stuck in the queen's crown in token of victory, and its feathers rose on end as, with a flourish of the drawing-room poker which she carried as her sceptre, she leaped upon the grave, and continued her dance and song there. Clouds of dust and feathers rose from the cushions, and encouraged by the shouts of

her audience, the queen's dance waxed more furious. There was a stagger, a crash, and a shrill scream rose from the corpse, as the lid gave way, and Queen Elizabeth stood knee-deep in Amy Robsart's tomb. An answering scream came from Mrs. Gascogne and Lady Dysart, both of whom rushed from their places on to the stage, and dragged forth the unhappy Kitty, smothered in dust, redder in the face than ever, but unhurt, and still giggling.

Francie and Hawkins emerged from the brougham, and mingled quietly with the crowd in the general break-up that followed. The point at issue between them had not been settled, but arrangements had been made for the following day that ensured a renewal of the argument.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE crash of the prayer gong was the first thing that Francie heard next morning. She had not gone to sleep easily the night before. It had been so much pleasanter to lie awake, that she had done so till she had got past the stage when the process of going to sleep is voluntary, and she had nearly exhausted the pleasant aspect of things and got to their wrong side when the dawn stood at her window, a pallid reminder of the day that was before her, and she dropped into prosaic slumber. She came downstairs in a state of some anxiety as to whether the chill that she had perceived last night in Lady Dysart's demeanour would be still apparent. Breakfast was nearly over when she got into the room, and when she said good morning to Lady Dysart, she felt, though she was not eminently perceptive of the shades in a well-bred manner, that she had not been restored to favour.

She sat down at the table, with the feeling that was very familiar to her of being in disgrace, combatting with the excitement and hurry of her nerves in a way that made her feel almost hysterical; and the fear that the strong revealing light of the long windows opposite to which she was sitting would show the dew of tears in her eyes, made her bend her head over her plate and scarcely raise it to respond to Pamela's good-natured efforts to put her at her ease. Miss Hope-Drummond presently looked up from her letters and took a quiet stare at the discomposed face opposite to her. She had no particular dislike for Francie beyond the ordinary rooted distrust which she felt as a matter of course for those whom she regarded as fellow-competitors, but on general principles she was pleased that discomfiture had come to Miss Fitzpatrick. It occurred to her that a deepening of the discomfiture would suit well with Lady Dysart's present mood, and might also be to her own personal advantage.

"I hope your dress did not suffer last night, Miss Fitzpatrick? Mine was ruined, but that was because

Mr. Dysart *would* make me climb on to the box for the last scene."

"No, thank you, Miss Hope-Drummond—at least, it only got a little sign of dust."

"Really? How nice! How lucky you were, weren't you?"

"She may have been lucky about her dress," interrupted Garry, "but I'm blowed if she could have seen much of the acting! Why on earth did you let Hawkins jam you into that old brougham, Miss Fitzpatrick?"

"Garry," said Lady Dysart with unusual asperity, "how often am I to tell you not to speak of grown-up gentlemen as if they were little boys like yourself? Run off to your lessons. If you have finished, Miss Fitzpatrick," she continued, her voice chilling again, "I think we will go into the drawing-room."

It is scarcely to be wondered at that Francie found the atmosphere of the drawing-room rather oppressive. She was exceedingly afraid of her hostess; her sense of her misdoings was, like a dog's, entirely shaped upon other people's opinions, and depended in no way upon her own conscience; and she had

now awakened to a belief that she had transgressed very badly indeed. "And if she" ("she" was Lady Dysart, and for the moment Francie's standard of morality) "was so angry about me sitting in the brougham with him," she thought to herself, as, having escaped from the house, she wandered alone under the oaks of the shady back avenue, "what would she think if she knew the whole story?"

In Francie's society "the whole story" would have been listened to with extreme leniency, if not admiration; in fact, some episodes of a similar kind had before now been confided by our young lady to Miss Fanny Hemphill, and had even given her a certain standing in the eyes of that arbiter of manners and morals. But on this, as on a previous occasion, she did not feel disposed to take Miss Hemphill into her confidence. For one thing, she was less distinct in her recollection of what had happened than was usual. It had seemed to her that she had lost her wonted clear and mocking remembrance of events from the moment when he had taken her hand, and what followed was blurred in her memory as a landscape is blurred by the quiver of

heat in the air. For another, she felt it all to be so improbable, so uncertain, that she could not quite believe in it herself. Hawkins was so radically different from any other man she had ever known ; so much more splendid in all ways, the very texture of his clothes, the scent on his handkerchief, breathed to her his high estate. That she should have any part in this greatness was still a little beyond belief, and as she walked softly in the deep grass under the trees, she kept saying to herself that he could not really care for her, that it was too good to be true.

It was almost pathetic that this girl, with her wild-rose freshness and vivid spring-like youth, should be humble enough to think that she was not worthy of Mr. Hawkins, and sophisticated enough to take his love-making as a matter of common occurrence, that in no way involved anything more serious. Whatever he might think about it, however, she was certain that he would come here to-day, and being wholly without the power of self-analysis, she passed easily from such speculations to the simpler mental exercise of counting how many hours would have to crawl by before

she could see him again. She had left the avenue, and she strolled aimlessly across a wide marshy place between the woods and the lake, that had once been covered by the water, but was now so far reclaimed that sedgy grass and bog-myrtle grew all over it, and creamy meadow-sweet and magenta loosestrife glorified the swampy patches and the edges of the drains. The pale azure of the lake lay on her right hand, with, in the distance, two or three white sails just tilted enough by the breeze to make them look like acute accents, gaily emphasising the purpose of the lake and giving it its final expression. In front of her spread a long, low wood, temptingly cool and green, with a gate pillared by tall fir-trees, from which, as she lifted the latch, a bevy of wood-pigeons dashed out, startling her with the sudden frantic clapping of their wings. It was a curious wood—very old, judging by its scattered knots of hoary, weather-twisted pine-trees; very young, judging by the growth of ash saplings and slender larches that made dense every inch of space except where rides had been cut through them for the woodcock shooting. Francie walked along the quiet path, thinking little of the

beauty that surrounded her, but unconsciously absorbing its rich harmonious stillness. The little grey rabbits did not hear her coming, and hopped languidly across the path, "for all the world like toys from Robinson's," thought Francie; the honeysuckle hung in delicious tangle from tree to tree; the wood-pigeons crooned shrilly in the fir-trees, and every now and then a bumble-bee started from a clover blossom in the grass with a deep resentful note, as when one plucks the lowest string of a violoncello. She had noticed a triple wheel-track over the moss and primrose leaves of the path, and vaguely wondered what had brought it there; but at a turn where the path took a long bend to the lake she was no longer left in doubt. Drawn up under a solemn pine-tree near the water's edge was Sir Benjamin's bath-chair, and in it the dreaded Sir Benjamin himself, vociferating at the top of his cracked old voice, and shaking his oaken staff at some person or persons not apparent.

Francie's first instinct was flight, but before she had time to turn, her host had seen her, and changing his tone of fury to one of hideous affability, he called

to her to come and speak to him. Francie was too uncertain as to the exact extent of his intellect to risk disobedience, and she advanced tremblingly.

"Come here, miss," said Sir Benjamin, goggling at her through his gold spectacles. "You're the pretty little visitor, and I promised I'd take you out driving in my carriage and pair. Come here and shake hands with me, miss. Where's your manners?"

This invitation was emphasised by a thump of his stick on the floor of the chair, and Francie, with an almost prayerful glance round for James Canavan, was reluctantly preparing to comply with it, when she heard Garry's voice calling her.

"Miss Fitzpatrick! Hi! Come here!"

Miss Fitzpatrick took one look at the tremulous, irritable old claw outstretched for her acceptance, and plunged incontinently down a ride in the direction of the voice. In front of her stood a sombre ring of immense pine trees, and in their shadow stood Garry and James Canavan, apparently in committee upon some small object that lay on the thick mat of moss and pine-needles.

"I heard the governor talking to you," said Garry

with a grin of intelligence, "and I thought you'd sooner come and look at the rat that's just come out of this hole. Stinking Jemima's been in there for the last half hour after rabbits. She's my ferret, you know, a regular ripper," he went on in excited narration, "and I expect she's got the muzzle off and is having a high old time. She's just bolted this brute."

The brute in question was a young rat that lay panting on its side, unable to move, with blood streaming from its face.

"Oh! the creature!" exclaimed Francie with compassionate disgust; "what'll you do with it?"

"I'll take it home and try and tame it," replied Garry; "it's quite young enough. Isn't it, Canavan?"

James Canavan, funereal in his black coat and rusty tall hat, was regarding the rat meditatively, and at the question he picked up Garry's stick and balanced it in his hand.

> "Voracious animals that we hate,
> Cats, rats, and bats deserve their fate,"

he said pompously, and immediately brought the stick down on the rat's head with a determination

that effectually disposed of all plans for its future, educational or otherwise.

Garry and Francie cried out together, but James Canavan turned his back unregardingly upon them and his victim, and stalked back to Sir Benjamin, whose imprecations, since Francie's escape, had been pleasantly audible.

"The old beast!" said Garry, looking resentfully after his late ally; "you never know what he'll do next. I believe if mother hadn't been there last night, he'd have gone on jumping on Kitty Gascogne till he killed her. By the bye, Miss Fitzpatrick, Hawkins passed up the lake just now, and he shouted out to me to say that he'd be at the turf-boat pier at four o'clock, and he hoped none of you were going out."

Then he had not forgotten her; he was going to keep his word, thought Francie, with a leap of the heart, but further thoughts were cut short by the sudden appearance of Pamela, Christopher, and Miss Hope-Drummond at the end of the ride. The treacherous slaughter of the rat was immediately recounted to Pamela at full length by

Garry, and Miss Fitzpatrick addressed herself to Christopher.

"How sweet your woods are, Mr. Dysart," she began, feeling that some speech of the kind was suitable to the occasion. "I declare, I'd never be tired walking in them!"

Christopher was standing a little behind the others, looking cool and lank in his flannels, and feeling a good deal less interested in things in general than he appeared. He had an agreeably craven habit of simulating enjoyment in the society of whoever fate threw him in contact with, not so much from a wish to please as from a politeness that had in it an unworthy fear of exciting displeasure; and so ably had he played the part expected of him that Miss Hope-Drummond had felt, as she strolled with him and his sister through the sunshiny wood, that he really was far more interested in her than she had given him credit for, and that if that goose Pamela were not so officious in always pursuing them about everywhere, they would have got on better still. She did not trouble her brothers in this way, and the idea that Mr. Dysart would not have come at all without

his sister did not occur to her. She was, therefore, by no means pleased when she heard him suggest to Miss Fitzpatrick that she should come and see the view from the point, and saw them walk away in that direction without any reference to the rest of the party.

Christopher himself could hardly have explained why he did it. It is possible that he felt Francie's ingenuous, unaffected vulgarity to be refreshing after the conversation in which Miss Hope-Drummond's own especial tastes and opinions had shed their philosophy upon a *rechauffé* of the society papers, and recollections of Ascot and Hurlingham. Perhaps also, after his discovery that Francie had a soul to be saved, he resented the absolute possession that Hawkins had taken of her the night before. Hawkins was a good little chap, but not the sort of person to develop a nascent intellectuality, thought this sage of seven-and-twenty.

"Why did you come out here by yourself?" he said to her, some little time after they had left the others.

"And why shouldn't I?" answered Francie, with

the pertness that seldom failed her, even when, as on this morning, she felt a little uninterested in every subject except one.

"Because it gave us the trouble of coming out to look for you."

"To see I didn't get into mischief, I suppose!"

"That hadn't occurred to me. Do you always get into mischief when you go out by yourself?"

"I would if I thought you were coming out to stop me!"

"But why should I want to stop you?" asked Christopher, aware that this class of conversation was of a very undeveloping character, but feeling unable to better it.

"Oh, I don't know; I think everyone's always wanting to stop me," replied Francie with a cheerful laugh; "I declare I think it's impossible for me to do anything right."

"Well, you don't seem to mind it very much," said Christopher, the thought of how like she was to a typical "June" in a Christmas Number striking him for the second time; "but perhaps that's because you're used to it."

"Oh, then, I can tell you I *am* used to it, but, indeed, I don't like it any better for that."

There was a pause after this. They scrambled over the sharp loose rocks, and between the stunted fir-trees of the lake shore, until they gained a comparatively level tongue of sandy gravel, on which the sinuous line of dead rushes showed how high the fretful waves had thrust themselves in winter. A glistening bay intervened between this point and the promontory of Bruff, a bay dotted with the humped backs of the rocks in the summer shallows, and striped with dark-green beds of rushes, among which the bald coots dodged in and out with shrill metallic chirpings. Outside Bruff Point the lake spread broad and mild, turned to a translucent lavender grey by an idly-drifting cloud; the slow curve of the shore was followed by the woods, till the hay fields of Lismoyle showed faintly beyond them, and, further on, the rival towers of church and chapel gave a finish to the landscape that not even conventionality could deprive of charm. Christopher knew every detail of it by heart. He had often solaced himself with it when, as now, he had led forth visitors to see the view, and had discerned their

boredom with a keenness that was the next thing to sympathy; he had lain there on quiet Autumn evenings, and tried to put into fitting words the rapture and the despair of the sunset, and had gone home wondering if his emotions were not mere self-conscious platitudes, rather more futile and contemptible than the unambitious adjectives, or even the honest want of interest, of the average sight-seer. He waited rather curiously to see whether Miss Fitzpatrick's problematic soul would here utter itself. From his position a little behind her he could observe her without seeming to do so; she was looking down the lake with a more serious expression than he had yet seen on her face, and when she turned suddenly towards him, there was a wistfulness in her eyes that startled him.

"Mr. Dysart," she began, rather more shyly than usual; "d'ye know whose is that boat with the little sail, going away down the lake now?"

Christopher's mood received an unpleasant jar.

"That's Mr. Hawkins' punt," he replied shortly.

"Yes, I thought it was," said Francie, too much preoccupied to notice the flatness of her companion's tone.

There was another pause, and then she spoke again.

"Mr. Dysart, d'ye think—would you mind telling me, was Lady Dysart mad with me last night?" She blushed as she looked at him, and Christopher was much provoked to feel that he also became red.

"Last night?" he echoed in a tone of as lively perplexity as he could manage; "what do you mean? why should my mother be angry with you?" In his heart he knew well that Lady Dysart had been, as Francie expressed it, "mad."

"I know she was angry," pursued Francie. "I saw the look she gave me when I was getting out of the brougham, and then this morning she was angry too. I didn't think it was any harm to sit in the brougham."

"No more it is. I've often seen her do it herself."

"Ah! Mr. Dysart, I didn't think you'd make fun of me," she said with an accent on the "you" that was flattering, but did not altogether please Christopher. "You know," she went on, "I've never stayed in a house like this before. I mean—you're all so different—"

"I think you must explain that remarkable statement," said Christopher, becoming Jonsonian as was

his wont when he found himself in a difficulty. "It seems to me we're even depressingly like ordinary human beings."

"You're different to me," said Francie in a low voice, "and you know it well."

The tears came to her eyes, and Christopher, who could not know that this generality covered an aching thought of Hawkins, was smitten with horrified self-questioning as to whether anything he had said or done could have wounded this girl, who was so much more observant and sensitive than he could have believed.

"I can't let you say things like that," he said clumsily. "If we are different from you it is so much the worse for us."

"You're trying to pay me a compliment now to get out of it," said Francie, recovering herself; "isn't that just like a man!"

She felt, however, that she had given him pain, and the knowledge seemed to bring him more within her comprehension.

CHAPTER XXII.

THERE are few things that so stimulate life, both social and vegetable, in a country neighbourhood as the rivalry that exists, sometimes unconfessed, sometimes bursting into an open flame, among the garden owners of the district. The Bruff garden was a little exalted and removed from such competition, but the superiority had its depressing aspect for Lady Dysart in that it was counted no credit to her to excel her neighbours, although those neighbours took to themselves the highest credit when they succeeded in excelling her. Of all these Mr. Lambert was the one she most feared and respected. He knew as well, if not better than she, the joints in the harness of Doolan the gardener, the weak battalions in his army of bedding-out plants, the failures in the ranks of his roses. Doolan himself, the despotic and self-confident, felt an inward qualm when he saw Mr.

Lambert strolling slowly through the garden with her ladyship, as he was doing this very afternoon, his observant eye taking in everything that Doolan would have preferred that it should not take in, while he paid a fitting attention to Lady Dysart's conversation.

"I cannot understand why these Victor Verdiers have not better hearts," she was saying, with the dejection of a clergyman disappointed in his flock "Mrs. Waller told me they were very greedy feeders, and so I gave them the cleanings of the scullery drain, but they don't seem to care for it. Doolan, of course, said Mrs. Waller was wrong, but I should like to know what you thought about it."

Mr. Lambert delivered a diplomatic opinion, which sufficiently coincided with Lady Dysart's views, and yet kept her from feeling that she had been entirely in the right. He prided himself as much on his knowledge of women as of roses, and there were ultra feminine qualities in Lady Dysart, which made her act up to his calculations on almost every point. Pamela did not lend herself equally well to his theories; "she hasn't half the go of her mother; she'd as soon

talk to an old woman as to the smartest chap in Ireland," was how he expressed the fine impalpable barrier that he always felt between himself and Miss Dysart. She was now exactly fulfilling this opinion by devoting herself to the entertainment of his wife, while the others were amusing themselves down at the launch; and being one of those few who can go through unpleasant social duties with "all grace, and not with half disdain hid under grace," not even Lambert could guess that she desired anything more agreeable.

"Isn't it disastrous that young Hynes is determined upon going to America?" remarked Lady Dysart presently, as they left the garden; "just when he had learned Doolan's ways, and Doolan *is* so hard to please."

"America is the curse of this country," responded Mr. Lambert gloomily; "the people are never easy till they get there and make a bit of money, and then they come swaggering back saying Ireland's not fit to live in, and end by setting up a public-house and drinking themselves to death. They're sharp enough to know the only way of making money in

Ireland is by selling drink." Lambert spoke with the conviction of one who is sure, not only of his facts, but of his hearer's sympathy. Then seeing his way to a discussion of the matter that had brought him to Bruff, he went on, "I assure you, Lady Dysart, the amount of money that's spent in drink in Lismoyle would frighten you. It's easy to know where the rent goes, and those that aren't drunken are thriftless, and there isn't one of them has the common honesty to give up their land when they've ruined it and themselves. Now, there's that nice farm, Gurthnamuckla, down by the lake-side, all going to moss from being grazed year after year, and the house falling to pieces for the want of looking after; and as for paying her rent—" he broke off with a contemptuous laugh.

"Oh, but what can you expect from that wretched old Julia Duffy?" said Lady Dysart good-naturedly; "she's too poor to keep the place in order."

"I can expect one thing of her," said Lambert, with possibly a little more indignation than he felt; "that she'd pay up some of her arrears, or if she can't, that she'd go out of the farm. I could get a tenant for it

to-morrow that would give me a good fine for it and put the house to rights into the bargain."

"Of course, that would be an excellent thing, and I can quite see that she ought to go," replied Lady Dysart, falling away from her first position; "but what would happen to the poor old creature if she left Gurthnamuckla?"

"That's just what your son says," replied Lambert with an almost irrepressible impatience; "he thinks she oughtn't to be disturbed because of some promise that she says Sir Benjamin made her, though there isn't a square inch of paper to prove it. But I think there can be no doubt that she'd be better and healthier out of that house; she keeps it like a pig-stye. Of course, as you say, the trouble is to find some place to put her."

Lady Dysart turned upon him a face shining with the light of inspiration.

"The back-lodge!" she said, with Delphic finality. "Let her go into the back-lodge when Hynes goes out of it!"

Mr. Lambert received this suggestion with as much admiration as if he had not thought of it before.

"By Jove! Lady Dysart, I always say that you have a better head on your shoulders than any one of us! That's a regular happy thought."

Any new scheme, no matter how revolutionary, was sure to be viewed with interest, if not with favour, by Lady Dysart, and if she happened to be its inventor, it was endowed with virtues that only flourished more strongly in the face of opposition. In a few minutes she had established Miss Duffy in the back-lodge, with, for occupation, the care of the incubator recently imported to Bruff, and hitherto a failure except as a cooking-stove; and for support, the milk of a goat that should be chained to a laurel at the back of the lodge, and fed by hand. While these details were still being expanded, there broke upon the air a series of shrill, discordant whistles, coming from the direction of the lake.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Lady Dysart. "What can that be? Something must be happening to the steam-launch; it sounds as if it were in danger!"

"It's more likely to be Hawkins playing the fool," replied Lambert ill-temperedly. "I saw him on the

launch with Miss Fitzpatrick just after we left the pier."

Lady Dysart said nothing, but her expression changed with such dramatic swiftness from vivid alarm to disapproval, that her mental attitude was as evident as if she had spoken.

"Hawkins is very popular in Lismoyle," observed Lambert, tepidly.

"That I can very well understand," said Lady Dysart, opening her parasol with an abruptness that showed annoyance, "since he takes so much trouble to make himself agreeable to the Lismoyle young ladies."

Another outburst of jerky, amateur whistles from the steam launch gave emphasis to the remark.

"Oh, the trouble's a pleasure," said Lambert acidly. "I hope the pleasure won't be a trouble to the young ladies one of these days."

"Why, what do you mean?" cried Lady Dysart, much interested.

"Oh, nothing," said Lambert, with a laugh, "except that's he's been known to love and ride away before now."

He had no particular object in lowering Hawkins in Lady Dysart's eyes, beyond the fact that it was an outlet for his indignation at Francie's behaviour in leaving him, her oldest friend, to go and make a common laughing-stock of herself with that young puppy, which was the form in which the position shaped itself in his angry mind. He almost decided to tell Lady Dysart the episode of the Limerick tobacconist's daughter, when they saw Miss Hope-Drummond and Captain Cursiter coming up the shrubbery path towards them, and he was obliged to defer it to a better occasion.

"What was all that whistling about, Captain Cursiter?" asked Lady Dysart, with a certain vicarious severity.

Captain Cursiter seemed indisposed for discussion. "Mr. Hawkins was trying the whistle, I think," he replied with equal severity.

"Oh, yes, Lady Dysart!" broke in Miss Hope-Drummond, apparently much amused; "Mr. Hawkins has nearly deafened us with that ridiculous whistle; they *would* go off down the lake, and when we called after them to ask where they were going, and told

them they would be late for tea, they did nothing but whistle back at us in that absurd way."

"Why? What? Who have gone? Whom do you mean by they?" Lady Dysart's handsome eyes shone like stars as they roved in wide consternation from one speaker to another.

"Miss Fitzpatrick and Mr. Hawkins!" responded Miss Hope-Drummond with childlike gaiety; "we were all talking on the pier, and we suddenly heard them calling out 'good-bye!' And Mr. Hawkins said he couldn't stop the boat, and off they went down the lake! I don't know when we shall see them again."

Lady Dysart's feelings found vent in a long-drawn groan. "Not able to stop the boat! Oh, Captain Cursiter, is there any danger? Shall I send a boat after them? Oh, how I wish this house was in the Desert of Sahara, or that that intolerable lake was at the bottom of the sea!"

This was not the first time that Captain Cursiter had been called upon to calm Lady Dysart's anxieties in connection with the lake, and he now unwillingly felt himself bound to assure her that Hawkins

thoroughly understood the management of the *Serpolette*, that he would certainly be back in a few minutes, and that in any case, the lake was as calm as the conventional mill-pond. Inwardly he was cursing himself for having yielded to Hawkins in putting into Bruff; he was furious with Francie for the vulgar liberties taken by her with the steam-whistle, an instrument employed by all true steam-launchers in the most abstemious way; and lastly, he was indignant with Hawkins for taking his boat without his permission, and leaving him here, as isolated from all means of escape, and as unprotected, as if his clothes had been stolen while he was bathing.

The party proceeded moodily into the house, and, as moodily, proceeded to partake of tea. It was just about the time that Mrs. Lambert was asking that nice, kind Miss Dysart for another cup of *very* weak tea—"Hog-wash, indeed, as Mr. Lambert calls it"—that the launch was sighted by her proprietor crossing the open space of water beyond Bruff Point, and heading for Lismoyle. Almost immediately afterwards Mrs. Lambert received the look from her husband which intimated that the time had arrived for

her to take her departure, and some instinct told her that it would be advisable to relinquish the prospect of the second cup and to go at once.

If Mr. Lambert's motive in hurrying back to Lismoyle was the hope of finding the steam-launch there, his sending along our friend the black mare, till her sleek sides were in a lather of foam, was unavailing. As he drove on to the quay the *Serpolette* was already steaming back to Bruff round the first of the miniature headlands that jagged the shore, and the good turkey-hen's twitterings on the situation received even less attention than usual, as her lord pulled the mare's head round and drove home to Rosemount.

The afternoon dragged wearily on at Bruff; Lady Dysart's mood alternating between anger and fright as dinner-time came nearer and nearer and there was still no sign of the launch.

"What will Charlotte Mullen say to me?" she wailed, as she went for the twentieth time to the window and saw no sign of the runaways upon the lake vista that was visible from it. She found small consolation in the other two occupants of the drawing-room. Christopher, reading the newspaper with every

appearance of absorbed interest, treated the alternative theories of drowning or elopement with optimistic indifference; and Miss Hope-Drummond, while disclaiming any idea of either danger, dwelt on the social aspect of the affair so ably as almost to reduce her hostess to despair. Cursiter was down at the pier, seriously debating with himself as to the advisability of rowing the long four miles back to Lismoyle, and giving his opinion to Mr. Hawkins in language that would, he hoped, surprise even that bland and self-satisfied young gentleman. There Pamela found him standing, as desolate as Sir Bedivere when the Three Queens had carried away King Arthur in their barge, and from thence she led him, acquiescing with sombre politeness in the prospect of dining out for the second time in one week, and wondering whether Providence would again condemn him to sit next Miss Hope-Drummond, and prattle to her about the Lincolnshire Cursiters. He felt as if talking to Pamela would make the situation more endurable. She knew how to let a man alone, and when she did talk she had something to say, and did not scream twaddle at you, like a peacock. These unamiable reflections will serve to

show the irritation of Captain Cursiter's mind, and as he stalked into dinner with Lady Dysart, and found that for her sake he had better make the best of his subaltern's iniquity, he was a man much to be pitied.

CHAPTER XXIII.

At about this very time it so happened that Mr. Hawkins was also beginning to be sorry for himself. The run to Lismoyle had been capital fun, and though the steering and the management of the machinery took up more of his attention than he could have wished, he had found Francie's society more delightful than ever. The posting of a letter, which he had fortunately found in his pocket, had been the pretext for the expedition, and both he and Francie confidently believed that they would get back to Bruff at about six o'clock. It is true that Mr. Hawkins received rather a shock when, on arriving at Lismoyle, he found that it was already six o'clock, but he kept this to himself, and lost no time in starting again for Bruff.

The excitement and hurry of the escapade had conspired, with the practical business of steering and

attending to the various brass taps, to throw sentiment for a space into the background, and that question as to whether forgiveness should or should not be extended to him, hung enchantingly on the horizon, as delightful and as seductive as the blue islands that floated far away in the yellow haze of the lowered sun. There was not a breath of wind, and the launch slit her way through tranquil, oily spaces of sky that lay reflected deep in the water, and shaved the long rocky points so close that they could see the stones at the bottom looking like enormous cairngorms in the golden shallows.

"That was a near thing," remarked Mr. Hawkins complacently, as a slight grating sound told that they had grazed one of these smooth-backed monsters. "Good business old Snipey wasn't on board!"

"Well, I'll tell old Snipey on you the very minute I get back!"

"Oh, you little horror!" said Mr. Hawkins.

Both laughed at this brilliant retort, and Hawkins looked down at her, where she sat near him, with an expression of fondness that he did not take the least pains to conceal.

"Hang it! you know," he said presently, "I'm sick of holding this blooming wheel dead amidships; I'll just make it fast, and let her rip for a bit by herself." He suited the action to the word, and came and sat down beside her.

"Now you're going to drown me again, I suppose, the way Mr. Lambert did," Francie said. She felt a sudden trembling that was in no way caused by the danger of which she had spoken; she knew quite well why he had left the wheel, and her heart stood still with the expectation of that explanation that she knew was to come.

"So you think I want to drown you, do you?" said Hawkins, getting very close to her, and trying to look under the wide brim of her hat. "Turn round and look me in the face and say you're ashamed of yourself for thinking of such a thing."

"Go on to your steering," responded Francie, still looking down and wondering if he saw how her hands were trembling.

"But I'm not wanted to steer, and you do want me here, don't you?" replied Hawkins, his face flushing through the sunburn as he leaned nearer to her,

"and you know you never told me last night if you were angry with me or not."

"Well, I was."

"Ah, not very—" A rather hot and nervous hand, burned to an unromantic scarlet, turned her face upwards against her will. "Not very?" he said again, looking into her eyes, in which love lay helpless like a prisoner.

"Don't," said Francie, yielding the position, powerless, indeed, to do otherwise.

Her delicate defeated face was drawn to his; her young soul rushed with it, and with passionate, innocent sincerity, thought it had found heaven itself. Hawkins could not tell how long it was before he heard again, as if in a dream, the click-clicking of the machinery, and wondered, in the dazed way of a person who is "coming to" after an anæsthetic, how the boat was getting on.

"I must go back to the wheel, darling," he whispered in the small ear that lay so close to his lips; "I'm afraid we're a little bit off the course."

As he spoke, his conscience reminded him that he himself had got a good deal off his course, but he put

the thought aside. The launch was duly making for the headland that separated them from Bruff, but Hawkins had not reflected that in rounding the last point he had gone rather nearer to it than was usual, and that he was consequently inside the proper course. This, however, was an easy matter to rectify, and he turned the *Serpolette's* head out towards the ordinary channel. A band of rushes lay between him and it, and he steered wide of them to avoid their parent shallow. Suddenly there was a dull shock, a quiver ran through the launch, and Hawkins found himself sitting abruptly on the india-rubber matting at Francie's feet. The launch had run at full speed upon the soft, muddy shallow that extended unconscionably far beyond the bed of rushes, and her sharp nose was now digging itself deeper and deeper into the mud. Hawkins lost no time in reversing the engine, but by the time they had gone full speed astern for five minutes, and had succeeded only in lashing the water into a thick, pea-soupy foam all round them, he began to feel exceedingly anxious as to their prospects of getting off again.

"Well, we've been and gone and done it this time,"

he said, with a laugh that had considerably more discomfiture than mirth in it; "I expect we've got to stay here till we're taken off."

Francie looked all round the lake; not a boat was in sight, not even a cottage on the shore from which they might hope for help. She was standing up, pale, now that the tide of excitement had ebbed a little, and shaken by a giddy remembrance of that moment when the yacht heeled over and flung her into blackness.

"I told you you were going to drown me," she said, shivering and laughing together; and "oh—! what in the name of goodness will I say to Lady Dysart?"

"Oh, we'll tell her it was an accident, and she won't say a word," said Hawkins with more confidence than he felt. "If the worst comes to the worst I'll swim ashore and get a boat."

"Oh don't, don't! you mustn't do that!" she cried, catching at his arm as if she already saw him jumping overboard; "I'd be frightened—I could'nt bear to see you—don't go away from me!"

Her voice failed pathetically, and, bared of all their wiles, her eyes besought him through the tears of a

woman's terror and tenderness. Hawkins looked at her with a kind of ecstacy.

"Do you care so much as all that," he said, "you silly little thing!"

After this there was nothing to be done except sit down again, and with her head on his shoulder, allow that fatal anæsthetic to rob him of all considerations beyond Francie's kisses.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DINNER at Bruff was over. It had been delayed as long as possible in the belief that each moment would bring back the culprits, and it had dragged painfully through its eight courses, in spite of Lady Dysart's efforts to hasten Gorman and his satellite in their inexorable orbit. Everyone except Garry and Miss Hope-Drummond had been possessed by an anxiety which Lady Dysart alone had courage to express. She indeed, being a person who habitually said what other people were half afraid to think, had dilated on all possible calamities till Cursiter, whose temper was momently becoming worse, many times wished himself on the lake, rowing dinnerless and vengeful on the track of the fugitives.

The whole party was now out of doors, and on its way down to the landing-place, in the dark twilight; Lady Dysart coming last of all, and driving before

her the much incensed Gorman, whom she had armed with the gong, in the idea that its warlike roar would be at once a guide and a menace to the wanderers. So far it had only had the effect of drawing together in horrified questioning all the cattle in the lower part of the park, and causing them to rush, bellowing, along by the railings that separated them from the siren who cried to them with a voice so commanding and so mysterious. Gorman was fully alive to the indignity of his position, and to the fact that Master Garry, his ancient enemy, was mocking at his humiliation; but any attempt to moderate his attack upon the gong was detected by his mistress.

"Go on, Gorman! Beat it louder! The more they bellow the better, it will guide them into the landing-place."

Christopher's affected misapprehension of his mother's pronouns created a diversion for some time, as it was perhaps intended to do. He had set himself to treat the whole affair with unsympathetic levity, but, in spite of himself, an insistent thorn of anxiety made it difficult for him to make little of his mother's vigorous panic. It was absurd, but her

lamentations about the dangers of the lake and of steam-launches found a hollow echo in his heart. He remembered, with a shudder that he had not felt at the time, the white face rising and dipping in the trough of the grey lake waves ; and though his sense of humour, and of the supreme inadequacy and staleness of swearing, usually deprived him of that safety valve, he was conscious that in the background of his mind the traditional adjective was monotonously coupling itself with the name of Mr. Hawkins. He was walking behind the others down the path to the pier. Here and there great trees that looked tired from their weight of foliage stood patiently spreading their arms to the dew, and in the intervals between Gorman's fantasias on the gong, he could hear how the diffident airs from the lake whispered confidentially to the sleeping leaves. There was no moon ; the sky was thickened with a light cloudiness, and in the mystical twilight the pale broad blossoms of an elder-bush looked like constellated stars in a nearer and darker firmament. Christopher walked on, that cold memory of danger and disquiet jarring the fragrance and peace of the rich summer night.

The searchers ranged themselves on the pier; the gong was stilled, and except for the occasional stamping of a hoof, or low booming complaint from the cattle, there was perfect silence. All were listening for some sound from the lake before Christopher and Cursiter carried out their intention of starting in a boat to look for the launch. Suddenly in the misty darkness into which all were staring, a vivid spark of light sprang out. It burned for a few seconds only, a sharp distinct star, and then disappeared.

"There they are!" cried Lady Dysart. "The gong, Gorman! The gong!"

Gorman sounded with a will, and the harsh, brazen blare spread and rolled over the lake, but there was no response.

"They *must* hear that," said Cursiter to Christopher; "why the devil don't he whistle?"

"How should I know?" answered Christopher, with a crossness which was in some irrational way the outcome of extreme relief; "I suppose he fooled with it till it broke."

"Perhaps they are not there after all," suggested Miss Hope-Drummond cheerfully.

"How can you say such a thing, Evelyn!" exclaimed Lady Dysart indignantly; "I know it was they, and the light was a signal of distress!"

"More likely to have been Hawkins lighting a cigarette," said Christopher; "if everyone would stop talking at the same time we might be able to hear something."

A question ran like a ripple through Pamela's mind, "What makes Christopher cross to-night?" but the next instant she forgot it. A distant shout, unmistakably uttered by Hawkins, came thinly to them across the water, and in another second or two the noise of oars could be distinctly heard. The sound advanced steadily.

"Show a light there on the pier!" called out a voice that was not Hawkins'.

Cursiter struck a match, a feeble illuminant that made everything around invisible except the faces of the group on the pier, and by the time it had been tossed, like a falling star, into the tarry blackness of the water, the boat was within conversational distance.

"Is Miss Fitzpatrick there?" demanded Lady Dysart.

"She is," said Lambert's voice.

"What have you done with the launch?" shouted Cursiter, in a tone that made his subaltern quake.

"She's all right," he made haste to reply. "She's on that mud-shallow off Curragh Point, and Lambert's man is on board her now. Lambert saw us aground there from his window, and we were at her for an hour trying to get her off, and then it got so dark, we thought we'd better leave her and come on. She's all right, you know."

"Oh," said Captain Cursiter, in, as Hawkins thought to himself, a deuced disagreeable voice.

The boat came up alongside of the pier, and in the hubbub of inquiry that arose, Francie was conscious of a great sense of protection in Lambert's presence, angry though she knew he was. As he helped her out of the boat, she whispered tremulously:

"It was awfully good of you to come."

He did not answer, and stepped at once into the boat again. In another minute the necessary farewells had been made, and he, Cursiter, and Hawkins, were rowing back to the launch, leaving Francie to face her tribunal alone.

CHAPTER XXV.

IT was noon on the following day — a soaking, windy noon. Francie felt its fitness without being aware that she did so, as she knelt in front of her trunk, stuffing her few fineries into it with unscientific recklessness, and thinking with terror that it still remained for her to fee the elderly English upper housemaid with the half-crown that Charlotte had diplomatically given her for the purpose.

Everything had changed since yesterday, and changed for the worse. The broad window, out of which yesterday afternoon she had leaned in the burning sunshine to see the steam-launch puffing her way up the lake, was now closed against the rain; the dirty flounces of her best white frock, that had been clean yesterday, now thrust themselves out from under the lid of her trunk in disreputable reminder of last night's escapade; and Lady Dysart, who had

been at all events moderately friendly yesterday, now evidently considered that Francie had transgressed beyond forgiveness, and had acquiesced so readily in Francie's suggestion of going home for luncheon, that her guest felt sorry that she had not said breakfast. Even the padlock of her bonnet-box refused to lock—was "going bandy with her," as she put it, in a phrase learnt from the Fitzpatrick cook—and she was still battling with it when the sound of wheels on the gravel warned her that the ordeal of farewell was at hand. The *blasé* calm with which Sarah helped her through the presentation of Charlotte's half-crown made her feel her social inferiority as keenly as the coldness of Lady Dysart's *adieux* made her realise that she was going away in disgrace, when she sought her hostess and tried to stammer out the few words of orthodox gratitude that Charlotte had enjoined her not to forget.

Pamela, whose sympathies were always with the sinner, was kinder than ever, even anxiously kind, as Francie dimly perceived, and in some unexpected way her kindness brought a lump into the throat of

the departing guest. Francie hurried mutely out on to the steps, where, in spite of the rain, the dogs and Christopher were waiting to bid her goodbye.

"You are very punctual," he said. "I don't know why you are in such a hurry to go away."

"Oh, I think you've had quite enough of me," Francie replied with a desperate attempt at gaiety. "I'm sure you're all very glad to be shut of me."

"That isn't a kind thing to say, and I think you ought to know that it is not true either."

"Indeed then I know it *is* true," answered Francie, preparing in her agitation to plunge into the recesses of the landau without any further ceremonies of farewell.

"Well, won't you even shake hands with me?"

She was already in the carriage; but at this reproach she thrust an impulsive hand out of the window. "Oh, gracious—! I mean—I beg your pardon, Mr. Dysart," she cried incoherently, "I—I'm awfully grateful for all your kindness, and to Miss Dysart—"

She hardly noticed how tightly he held her hand in his; but, as she was driven away, and, looking back, saw him and Pamela standing on the steps, the

latter holding Max in her arms, and waving one of his crooked paws in token of farewell, she thought to herself that it must be only out of good nature they were so friendly to her; but anyhow they were fearfully nice.

"Thank goodness!" said Lady Dysart fervently, as she moved away from the open hall-door—"thank goodness that responsibility is off my hands. I began by liking the creature, but never, no, never, have I seen a girl so abominably brought up."

"Not much notion of the *convenances*, has she?" observed Miss Hope-Drummond, who had descended from her morning task of writing many letters in a tall, square hand, just in time to enjoy the sight of Francie's departure, without having the trouble of saying good-bye to her.

"*Convenances!*" echoed Lady Dysart, lifting her dark eyes till nothing but the whites were visible; "I don't suppose she could tell you the meaning of the word. 'One master passion in the breast, like Aaron's serpent, swallows up the rest,' and of all the man-eaters I have ever seen, she is the most cannibalistic!"

Miss Hope-Drummond laughed in polite appreciation, and rustled crisply away towards the drawing-room. Lady Dysart looked approvingly after the tall, admirably neat figure, and thought, with inevitable comparison, of Francie's untidy hair, and uncertainly draped skirts. She turned to Christopher and Pamela, and continued, with a lowered voice:

"Do you know, even the servants are all talking about her. Of course, they can't help noticing what goes on."

Christopher looked at his mother with a singularly expressionless face.

"Gorman hasn't mentioned it to me yet, or William either."

"If you had not interrupted me, Christopher," said poor Lady Dysart, resentful of this irreproachably filial rebuke, "I would have told you that none of the servants breathed a word on the subject to me. Evelyn was told it by her maid."

"How Evelyn can discuss such things with her maid, I cannot imagine," said Pamela, with unwonted heat; "and Davis is such a particularly detestable woman."

"I do not care in the least what sort of woman she is, she does hair beautifully, which is more than I can say for you," replied Lady Dysart, with an Uhlan-like dash into the enemy's country.

"I suppose it was by Davis' advice that Evelyn made a point of ignoring Miss Fitzpatrick this whole morning," continued Pamela, with the righteous wrath of a just person.

"It was quite unnecessary for her to trouble herself," broke in Lady Dysart witheringly; "Christopher atoned for all her deficiencies—taking advantage of Mr. Hawkins' absence, I suppose."

"If Hawkins had been there," said Christopher, with the slowness that indicated that he was trying not to stammer, "it would have saved me the trouble of making c—conversation for a person who did not care about it."

"You may make your mind easy on that point, my dear!" Lady Dysart shot this parting shaft after her son as he turned away towards the smoking-room. "To do her justice, I don't think she is in the least particular, so long as she has a man to talk to!"

It is not to be wondered at, that, as Francie drove through Lismoyle, she felt that the atmosphere was laden with reprobation of her and her conduct.

Her instinct told her that the accident to Captain Cursiter's launch, and her connection with it, would be a luscious topic of discourse for everyone, from Mrs. Lambert downwards; and the thought kept her from deriving full satisfaction from the Bruff carriage and pair. Even when she saw Annie Beattie standing at her window with a duster in her hand, the triumph of her position was blighted by the reflection that if Charlotte did not know everything before the afternoon was out, full details would be supplied to her at the party to which on this very evening they had been bidden by Mrs. Beattie.

The prospect of the cross-examination which she would have to undergo grew in portentousness during the hour and a half of waiting at Tally Ho for her cousin's return, while through and with her fears the dirt and vulgarity of the house and the furniture, the sickly familiarities of Louisa, and the all-pervading smell of cats and cooking, impressed themselves on her mind with a new and repellent vigour. But

Charlotte, when she arrived, was evidently still in happy ignorance of the events that would have interested her so profoundly. Her Dublin dentist had done his spiriting gently, her friends had been so hospitable that her lodging-house breakfasts had been her only expense in the way of meals, and the traditional battle with the Lismoyle car-driver and his equally inevitable defeat, had raised her spirits so much that she accepted Francie's expurgated account of her sojourn at Bruff with almost boisterous approval. She even extended a jovial feeler in the direction of Christopher.

"Well, now, after all the chances you've had, Francie, I'll not give tuppence for you if you haven't Mr. Dysart at your feet!"

It was not usually Francie's way to object to jests of this kind, but now she shrank from Charlotte's heavy hand.

"Oh, he was awfully kind," she said hurriedly; "but I don't think he'll ever want to marry anyone, not even Miss Hope-Drummond, for all as hard as she's trying!"

"Paugh! Let her try! *She*'ll not get him, not

if she was to put her eyes on sticks! But believe you me, child, there never was a man yet that pretended he didn't want to marry that wasn't dying for a wife!"

This statement demanded no reply, and Miss Mullen departed to the kitchen to see the new kittens and to hold high inquisition into the doings of the servants during her absence.

Mrs. Beattie gave but two parties in the year—one at Christmas, on account of the mistletoe; and one in July, on account of the raspberries, for which her garden was justly famous. This, it need scarcely be said, was the raspberry party, and accordingly when the afternoon had brought a cessation of the drizzling rain, Miss Ada and Miss Flossie Beattie might have been seen standing among the wet over-arching raspberry canes, devoured by midges, scarlet from the steamy heat, and pestered by that most maddening of all created things, the common fly, but, nevertheless, filling basket after basket with fruit. Miss May and Miss Carrie spent a long and arduous day in the kitchen making tartlets, brewing syrupy lemonade, and decorating cakes with pink and white sugar

devices and mottoes archly stimulative of conversation. Upon Mrs. Beattie and her two remaining daughters devolved the task of arranging the drawing-room chairs in a Christy minstrel circle, and borrowing extra tea-cups from their obliging neighbour, Mrs. Lynch; while Mr. Beattie absented himself judiciously until his normal five o'clock dinner hour, when he returned to snatch a perfunctory meal at a side table in the hall, his womenkind, after their wont, declining anything more substantial than nomadic cups of tea, brewed in the kitchen tea-pot, and drunk standing, like the Queen's health.

But by eight o'clock all preparations were completed, and the young ladies were in the drawing-room, attired alike in white muslin and rose-coloured sashes, with faces pink and glossy from soap and water. In Lismoyle, punctuality was observed at all entertainments, not as a virtue but as a pleasure, and at half-past eight the little glaring drawing-room had rather more people in it than it could conveniently hold. Mrs. Beattie had trawled Lismoyle and its environs with the purest impartiality; no one was invidiously omitted, not even young Mr. Redmond

the solicitor's clerk, who came in thick boots and a suit of dress clothes so much too big for him as to make his trousers look like twin concertinas, and also to suggest the more massive proportions of his employer, Mr. Lynch. In this assemblage, Mrs. Baker, in her celebrated maroon velvet, was a star of the first magnitude, only excelled by Miss Mullen, whose arrival with her cousin was, in a way, the event of the evening. Everyone knew that Miss Fitzpatrick had returned from Bruff that day, and trailing clouds of glory followed her in the mind's eye of the party as she came into the room. Most people, too, knew of the steam-launch adventure, so that when, later in the proceedings, Mr. Hawkins made his appearance, poor Mrs. Beattie was given small credit for having secured this prize.

"Are they engaged, do you think?" whispered Miss Corkran, the curate's sister, to Miss Baker.

"Engaged indeed!" echoed Miss Baker, "no more than you are! If you knew him as well as I do you'd know that flirting's all he cares for!"

Miss Corkran, who had not the pleasure of Mr. Hawkins' acquaintance, regarded him coldly through

her spectacles, and said that for her own part she disapproved of flirting, but liked making gentlemen-friends.

"Well, I suppose I might as well confess," said Miss Baker with a frivolous laugh, "that there's nothing I care for like flirting, but p'pa's awful particular! Wasn't he for turning Dr. M'Call out of the house last summer because he cot me curling his moustache with my curling-tongs! 'I don't care what you do with officers,' says p'pa, 'but I'll not have you going on with that Rathgar bounder of a fellow!' Ah, but that was when the poor 'Foragers' were quartered here; they were the jolliest lot we ever had!"

Miss Corkran paid scant attention to these memories, being wholly occupied with observing the demeanour of Mr. Hawkins, who was holding Miss Mullen in conversation. Charlotte's big, pale face had an intellectuality and power about it that would have made her conspicuous in a gathering more distinguished than the present, and even Mr. Hawkins felt something like awe of her, and said to himself that she would know how to make it hot for him if

she chose to cut up rough about the launch business.

As he reflected on that escapade he felt that he would have given a good round sum of money that it had not taken place. He had played the fool in his usual way, and now it didn't seem fair to back out of it. That, at all events, was the reason he gave to himself for coming to this blooming menagerie, as he inwardly termed Mrs. Beattie's highest social effort; it wouldn't do to chuck the whole thing up all of a sudden, even though, of course, the little girl knew as well as he did that it was all nothing but a lark. This was pretty much the substance of the excuses that he had offered to Captain Cursiter; and they had seemed so successful at the time that he now soothed his guilty conscience with a *rechauffé* of them, while he slowly and conversationally made his way round the room towards the green rep sofa in the corner, whereon sat Miss Fitzpatrick, looking charming things at Mr. Corkran, judging, at least, by the smile that displayed the reverend gentleman's prominent teeth to such advantage. Hawkins kept

on looking at her over the shoulder of the Miss Beattie to whom he was talking, and with each glance he thought her looking more and more lovely. Prudence melted in a feverish longing to be near her again, and the direction of his wandering eye became at length so apparent that Miss Carrie afterwards told her sister that "Mr. Hawkins was *fear*fully gone about Francie Fitzpatrick—oh, the tender looks he cast at her!"

Mrs. Beattie's entertainments always began with music, and the recognised musicians of Lismoyle were now contributing his or her share in accustomed succession. Hawkins waited until the time came for Mr. Corkran to exhibit his wiry bass, and then definitely took up his position on the green sofa. When he had first come into the room their eyes had met with a thrilling sense of understanding, and since then Francie had felt rather than seen his steady and diplomatic advance in her direction. But somehow, now that he was beside her, they seemed to find little to say to each other.

"I suppose they're all talking about our running aground yesterday," he said at last in a low voice.

"Does she know anything about it yet?" indicating Miss Mullen with a scarcely perceptible turn of his eye.

"No," replied Francie in the same lowered voice; "but she will before the evening's out. Everyone's quizzing me about it." She looked at him anxiously as she spoke, and his light eyebrows met in a frown.

"Confound their cheek!" he said angrily; "why don't you shut them up?"

"I don't know what to say to them. They only roar laughing at me, and say I'm not born to be drowned anyway."

"Look here," said Hawkins impatiently, "what do they do at these shows? Have we got to sit here all the evening?"

"Hush! Look at Charlotte looking at you, and that's Carrie Beattie just in front of us."

"I didn't come here to be wedged into a corner of this little beastly hole all the evening," he answered rebelliously; "can't we get out to the stairs or the garden or something?"

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed Francie, half-frightened

and half-delighted at his temerity. "Of course we can't! Why, they'll be going down to tea now in a minute—after that perhaps—"

"There won't be any perhaps about it," said Hawkins, looking at her with an expression that made her blush and tremble, "will there?"

"I don't know—not if you go away now," she murmured, "I'm so afraid of Charlotte."

"I've nowhere to go; I only came here to see you."

Captain Cursiter, at this moment refilling his second pipe, would not have studied the fascinating pages of the *Engineer* with such a careless rapture had he at all realised how Mr. Hawkins was fulfilling his promises of amendment.

At this juncture, however, the ringing of a bell in the hall notified that tea was ready, and before Hawkins had time for individual action, he found himself swept forward by his hostess, and charged with the task of taking Mrs. Rattray, the doctor's bride, down to the dining-room. The supply of men did little more than yield a sufficiency for the matrons, and after these had gone forth with due state, Francie found herself in the

midst of a throng of young ladies following in the wake of their seniors. As she came down the stairs she was aware of a tall man taking off his coat in a corner of the hall, and before she reached the dining-room door Mr. Lambert's hand was laid upon her arm.

CHAPTER XXVI.

TEA at Mrs. Beattie's parties was a serious meal, and, as a considerable time had elapsed since any of the company, except Mr. Hawkins, had dined, they did full justice to her hospitality. That young gentleman toyed with a plate of raspberries and cream and a cup of coffee, and spasmodically devoted himself to Mrs. Rattray in a way that quite repaid her for occasional lapses of attention. Francie was sitting opposite to him, not at the table, where, indeed, there was no room for her, but on a window-sill, where she was sharing a small table with Mr. Lambert. They were partly screened by the window curtains, but it seemed to Hawkins that Lambert was talking a great deal and that she was eating nothing. Whatever was the subject of their conversation they were looking very serious over it, and, as it progressed, Francie seemed to get more and more behind her window curtain.

The general clamour made it impossible for him to hear what they were talking about, and Mrs. Rattray's demands upon his attention became more intolerable every moment, as he looked at Francie and saw how wholly another man was monopolising her.

"And do you like being stationed here, Mr Hawkins?" said Mrs. Rattray after a pause.

"Eh? what? Oh yes, of course I do—awfully! you're all such delightful people y'know!"

Mrs. Rattray bridled with pleasure at this audacity.

"Oh, Mr. Hawkins, I'm afraid you're a terrible flatterer! Do you know that one of the officers of the Foragers said he thought it was a beastly spawt!"

"Beastly what? Oh yes, I see. I don't agree with him at all; I think it's a capital good spot." (Why did that old ass, Mrs. Corkran stick her great widow's cap just between him and the curtain? Francie had leaned forward and looked at him that very second, and that infernal white tow-row had got in his way.)

Mrs. Rattray thought it was time to play her trump card.

"I suppose you read a great deal, Mr. Hawkins? Dr. Rattray takes the—a—the *Pink One* I think he calls it—I know, of course, it's only a paper for gentlemen," she added hurriedly, "but I believe it's very comical, and the doctor would be most happy to lend it to you."

Mr. Hawkins, whose Sunday mornings would have been a blank without the solace of the *Sporting Times*, explained that the loan was unnecessary, but Mrs. Rattray felt that she had nevertheless made her point, and resolved that she would next Sunday study the *Pink One's* inscrutable pages, so that she and Mr. Hawkins might have, at least, one subject in common.

By this time the younger members of the company had finished their tea, and those nearest the door began to make a move. The first to leave the room were Francie and Lambert, and poor Hawkins, who had hoped that his time of release had at length come, found it difficult to behave as becomes a gentleman and a soldier, when Mrs. Rattray, with the air of one who makes a concession, said she thought she could try another saucer of raspberries.

Before they left the table the piano had begun again upstairs, and a muffled thumping, that shook flakes from the ceiling down on to the tea-table, told that the realities of the evening had begun at last.

"I knew the young people would be at that before the evening was out," said Mrs. Beattie with an indulgent laugh, "though the girls let on to me it was only a musical party they wanted."

"Ah well, they'll never do it younger!" said Mrs. Baker, leaning back with her third cup of tea in her hand. "Girls will be girls, as I've just been saying to Miss Mullen."

"Girls will be tom-fools!" said Miss Mullen with a brow of storm, thrusting her hands into her gloves, while her eyes followed Hawkins, who had at length detached Mrs. Rattray from the pleasures of the table, and was hurrying her out of the room.

"Oh now, Miss Mullen, you mustn't be so cynical," said Mrs. Beattie from behind the tea-urn; "we have six girls, and I declare now Mr. Beattie and I wouldn't wish to have one less."

"Well, they're a great responsibility," said Mrs. Corkran with a slow wag of her obtrusively widowed

head, "and no one knows that better than a mother. I shall never forget the anxiety I went through—it was just before we came to this parish—when my Bessy had an offer. Poor Mr. Corkran and I disapproved of the young man, and we were both quite distracted about it. Indeed we had to make it a subject of prayer, and a fortnight afterwards the young man died. Oh, doesn't it show the wonderful force of prayer?"

"Well now I think it's a pity you didn't let it alone," said Mr. Lynch, with something resembling a wink at Miss Mullen.

"I daresay Bessy's very much of your opinion," said Charlotte, unable to refrain from a jibe at Miss Corkran, pre-occupied though she was with her own wrath. She pushed her chair brusquely back from the table. "I think, with your kind permission, Mrs. Beattie, I'll go upstairs and see what's going on. Don't stir, Mr. Lynch, I'm able to get that far by myself."

When Miss Mullen arrived at the top of the steep flight of stairs, she paused on the landing amongst the exiled drawing-room chairs and tables,

and looked in at seven or eight couples revolving in a space so limited as to make movement a difficulty, if not a danger, and in an atmosphere already thickened with dust from the carpet. She saw to her surprise that her cousin was dancing with Lambert, and, after a careful survey of the room, espied Mr. Hawkins standing partnerless in one of the windows.

"I wonder what she's at now," thought Charlotte to herself; "is she trying to play Roddy off against him? The little cat, I wouldn't put it past her!"

As she looked at them wheeling slowly round in the cramped circle she could see that neither he or Francie spoke to each other, and when, the dance being over, they sat down together in the corner of the room, they seemed scarcely more disposed to talk than they had been when dancing.

"Aha! Roddy's a good fellow," she thought, "he's doing his best to help me by keeping her away from that young scamp."

At this point the young scamp in question crossed the room and asked Miss Fitzpatrick for the next dance in a manner that indicated just displeasure. The heat of the room and the exertion of dancing on

a carpet had endued most of the dancers with the complexions of ripe plums, but Francie seemed to have been robbed of all colour. She did not look up at him as he proffered his request.

"I'm engaged for the next dance."

Hawkins became very red. "Well the next after that," he persisted, trying to catch her eye.

"There isn't any next," said Francie, looking suddenly at him with defiant eyes; "after the next we're going home."

Hawkins stared for a brief instant at her with a sparkle of anger in his eyes. "Oh, very well," he said with exaggerated politeness of manner, "I thought I was engaged to you for the first dance after supper, that was all."

He turned away at once and walked out of the room, brushing past Charlotte at the door, and elbowed his way through the uproarious throng that crowded the staircase. Mrs. Beattie, coming up from the tea-table with her fellow matrons, had no idea of permitting her prize guest to escape so early. Hawkins was captured, his excuses were disregarded, and he was driven up the stairs again.

"Very well," he said to himself, "if she chooses to throw me over, I'll let her see that I can get on without her." It did not occur to him that Francie was only acting in accordance with the theory of the affair that he had himself presented to Captain Cursiter. His mind was now wholly given to revenging the snub he had received, and, spurred by this desire, he advanced to Miss Lynch, who was reposing in an armchair in a corner of the landing, while her partner played upon her heated face with the drawing-room bellows, and secured her for the next dance.

When Mr. Hawkins gave his mind to rollicking, there were few who could do it more thoroughly, and the ensuing polka was stamped through by him and Miss Lynch with a vigour that scattered all opposing couples like ninepins. Even his strapping partner appealed for mercy.

"Oh, Mr. Hawkins," she panted, "wouldn't you chassy now please? if you twirl me any more, I think I'll die!"

But Mr. Hawkins was deaf to entreaty; far from moderating his exertions, he even snatched the

eldest Miss Beattie from her position as on-looker, and, compelling her to avail herself of the dubious protection of his other arm, whirled her and Miss Lynch round the room with him in a many-elbowed triangle. The progress of the other dancers was necessarily checked by this performance, but it was viewed with the highest favour by all the matrons, especially those whose daughters had been selected to take part in it. Francie looked on from the doorway, whither she and her partner, the Reverend Corkran, had been driven for safety, with a tearing pain at her heart. Her lips were set in a fixed smile —a smile that barely kept their quivering in check— and her beautiful eyes shone upon the dazzled curate through a moisture that was the next thing to tears.

"I want to find Miss Mullen," she said at last, dragging Mr. Corkran towards the stairs, when a fresh burst of applause from the dancing-room made them both look back. Hawkins' two partners had, at a critical turn, perfidiously let him go with such suddenness that he had fallen flat on the floor, and having pursued them as they polkaed round the room, he was now encircling both with one arm, and affecting to

box their ears with his other hand, encouraged thereto by cries of, "Box them, Mr. Hawkins!" from Mrs. Beattie. "Box them well!"

Charlotte was in the dining-room, partaking of a gentlemanly glass of Marsala with Mr. Beattie, and other heads of families.

"Great high jinks they're having upstairs!" she remarked, as the windows and tea-cups rattled from the stamping overhead, and Mr. Beattie cast many an anxious eye towards the ceiling. "I suppose my young lady's in the thick of it, whatever it is!" She always assumed the attitude of the benevolently resigned chaperon when she talked about Francie, and Mr. Lynch was on the point of replying in an appropriate tone of humorous condolence, when the young lady herself appeared on Mr. Corkran's arm, with an expression that at once struck Charlotte as being very unlike high jinks.

"Why, child, what do you want down here?" she said. "Are you tired dancing?"

"I am; awfully tired; would you mind going home, Charlotte?"

"What a question to ask before our good host

here! Of course I mind going home!" eyeing Francie narrowly as she spoke; "but I'll come if you like."

"Why, what people you all are for going home!" protested Mr. Beattie hospitably; "there was Hawkins that we only stopped by main strength, and Lambert slipped away ten minutes ago, saying Mrs. Lambert wasn't well, and he had to go and look after her! What's your reverence about letting her go away now, when they're having the fun of Cork upstairs?"

Francie smiled a pale smile, but held to her point, and a few minutes afterwards she and Charlotte had made their way through the knot of loafers at the garden gate, and were walking through the empty moon-lit streets of Lismoyle towards Tally Ho. Charlotte did not speak till the last clanging of the *Bric-à-brac* polka had been left behind, and then she turned to Francie with a manner from which the affability had fallen like a garment.

"And now I'll thank you to tell me what's the truth of this I hear from everyone in the town about

you and that young Hawkins being out till all hours of the night in the steam-launch by yourselves?"

"It wasn't our fault. We were in by half-past nine." Francie had hardly spirit enough to defend herself, and the languor in her voice infuriated Charlotte.

"Don't give me any of your fine-lady airs," she said brutally; "I can tell ye this, that if ye can't learn how to behave yourself decently I'll pack ye back to Dublin!"

The words passed over Francie like an angry wind, disturbing, but without much power to injure.

"All right, I'll go away when you like."

Charlotte hardly heard her. "I'll be ashamed to look me old friend, Lady Dysart, in the face!" She stormed on. "Disgracing her house by such goings on with an unprincipled blackguard that has no more idea of marrying you than I have—not that that's anything to be regretted! An impudent little upstart without a halfpenny in his pocket, and as for family—" her contempt stemmed her volubility for a mouthing moment. "God only knows what gutter

he sprang from; I don't suppose he has a drop of blood in his whole body!"

"I'm not thinking of marrying him no more than he is of marrying me," answered Francie in the same lifeless voice, but this time faltering a little. "You needn't bother me about him, Charlotte, he's engaged."

"Engaged!" yelled Charlotte, squaring round at her cousin, and standing stock still in her amazement. "Why didn't you tell me so before? When did you hear it?"

"I heard it some time ago from a person whose name I won't give you," said Francie, walking on. "They're to be married before Christmas." The lump rose at last in her throat, and she trod hard on the ground as she walked, in the effort to keep the tears back.

Charlotte girded her velveteen skirt still higher, and hurried clumsily after the light graceful figure.

"Wait, child! Can't ye wait for me? Are ye sure it's true?"

Francie nodded.

"The young reprobate! To be making you so

remarkable and to have the other one up his sleeve all the time! Didn't I say he had no notion of marrying ye?"

Francie made no reply, and Charlotte with some difficulty disengaged her hand from her wrappings and patted her on the back.

"Well, never mind, me child," she said with noisy cheerfulness; "you're not trusting to the likes of that fellow! wait till ye're me Lady Dysart of Bruff, and it's little ye'll think of him then!"

They had reached the Tally Ho gate by this time; Francie opened it, and plunged into the pitch-dark tunnel of evergreens without a word.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE pre-eminently domestic smell of black currant jam pervaded Tally Ho next day. The morning had been spent by Charlotte and her retainers in stripping the straggling old bushes of the berries that resembled nothing so much as boot-buttons in size, colour, and general consistency; the preserving pan had been borrowed, according to immemorial custom, from Miss Egan of the hotel, and at three o'clock of the afternoon the first relay was sluggishly seething and bubbling on the kitchen fire, and Charlotte, Norry, and Bid Sal were seated at the kitchen table snipping the brown tips off the shining fruit that still awaited its fate.

It was a bright, steamy day, when the hot sun and the wet earth turned the atmosphere into a Turkish bath, and the cats sat out of doors, but avoided the grass like the plague. Francie had docilely picked currants with the others.

She was accustomed to making herself useful, and it did not occur to her to shut herself up in her room, or go for a walk, or, in fact, isolate herself with her troubles in any way. She had too little self-consciousness for these deliberate methods, and she moved among the currant bushes in her blue gown, and was merely uncomplainingly thankful that she was able to pull the broad leaf of her hat down so as to hide the eyes that were heavy from a sleepless night and red from the sting of tears. She went over again what Lambert had told her, as she mechanically dropped the currants into her tin can; the soldier-servant had read the letters, and had told Michael, the Rosemount groom, and Michael had told Mr. Lambert. She wouldn't have cared a pin about his being engaged if he had only told her so at first. She had flirted with engaged men plenty of times, and it hadn't done anybody any harm, but this was quite different. She couldn't believe, after the way he went on, that he cared about another girl all the time, and yet Michael had said that the soldier had said that they were to be married at Christmas. Well, thank goodness, she thought, with a half sob,

she knew about it now; he'd find it hard to make a fool of her again.

After the early dinner the practical part of the jam-making began, and for an hour Francie snipped at the currant-tops as industriously as Charlotte herself. But by the time that the first brew was ready for the preserving pan, the heat of the kitchen, and the wearisomeness of Charlotte's endless discussions with Norry, made intolerable the headache that had all day hovered about her forehead, and she fetched her hat and a book and went out into the garden to look for coolness and distraction. She wandered up to the seat where she had sat on the day that Lambert gave her the bangle, and, sitting down, opened her book, a railway novel, bought by Charlotte on her journey from Dublin. She read its stodgily sensational pages with hot tired eyes, and tried hard to forget her own unhappiness in the infinitely more terrific woes of its heroine; but now and then some chance expression, or one of those terms of endearment that were lavished throughout its pages, would leap up into borrowed life and sincerity, and she would shut her eyes and drift back into the

golden haze on Lough Moyle, when his hand had pressed her head down on to his shoulder, and his kisses had touched her soul. At such moments all the heated stillness of the lake was round her, with no creature nearer than the white cottages on the far hillsides; and when the inevitable present swam back to her, with carts rattling past on the road, and insects buzzing and blundering against her face, and Bid Sal's shrill summoning of the hens to their food, she would fling herself again into the book to hide from the pursuing pain and the undying, insane voice of hope.

Hope mastered pain, and reality mastered both, when, with the conventionality of situation to which life sometimes condescends, there came steps on the gravel, and looking up she saw that Hawkins was coming towards her. Her heart stopped and rushed on again like a startled horse, but all the rest of her remained still and almost impassive, and she leaned her head over her book to keep up the affectation of not having seen him.

"I saw your dress through the trees as I was coming up the drive," he said after a moment of

suffocating silence, "and so—" he held out his hand, "aren't you going to shake hands with me?"

"How d'ye do, Mr. Hawkins?" she gave him a limp hand and withdrew it instantly.

Hawkins sat down beside her, and looked hard at her half-averted face. He had solved the problem of her treatment of him last night in a way quite satisfactory to himself, and he thought that now that he had been sharp enough to have found her here, away from Miss Mullen's eye, things would be very different. He had quite forgiven her her share in the transgression; in fact, if the truth were known, he had enjoyed himself considerably after she had left Mrs. Beattie's party, and had gone back to Captain Cursiter and disingenuously given him to understand that he had hardly spoken a word to Miss Fitzpatrick the whole evening.

"So you wouldn't dance with me last night," he said, as if he were speaking to a child; "wasn't that very unkind of you?"

"No it was not," she replied, without looking at him.

"Well, *I* think it was," he said, lightly touching the hand that held the novel.

Francie took her hand sharply away.

"I think you are being very unkind now," he continued; "aren't you even going to look at me?"

"Oh yes, I'll look at you if you like," she said, turning upon him in a kind of desperation; "it doesn't do me much harm, and I don't suppose it does you much good."

The cool, indifferent manner that she had intended to assume was already too difficult for her, and she sought a momentary refuge in rudeness. He showed all the white teeth, that were his best point, in a smile that was patronisingly free from resentment.

"Why, what's the matter with her?" he said caressingly. "I believe I know what it's all about. She's been catching it about that day in the launch! Isn't that it?"

"I don't know what you're talking about, Mr. Hawkins," said Francie, with an indifferent attempt at hauteur; "but since you're so clever at guessing things I suppose there's no need of me telling you."

Hawkins came closer to her, and forcibly took possession of her hands. "What's the matter with you?" he said in a low voice; "why are you angry

with me? Don't you know I love you?" The unexpected element of uncertainty sharpened the edge of his feelings and gave his voice an earnestness that was foreign to it.

Francie started visibly; "No, I know you don't," she said, facing him suddenly, like some trapped creature; "I know you're in love with somebody else!"

His eyes flinched as though a light had been flashed in them. "What do you mean?" he said quickly, while a rush of blood darkened his face to the roots of his yellow hair, and made the veins stand out on his forehead; "who told you that?"

"It doesn't matter who told me," she said, with a miserable satisfaction that her bolt had sped home; "but I know it's true."

"I give you my honour it's not!" he said passionately; "you might have known better than to believe it."

"Oh yes, I might," she said with all the scorn she was master of; "but I think it 'twas as good for me I didn't." Her voice collapsed at the end of the sentence, and the dry sob that rose in her throat

almost choked her. She stood up and turned her face away to hide the angry tears that in spite of herself had sprung to her eyes.

Hawkins caught her hand again and held it tightly. "I know what it is. I suppose they've been telling you of that time I was in Limerick; and that was all rot from beginning to end; anyone could tell you that."

"It's not that; I heard all about that—"

Hawkins jumped up. "I don't care what you heard," he said violently. "Don't turn your head away from me like that, I won't have it—I know that you care about me, and I know that I shouldn't care if everyone in the world was dead, so long as you were here." His arm was round her, but she shook herself free.

"What about Miss Coppard?" she said; "what about being married before Christmas?"

For a moment Hawkins could find no words to say, "So you've got hold of that, have you?" he said, after some seconds of silence that seemed endless to Francie. "And do you think that will come between us?"

"Of course it must come between us," she said in a stifled voice; "and you knew that all through."

Mr. Hawkins' engagement was a painful necessity about which he affaired himself as little as possible. He recognised it as a certain and not disagreeable road to paying his debts, which might with good luck be prolonged till he got his company, and, latterly, it had fallen more than ever into the background. That it should interfere with his amusements in any way made it an impertinence of a wholly intolerable kind.

"It shall *not* come between us!" he burst out; "I don't care what happens, I won't give you up! I give you my honour I never cared twopence about her—I've never thought of her since I first saw you—I've thought of no one but you."

His hot, stammering words were like music to her; but that staunchness of soul that was her redeeming quality still urged her to opposition.

"It's no good your going on like this. You know you're going to marry her. Let me go."

But Mr. Hawkins was not in the habit of being baulked of anything on which he had set his heart.

"No, I will not let you go," he said, drawing her

towards him with bullying tenderness. "In the first place, you're not able to stand, and in the second place, I'm not going to marry anybody but you."

He spoke with a certainty that convinced himself; the certainty of a character that does not count the cost either for itself or for others; and, in the space of a kiss, her distrust was left far behind her as a despicable thing.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

NEARLY three weeks had gone by since Mrs. Beattie's party, and as Charlotte Mullen walked slowly along the road towards Rosemount one afternoon, her eyes fixed on the square toes of her boots, and her hands, as was her custom, in the pockets of her black jacket, she meditated agreeably upon recent events. Of these perhaps the pleasantest was Mr. Hawkins' departure to Hythe, for a musketry course, which had taken place somewhat unexpectedly a fortnight ago. He was a good-for-nothing young limb, and engagement or no engagement it was a good job he was out of the place; and, after all, Francie had not seemed to mind. Almost equally satisfactory was the recollection of that facetious letter to Christopher Dysart, in which she had so playfully reminded him of the ancient promise to photograph the Tally Ho cats,

and hoped that she and her cousin would not come under that category. Its success had even been surprising, for not only had Christopher come and spent a long afternoon in that difficult enterprise, but had come again more than once, on pretexts that had appeared to Charlotte satisfactorily flimsy, and had apparently set aside what she knew to be his repugnance to herself. That he should lend Francie "John Inglesant" and Rosetti's Poems, made Charlotte laugh in her sleeve. She had her own very sound opinion of her cousin's literary capacity, and had no sympathy for the scientific interest felt by a philosopher in the evolution of a nascent soul. Christopher's manner did not, it is true, coincide with her theory of a lover, which was crude, and founded on taste rather than experience, but she had imagination enough to recognise that Christopher, in love-making, as in most other things, would pursue methods unknown to her.

At this point in her reflections, congratulation began to wane. She thought she knew every twist and turn in Roddy Lambert, but lately she had not been able to explain him at all to her satisfaction.

He was always coming to Tally Ho, and he always seemed in a bad temper when he was there; in fact she had never known him as ill-mannered as he was last week, one day when he and Christopher were there together, and she had tried, for various excellent reasons, to get him off into the dining-room to talk business. She couldn't honestly say that Francie was running after him, though of course she had that nasty flirty way with every man, old or young, married or single; but all the same, there was something in it she didn't like. The girl was more trouble than she was worth; and if it wasn't for Christopher Dysart she'd have sent her packing back to Letitia Fitzpatrick, and told her that whether she could manage it or not she must keep her. But of course to have Sir Christopher Dysart of Bruff—she rolled the title on her tongue—as a cousin was worthy of patience.

As she walked up the trim Rosemount avenue she spied the owner of the house lying in a basket-chair in the shade, with a pipe in his mouth, and in his hand that journal politely described by Mrs. Rattray as "the pink one."

"Hallo, Charlotte!" he said lazily, glancing up at her from under the peak of his cap, "you look warm."

"And you look what you are, and that's cool, in manners and body," retorted Miss Mullen, coming and standing beside him, "and if you had tramped on your four bones through the dust, maybe you'd be as hot as I am."

"What do you wear that thick coat for?" he said, looking at it with a disfavour that he took no trouble to hide.

Charlotte became rather red. She had the Irish peasant-woman's love of heavy clothing and dislike of abating any item of it in summer.

"If you had my tendency to bronchitis, me fine fellow," she said, seating herself on the uncomfortable garden bench beside which his chair had been placed, "you'd think more of your health than your appearance."

"Very likely," said Mr. Lambert, yawning and relapsing into silence.

"Well, Roddy," resumed Charlotte more amicably, "I didn't walk all the way here to discuss the

fashions with you. Have y'any more news from the seat of war?"

"No; confound her, she won't stir, and I don't see what's going to make her unless I evict her."

"Why don't ye writ her for the money?" said Charlotte, the spirit of her attorney grandfather gleaming in her eyes; "that'd frighten her!"

"I don't want to do that if I can help it. I spoke o her about the lodge that Lady Dysart said she could have, and the old devil was fit to be tied; but we might get her to it before we've done with her."

"If it was me I'd writ her now," repeated Charlotte venomously; "you'll find you'll have to come to it in the end."

"It's a sin to see that lovely pasture going to waste," said Lambert, leaning back and puffing at his pipe. "Peter Joyce hasn't six head of cattle on it this minute."

"If you and I had it, Roddy," said Charlotte, eyeing him with a curious, guarded tenderness, "it wouldn't be that way."

Some vibration of the strong, incongruous tremor

that passed through her as she spoke, reached Lambert's indolent perception and startled it. It reminded him of the nebulous understanding that taking her money seemed to have involved him in; he believed he knew why she had given it to him, and though he knew also that he held his advantage upon precarious terms, even his coarse-fibred nature found something repellent in the thought of having to diplomatise with such affections as Charlotte's.

"I was up at Murphy's yesterday," he said, as if his train of ideas had not been interrupted. "He has a grand filly there that I'd buy to-morrow if I had the money, or any place to put her. There's a pot of money in her."

"Well, if you'll get me Gurthnamuckla," said Charlotte with a laugh, in which nervousness was strangely apparent, "you may buy up every young horse in the country and stable them in the parlour, so long as you'll leave the attics for me and the cats."

Lambert turned his head upon its cushion, and looked at her.

"I think I'll leave you a little more space than that, Charlotte, if ever we stable our horses together."

She glanced at him, as aware of the *double entendre*, and as stirred by it as he had intended her to be. Perhaps a little more than he had intended; at all events, he jerked himself into a sitting position, and, getting on to his feet, stretched himself with almost ostentatious ease.

"Where's Francie?" he asked, yawning.

"At home, dressmaking," replied Miss Mullen. She was a little paler than usual. "I think I'll go in now and have a cup of tea with Lucy," she said, rising from the garden bench with something like an effort.

"Well, I daresay I'll take the mare down to Tally Ho, and make Francie go for a ride," said Lambert; "it's a pity for anyone to be stewing in the house on a day like this."

"I wanted her to come here with me, but she wouldn't," Charlotte called after him as he turned towards the path that led to the stables. "Maybe she thought there might be metal more attractive for her at home!"

She grinned to herself as she went up the steps. "Me gentleman may put that in his pipe and smoke

it!" she thought; "that little hussy would let him think it was for him she was sitting at home!"

Ever since Mrs. Lambert's first entrance into Lismoyle society, she had found in Charlotte her most intimate and reliable ally. If Mr. Lambert had been at all uneasy as to his bride's reception by Miss Mullen, he must have been agreeably surprised to find that after a month or so Charlotte had become as useful and pleasant to Mrs. Lambert as in older days she had been to him. That Charlotte should have recognised the paramount necessity of his marrying money, had been to Lambert a proof of her eminent common sense. He had always been careful to impress his obvious destiny upon her, and he had always been grateful to that destiny for having harmlessly fulfilled itself, while yet old Mrs. Mullen's money was in her own keeping, and her niece was, beyond all question, ineligible. That was Mr. Lambert's view of the situation; whatever Charlotte's opinion was, she kept it to herself.

Mrs. Lambert was more than usually delighted to see her ever-sympathising friend on this hot afternoon. One of her chiefest merits in the turkey-hen's

eyes was that she "was as good as any doctor, and twice better than Dr. Rattray, who would never believe the half she went through with palpitations, and buzzings in her ears and roarings in her head," and the first half hour or so of her visit was consumed in minute detail of her more recent symptoms. The fact that large numbers of women entertain their visitors with biographies, mainly abusive, of their servants, has been dwelt on to weariness by many writers; but, nevertheless, in no history of Mrs. Lambert could this characteristic be conscientiously omitted.

"Oh, my dear," she said, as her second cup of sweet weak tea was entered upon, "you know that Eliza Hackett, that I got with the highest recommendations from the Honourable Miss Carrick, and thinking she'd be so steady, being a Protestant? Well, last Sunday she went to mass!" She paused, and Charlotte, one of whose most genuine feelings was a detestation of Roman Catholics, exclaimed:

"Goodness alive! what did you let her do that for?"

"How could I stop her?" answered Mrs. Lambert

plaintively, "she never told one in the house she was going, and this morning, when I was looking at the meat with her in the larder, I took the opportunity to speak to her about it. 'Oh,' says she, turning round as cool as you please, 'I consider the Irish Church hasn't the Apostolic succession!'"

"You don't tell me that fat-faced Eliza Hackett said that?" ejaculated Charlotte.

"She did, indeed," replied Mrs. Lambert deplorably; "I was quite upset. 'Eliza,' says I, 'I wonder you have the impudence to talk to me like that. You that was taught better by the Honourable Miss Carrick.' 'Ma'am,' says she, up to my face, 'Moses and Aaron was two holy Roman Catholic priests, and that's more than you can say of the archdeacon!' 'Indeed, no,' says I, 'thank God he's not!' but I ask you, Charlotte, what could I say to a woman like that, that would wrest the Scriptures to her own purposes?"

Even Charlotte's strong brain reeled in the attempt to follow the arguments of Eliza the cook and Mrs. Lambert,

"Well, upon my word, Lucy, it's little I'd have argued with her. I'd have just said to her, 'Out of

my house you march, if you don't go to your church!' I think that would have composed her religious scruples."

"Oh! but, Charlotte," pleaded the turkey-hen, "I *couldn't* part her; she knows just what gentlemen like, and Roderick's so particular about savouries. When I told him about her, he said he wouldn't care if she was a Mormon and had a dozen husbands, so long as she made good soup."

Charlotte laughed out loud. Mr. Lambert's turn of humour had a robustness about it that always roused a sympathetic chord in her.

"Well, that's a man all over! His stomach before anyone else's soul!"

"Oh, Charlotte, you shouldn't say such things! Indeed, Roderick will often take only the one cut of meat at his dinner these times, and if it isn't to his liking he'll take nothing; he's a great epicure. I don't know what's over him those last few weeks," continued Mrs. Lambert gloomily, "unless it's the hot weather, and all the exercise he's taking that's making him cross."

"Well, from all I've ever seen of men," said Char-

lotte, with a laugh, "the hotter they get the better pleased they are. Take my word for it, there's no time a man's so proud of himself as when he's 'larding the lean earth!'"

Mrs. Lambert looked bewildered, but was too much affaired with her own thoughts to ask for an explanation of what seemed to her a strange term in cookery.

"Did he know Francie Fitzpatrick much in Dublin?" she said after a pause, in which she had given a saucerful of cream and sopped cake to her dog.

Charlotte looked at her hostess suddenly and searchingly as she stooped with difficulty to take up the saucer.

"He's known her since she was a child," she replied, and waited for further developments.

"I thought it must be that way," said Mrs. Lambert, with a dissatisfied sound in her voice; "they're so very familiar-like talking to each other."

Charlotte's heart paused for an instant in its strong, regular course. Was it possible, she thought, that wisdom was being perfected in the mouth of Lucy Lambert?

"I never noticed anything so wonderfully familiar,"

she said, in a tone meant to provoke further confidence; "I never knew Roddy yet that he wasn't civil to a pretty girl; and as for Francie, any man comes handy to her! Upon my word, she'd dote on a tongs, as they say!"

Mrs. Lambert fidgeted nervously with her long gold watch chain. "Well, Charlotte," she said, a little defiantly, "I've been married to him five years now, and I've never known him particular with any girl."

"Then, my dear woman, what's this nonsense you're talking about him and Francie?" said Charlotte, with Mephistophelian gaiety.

"Oh, Charlotte!" said Mrs. Lambert, suddenly getting very red, and beginning to whimper, "I never thought to speak of it—" she broke off and began to root for her handkerchief, while her respectable middle-aged face began to wrinkle up like a child's, "and, indeed, I don't want to say anything against the girl, for she's a nice girl, and so I've always found her, but I can't help noticing—"she broke off again.

"What can't ye help noticing?" demanded Charlotte roughly.

Mrs. Lambert drew a long breath that was half-suffocated by a sob. "Oh, I don't know," she cried helplessly; "he's always going down to Tally Ho, by the way he'll take her out riding or boating or something, and though he doesn't say much, a little thing'll slip out now and again, and you can't say a word to him but he'll get cross."

"Maybe he's in trouble about money unknown to you," suggested Charlotte, who, for some reason or other, was not displaying her usual capacity for indictment, "or maybe he finds life's not worth living because of the liver!" she ended, with a mirthless laugh.

"Oh, no, no, Charlotte; indeed, it's no laughing joke at all—" Mrs. Lambert hesitated, then, with a little hysterical burst of sobs, "he talks about her in his sleep!" she quavered out, and began to cry miserably.

Charlotte sat perfectly still, looking at Mrs. Lambert with eyes that saw, but held no pity for, her abundant tears. How far more serious was this thing, if true, to her, than to that contemptible whining creature, whose snuffling gasps were exasperating her almost beyond the bounds of endurance. She waited till there was a lull.

'What did he say about her?" she asked in a hard jeering voice.

"Oh, Charlotte, how can I tell you? all sorts of things he says, nonsense like, and springing up and saying she'll be drowned."

"Well, if it's any comfort to you," said Charlotte, "she cares no more for him than the man in the moon! She has other fish to fry, I can tell you!"

"But what signifies that, Charlotte," sighed Mrs. Lambert, "so long as he thinks about her?"

"Tell him he's a fool to waste his time over her," suggested Charlotte scoffingly.

"Is it *me* tell him such a thing!" The turkey-hen lifted her wet red eyes from her saturated pocket handkerchief and began to laugh hysterically. "Much regard he has for what *I* say to him! Oh, don't make me laugh, Charlotte—" a frightened look came over her face, as if she had been struck, and she fell back in her chair. "It's the palpitations," she said faintly, with her hand on her heart. "Oh, I'm going—I'm going—"

Charlotte ran to the chimney-piece, and took from it a bottle of smelling salts. She put it to Mrs.

Lambert's nose with one hand, and with the other unfastened the neck of her dress without any excitement or fuss. Her eyes were keen and quiet as she bent over the pale blotched face that lay on the antimacassar; and when Mrs. Lambert began to realise again what was going on round her, she was conscious of a hand chafing her own, a hand that was both gentle and skilful.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"METAL more attractive!" Lambert thought there could not be a more offensive phrase in the English language than this, that had rung in his ears ever since Charlotte had flung it at him when he parted from her on his own avenue. He led the black mare straight to the dilapidated loose-box at Tally Ho Lodge, in which she had before now waited so often and so dismally, with nothing to do except nose about the broken manger for a stray oat or two, or make spiteful faces through the rails at her comrade, the chestnut, in the next stall. Lambert swung open the stable door, and was confronted by the pricked ears and interested countenance of a tall bay horse, whom he instantly recognised as being one of the Bruff carriage horses, looking out of the loose-box. Mr. Lambert's irritation culminated at this point in appropriate profanity; he felt that all

these things were against him, and the thought that he would go straight back to Rosemount made him stand still on the doorstep. But the next moment he had a vision of himself and the two horses turning in at the Rosemount gate, with the certain prospect of being laughed at by Charlotte and condoled with by his wife, and without so much as a sight of that maddening face that was every day thrusting itself more and more between him and his peace. It would be a confession of defeat at the hands of Christopher Dysart, which alone would be intolerable: besides, there wasn't a doubt but that, if Francie were given her choice, she would rather go out riding with him than anything.

Buoyed up by this reflection, he put the chestnut into the stable, and the mare into the cow-shed, and betook himself to the house. The hall door was open, and stepping over the cats on the door-mat, he knocked lightly at the drawing-room door, and walked in without waiting for an answer. Christopher was sitting with his back to him, holding one end of a folded piece of pink cambric, while Francie, standing up in front of him, was cutting

along the fold towards him, with a formidable pair of scissors.

"Must I hold on to the end?" he was saying, as the scissors advanced in leaps towards his fingers.

"I'll kill you if you let go!" answered Francie, rather thickly, by reason of a pin between her front teeth. "Goodness, Mr. Lambert! you frightened the heels off me! I thought you were Louisa with the tea."

"Good evening, Francie; good evening, Dysart," said Lambert with solemn frigidity.

Christopher reddened a little as he looked round. "I'm afraid I can't shake hands with you, Lambert," with an unavoidably foolish laugh, "I'm dressmaking."

"So I see," replied Mr. Lambert, with something as near a sneer as he dared. He always felt it a special unkindness of Providence to have placed this young man to reign over him, and the practical sentiment that it is well not to quarrel with your bread and butter, had not unfrequently held him back from a much-desired jibe. "I came, Francie," he went on with the same portentous politeness, "to see if you'd care to come for a ride with me."

"When? Now?" said Francie, without much enthusiasm.

"Oh, not unless you like," he replied, in a palpably offended tone.

"Well, how d'ye know I wouldn't like? Keep quiet now, Mr. Dysart, I've another one for you to hold!"

"I'm afraid I must be going—" began Christopher, looking helplessly at the billows of pink cambric which surrounded him on the floor. Lambert's arrival had suddenly made the situation seem vulgar.

"Ah, can't you sit still now?" said Francie, thrusting another length of material into his hand, and beginning to cut swiftly towards him. "I declare you're very idle!"

Lambert stood silent while this went on, and then, with an angry look at Francie, he said, "I understand then that you're not coming out riding to-day?"

"Do you?" asked Francie, pinning the seam together with marvellous rapidity; "take care your understanding isn't wrong! Have you the horse down here?"

"Of course I have."

"Well, I'll tell you what we'll do; we'll have tea first, and then we'll ride back with Mr. Dysart; will that do you?"

"I wanted to ride in the opposite direction," said Lambert, "I had some business—"

"Oh, bother your old business!" interrupted Francie, "anyway, I hear her bringing in the tea."

"Oh, I hope you'll ride home with me," said Christopher, "I hate riding by myself."

"Much I pity you!" said Francie, flashing a side-long look at him as she went over to the tea-table; "I suppose you'd be frightened!"

"Quite so. Frightened and bored. That is what I feel like when I ride by myself," said Christopher, trying to eliminate from his manner the constraint that Lambert's arrival had imparted to it, "and my horse is just as bored; I feel apologetic all the time and wishing I could do something to amuse him that wouldn't be dangerous. Do come; I'm sure he'd like it."

"Oh, how anxious you are about him!" said Francie cutting bread and butter with a dexterous hand from the loaf that Louisa had placed on the table in frank confession of incapacity. "I don't

know what I'll do till I've had my tea. Here now, here's yours poured out for both of you; I suppose you'd like me to come and hand it to you!" with a propitiatory look at Lambert.

Thus adjured, the two men seated themselves at the table, on which Francie had prepared their tea and bread and butter with a propriety that reminded Christopher of his nursery days. It was a very agreeable feeling, he thought; and as he docilely drank his tea and laughed at Francie for the amount of sugar that she put into hers, the idealising process to which he was unconsciously subjecting her advanced a stage. He was beginning to lose sight of her vulgarity, even to wonder at himself for ever having applied that crudely inappropriate word to her. She had some reflected vulgarities of course, thought the usually hypercritical Mr. Christopher Dysart, and her literary progress along the lines he had laid down for her was slow; but lately, since his missionary resolve to let the light of culture illuminate her darkness, he had found out subtle depths of sweetness and sympathy that were, in their responsiveness, equivalent to intellect.

When Francie went up a few minutes later to put on her habit, Christopher did not seem disposed to continue the small talk in which his proficiency had been more surprising than pleasing to Mr. Lambert.

He strolled over to the window, and looked meditatively out at Mrs. Bruff and a great-grandchild or two embowered in a tangle of nasturtiums, and putting his hands in his pockets began to whistle *sotto voce*. Lambert looked him up and down, from his long thin legs to his small head, on which the light brown hair grew rather long, with a wave in it that was to Lambert the height of effeminacy. He began to drum with his fingers on the table to show that he too was quite undisturbed and at his ease.

"By the bye, Dysart," he observed presently, "have you heard anything of Hawkins since he left?"

Christopher turned round. "No, I don't know anything about him except that he's gone to Hythe."

"Gone to *hide*, d'ye say?" Lambert laughed noisily in support of his joke.

"No, Hythe."

"It seems to me it's more likely it's a case of hide," Lambert went on with a wink; he paused,

fiddled with his teaspoon, and smiled at his own hand as he did so. "P'raphs he thought it was time for him to get away out of this."

"Really?" said Christopher, with a lack of interest that was quite genuine.

Lambert's pulse bounded with the sudden desire to wake this supercilious young hound up for once, by telling him a few things that would surprise him.

"Well, you see it's a pretty strong order for a fellow to carry on as Hawkins did, when he happens to be engaged."

The fact of Mr. Hawkins' engagement had, it need scarcely be said, made its way through every highway and by-way of Lismoyle; inscrutable as to its starting-point, impossible of verification, but all the more fascinating for its mystery. Lambert had no wish to claim its authorship; he had lived among gentlemen long enough to be aware that the second-hand confidences of a servant could not creditably be quoted by him. What he did not know, however, was whether the story had reached Bruff, or been believed there, and it was extremely provoking to him now that instead of being able to observe its

effect on Christopher, whose back was to the light, his discoveries should be limited to the fact that his own face had become very red as he spoke.

"I suppose he knows his own affairs best," said Christopher, after a silence that might have meant anything, or nothing.

"Well," leaning back and putting his hands in his pockets, "I don't pretend to be straight-laced, but d—n it, you know, I think Hawkins went a bit too far."

"I don't think I have heard who it is that he is engaged to," said Christopher, who seemed remarkably unaffected by Mr. Hawkins' misdemeanours.

"Oh, to a Yorkshire girl, a Miss—what's this her name is—Coppard. Pots of money, but mighty plain about the head, I believe. He kept it pretty dark, didn't he?"

"Apparently it got out, for all that."

Lambert thought he detected a tinge of ridicule in the voice, whether of him or of Hawkins he did not know; it gave just the necessary spur to that desire to open Christopher's eyes for him a bit.

"Oh, yes, it got out," he said, putting his elbow on the table, and balancing his teaspoon on his fore-

finger, "but I think there are very few that know for certain it's a fact,—fortunately for our friend."

"Why fortunately? I shouldn't think it made much difference to anyone."

"Well, as a rule, girls don't care to flirt with an engaged man."

"No, I suppose not," said Christopher, yawning with a frankness that was a singular episode in his demeanour towards his agent.

Lambert felt his temper rising every instant. He was a man whose jealousy took the form of reviling the object of his affections, if, by so doing, he could detach his rivals.

"Well, Francie Fitzpatrick knows it for one; but perhaps she's not one of the girls who object to flirting with an engaged man."

Lambert got up and walked to the window; he felt that he could no longer endure seeing nothing of Christopher except a lank silhouette with an offensive repose of attitude. He propped his back against one of the shutters, and obviously waited for a comment.

"I should think it was an inexpensive amusement,"

said Christopher, in his most impersonal and academic manner, "but likely to pall."

"Pall! Deuce a bit of it!" Lambert put a tooth-pick in his mouth, and began to chew it, to convey the effect of ease. "I can tell you I've known that girl since she was the length of my stick, and I never saw her that she wasn't up to some game or other; and she wasn't over particular about engagements or anything else!"

Christopher slightly shifted his position, but did not speak, and Lambert went on:

"I'm very fond of the girl, and she's a good-hearted little thing; but, by Jove! I was sorry to see the way she went on with that fellow Hawkins. Here he was, morning, noon, and night, walking with her, and steam-launching, and spooning, and setting all the old women in the place prating. I spoke to her about it, and much thanks I got, though there was a time she was ready enough to mind what I said to her." During this recital Mr. Lambert's voice had been deficient in the accent of gentlemanlike self-importance that in calmer moments he was careful to impart to it, and the raw Limerick brogue was

on top as he said, "Yes, by George! I remember the time when she wasn't above fancying your humble servant!"

He had almost forgotten his original idea; his own position, long brooded over, rose up out of all proportion, and confused his mental perspective, till Christopher Dysart's opinions were lost sight of. He was recalled to himself by a startling expression on the face of his confidant, an expression of almost unconcealed disgust, that checked effectively any further outpourings. Christopher did not look at him again, but turned from the window, and, taking up Miss Mullen's photograph-book, proceeded to a minute inspection of its contents. Neither he nor Lambert quite knew what would happen next, each in his own way being angry enough for any emergency, and both felt an extreme relief when Francie's abrupt entrance closed the situation.

"Well, I wasn't long now, was I?" she said breathlessly; "but what'll I do? I can't find my gloves!" She swept out of the corner of the sofa a cat that had been slumbering unseen behind a cushion. "Here they are! and full of fleas I'll be bound, after Clemen-

tina sleeping on them! Oh, goodness! Are both of you too angry to speak to me? I didn't think I was so long. Come on out to the yard; you can't say I'm keeping you now."

She whirled out of the room, and by the time Lambert and Christopher got into the yard, she had somehow dragged the black mare out of the cow-shed and was clambering on to her back with the aid of a wheel-barrow.

Riding has many charms, but none of its eulogists have properly dwelt on the advantages it offers to the unconversational. To ride in silence is the least marked form of unsociability, for something of the same reason that talking on horseback is one of the pleasantest modes of converse. The power of silence cuts both ways, and simplifies either confidence or its reverse amazingly. It so happened, however, that had Lambert had the inclination to make himself agreeable to his companions he could not have done so. Christopher's carriage-horse trotted with the machine-like steadiness of its profession, and the black mare, roused to emulation, flew along beside him, ignoring the feebly expressed desire of her rider that

she should moderate her pace. Christopher, indeed, seldom knew or cared at what pace his horse was going, and was now by no means sorry to find that the question of riding along with Lambert had been settled for him. The rough, young chestnut was filled with a vain-glory that scorned to trot, and after a great deal of brilliant ramping and curveting he fell into a kind of heraldic action, half-canter, half-walk, that left him more and more hopelessly in the rear, and raised Lambert's temper to boiling point.

"We're going very fast, aren't we?" panted Francie, trying to push down her rebellious habit-skirt with her whip, as they sped along the flat road between Lismoyle and Bruff. "I'm afraid Mr. Lambert can't keep up. That's a dreadfully wild horse he's riding."

"Are we?" said Christopher vaguely. "Shall we pull up? Here, woa, you brute!" He pulled the carriage-horse into a walk, and looked at Francie with a laugh. "I'm beginning to hope you're as bad a rider as I am," he said sympathetically. "Let me hold your reins, while you're pinning up that plait."

"Oh, botheration take it! Is my hair down again? It always comes down if I trot fast," bewailed Francie, putting up her hands to her dishevelled hair, that sparkled like gold in the sun.

"Do you know, the first time I ever saw you, your hair had come down out riding," said Christopher, looking at her as he held her rein, and not giving a thought to the intimate appearance they presented to the third member of the party; "if I were you I should start with it down my back."

"Ah, nonsense, Mr. Dysart; why would you have me make a Judy of myself that way?"

"Because it's the loveliest hair I've ever seen," answered Christopher, the words coming to his lips almost without his volition, and in their utterance causing his heart to give one or two unexpected throbs.

"Oh!" There was as much astonishment as pleasure in the exclamation, and she became as red as fire. She turned her head away, and looked back to see where Lambert was.

She had heard from Hawkins only this morning, asking her for a piece of the hair that Christopher

had called lovely. She had cut off a little curl from the place he had specified, near her temple, and had posted it to him this very afternoon after Charlotte went out; but all the things that Hawkins had said of her hair did not seem to her so wonderful as that Mr. Dysart should pay her a compliment.

Lambert was quite silent after he joined them. In his heart he was cursing everything and everyone, the chestnut, Christopher, Francie, and most of all himself, for having said the things that he had said. All the good he had done was to leave no doubt in Christopher's mind that Hawkins was out of the running, and as for telling him that Francie was a flirt, an ass like that didn't so much as know the meaning of the word flirting. He knew now that he had made a fool of himself, and the remembrance of that disgusted expression on Christopher's face made his better judgment return as burningly as the blood into veins numbed with cold. At the cross-roads next before Bruff, he broke in upon the exchange of experiences of the Dublin theatres that was going on very enjoyably beside him.

"I'm afraid we must part company here, Dysart,"

he said in as civil a voice as he could muster; "I want to speak to a farmer who lives down this way."

Christopher made his farewells, and rode slowly down the hill towards Bruff. It was a hill that had been cut down in the Famine, so that the fields on either side rose high above its level, and the red poppies and yellowing corn nodded into the sky over his head. The bay horse was collecting himself for a final trot to the avenue gates, when he found himself stopped, and, after a moment of hesitation on the part of his rider, was sent up the hill again a good deal faster than he had come down. Christopher pulled up again on the top of the hill. He was higher now than the corn, and, looking across its multitudinous, rustling surface, he saw the figure that some errant impulse had made him come back to see. Francie's head was turned towards Lambert, and she was evidently talking to him. Christopher's eyes followed the pair till they were out of sight, and then he again turned his horse, and went home to Bruff.

CHAPTER XXX.

ONE fine morning towards the end of August, Julia Duffy was sitting on a broken chair in her kitchen, with her hands in her lap, and her bloodshot eyes fixed on vacancy. She was so quiet that a party of ducks, which had hung uncertainly about the open door for some time, filed slowly in, and began to explore an empty pot or two with their long, dirty bills. The ducks knew well that Miss Duffy, though satisfied to accord the freedom of the kitchen to the hens and turkeys, had drawn the line at them and their cousins the geese, and they adventured themselves within the forbidden limits with the utmost caution, and with many side glances from their blinking, beady eyes at the motionless figure in the chair. They had made their way to a plate of potato skins and greasy cabbage on the floor by the table, and, forgetful of prudence, were clattering their bills on

the delf as they gobbled, when an arm was stretched out above their heads, and they fled in cumbrous consternation.

The arm, however, was not stretched out in menace; Julia Duffy had merely extended it to take a paper from the table, and having done so, she looked at its contents in entire obliviousness of the ducks and their maraudings. Her misfortunes were converging. It was not a week since she had heard of the proclaimed insolvency of the man who had taken the grazing of Gurthnamuckla, and it was not half an hour since she had been struck by this last arrow of outrageous fortune, the letter threatening to process her for the long arrears of rent that she had felt lengthening hopelessly with every sunrise and sunset. She looked round the dreary kitchen that had about it all the added desolation of past respectability, at the rusty hooks from which she could remember the portly hams and flitches of bacon hanging; at the big fireplace where her grandfather's Sunday sirloin used to be roasted. Now, cobwebs dangled from the hooks, and the old grate had fallen to pieces, so that the few sods of turf smouldered on the hearthstone.

Everything spoke of bygone plenty and present wretchedness.

Julia put the letter into its envelope again and groaned a long miserable groan. She got up and stood for a minute, staring out of the open door with her hands on her hips, and then went slowly and heavily up the stairs, groaning again to herself from the exertion and from the blinding headache that made her feel as though her brain were on fire. She went into her room and changed her filthy gown for the stained and faded black rep that hung on the door. From a band-box of tanned antiquity she took a black bonnet that had first seen the light at her mother's funeral, and tied its clammy satin strings with shaking hands. Flashes of light came and went before her eyes, and her pallid face was flushed painfully as she went downstairs again, and finding, after long search, the remains of the bottle of blacking, laboriously cleaned her only pair of boots. She was going out of the house when her eye fell upon the plate from which the ducks had been eating; she came back for it, and, taking it out with her, scattered its contents to the turkeys, mechanically holding her

dress up out of the dirt as she did so. She left the plate on the kitchen window-sill, and set slowly forth down the avenue.

Under the tree by the gate, Billy Grainy was sitting, engaged, as was his custom in moments of leisure, in counting the coppers in the bag that hung round his neck. He looked in amazement at the unexpected appearance of his patroness, and as she approached him he pushed the bag under his shirt.

"Where are ye goin'?" he asked.

Julia did not answer; she fumbled blindly with the bit of stick that fastened the gate, and, having opened it, went on without attempting to shut it.

"Where are ye goin' at all?" said Billy again, his bleared eyes following the unfamiliar outline of bonnet and gown.

Without turning, she said, "Lismoyle," and as she walked on along the sunny road, she put up her hand and tried to wipe away the tears that were running down her face. Perhaps it was the excitement with which every nerve was trembling that made the three miles to Rosemount seem as nothing to this woman, who, for the last six months, had been too ill to go

beyond her own gate; and probably it was the same unnatural strength that prevented her from breaking down, when, with her mind full of ready-framed sentences that were to touch Mr. Lambert's heart and appeal to his sense of justice, she heard from Mary Holleran at the gate that he was away for a couple of days in Limerick. Without replying to Mary Holleran's exclamations of pious horror at the distance she had walked, and declining all offers of rest or food, she turned and walked on towards Lismoyle.

She had suddenly determined to herself that she would walk to Bruff and see her landlord, and this new idea took such possession of her that she did not realise at first the magnitude of the attempt. But by the time she had reached the gate of Tally Ho the physical power that her impulse gave her began to be conscious of its own limits. The flashes were darting like lightning before her eyes, and the nausea that was her constant companion robbed her of her energy. After a moment of hesitation she decided that she would go in and see her kinswoman, Norry the Boat, and get a glass of water from her before going further. It wounded her pride somewhat to

go round to the kitchen—she, whose grandfather had been on nearly the same social level as Miss Mullen's; but Charlotte was the last person she wished to meet just then. Norry opened the kitchen door, beginning, as she did so, her usual snarling maledictions on the supposed beggar, which, however, were lost in a loud invocation of her patron saint as she recognised her first cousin, Miss Duffy.

"And is it to leg it in from Gurthnamuckla ye done?" said Norry, when the first greetings had been exchanged, and Julia was seated in the kitchen, "and you looking as white as the dhrivelling snow this minnit."

"I did," said Julia feebly, "and I'd be thankful to you for a drink of water. The day's very close."

"Faith ye'll get no wather in this house," returned Norry in grim hospitality; "I'll give ye a sup of milk, or would it be too much delay on ye to wait till I bile the kittle for a cup o' tay? Bad cess to Bid Sal! There isn't as much hot wather in the house this minute as'd write yer name!"

"I'm obliged to ye, Norry," said Julia stiffly, her sick pride evolving a supposition that she could be

in want of food; "but I'm only after my breakfast myself. Indeed," she added, assuming from old habit her usual attitude of medical adviser, "you'd be the better yourself for taking less tea."

"Is it me?" replied Norry indignantly. "I take me cup o' tay morning and evening, and if 'twas throwing afther me I wouldn't take more."

"Give me the cold wather, anyway," said Julia wearily; "I must go on out of this. It's to Bruff I'm going."

"In the name o' God what's taking ye into Bruff, you that should be in yer bed, in place of sthreelin' through the counthry this way?"

"I got a letter from Lambert to-day," said Julia, putting her hand to her aching head, as if to collect herself, "and I want to speak to Sir Benjamin about it."

"Ah, God help yer foolish head!" said Norry impatiently; "sure ye might as well be talking to the bird above there," pointing to the cockatoo, who was looking down at them with ghostly solemnity. "The owld fellow's light in his head this long while."

"Then I'll see some of the family," said Julia; "they

remember my fawther well, and the promise I had about the farm, and they'll not see me wronged."

"Throth, then, that's thrue," said Norry, with an unwonted burst of admiration; "they was always and ever a fine family, and thim that they takes in their hands has the luck o' God! But what did Lambert say t'ye?" with a keen glance at her visitor from under her heavy eyebrows.

Julia hesitated for a moment.

"Norry Kelly," she said, her voice shaking a little; "if it wasn't that you're me own mother's sister's child, I would not reveal to you the disgrace that man is trying to put upon me. I got a letter from him this morning saying he'd process me if I didn't pay him at once the half of what's due. And Joyce that has the grazing is bankrupt, and owes me what I'll never get from him."

"Blast his sowl!" interjected Norry, who was peeling onions with furious speed.

"I know there's manny would be thankful to take the grazing," continued Julia, passing a dingy pocket handkerchief over her forehead; "but who knows when I'd be paid for it, and Lambert will have me out

on the road before that if I don't give him the rent."

Norry looked to see whether both the kitchen doors were shut, and then, putting both her hands on the table, leaned across towards her cousin.

"Herself wants it," she said in a whisper.

"Wants what? What are you saying?"

"Wants the farm, I tell ye, and it's her that's driving Lambert."

"Is it Charlotte Mullen?" asked Julia, in a scarcely audible voice.

"Now ye have it," said Norry, returning to her onions, and shutting her mouth tightly.

The cockatoo gave a sudden piercing screech, like a note of admiration. Julia half got up, and then sank back into her chair.

"Are ye sure of that?"

"As sure as I have two feet," replied Norry, "and I'll tell ye what she's afther it for. It's to go live in it, and to let on she's as grand as the other ladies in the counthry."

Julia clenched the bony, discoloured hand that lay on the table.

"Before I saw her in it I'd burn it over my head!"

"Not a word out o' ye about what I tell ye," went on Norry in the same ominous whisper. "Shure she have it all mapped this minnit, the same as a pairson'd be makin' a watch. She's sthriving to make a match with young Misther Dysart and Miss Francie, and b'leeve you me, 'twill be a quare thing if she'll let him go from her. Sure he's the gentlest crayture ever came into a house, and he's that innocent he wouldn't think how cute she was. If ye'd see her, ere yesterday, follying him down to the gate, and she smilin' up at him as sweet as honey! The way it'll be, she'll sell Tally Ho house for a fortune for Miss Francie, though, indeed, it's little fortune himself'll ax!"

The words drove heavily through the pain of Julia's head, and their meaning followed at an interval.

"Why would she give a fortune to the likes of her?" she asked; "isn't it what the people say, it's only for a charity she has her here?"

Norry gave her own peculiar laugh of derision, a laugh with a snort in it.

"Sharity! It's little sharity ye'll get from that one! Didn't I hear the old misthress tellin' her, and

she sthretched for death—and Miss Charlotte knows well I heard her say it—'Charlotte,' says she, and her knees dhrawn up in the bed, 'Francie must have her share.' And that was the lasht word she spoke." Norry's large wild eyes roved skywards out of the window as the scene rose before her. "God rest her soul, 'tis she got the death aisy!"

"That Charlotte Mullen may get it hard!" said Julia savagely. She got up, feeling new strength in her tired limbs, though her head was reeling strangely, and she had to grasp at the kitchen table to keep herself steady. "I'll go on now. If I die for it I'll go to Bruff this day."

Norry dropped the onion she was peeling, and placed herself between Julia and the door.

"The divil a toe will ye put out of this kitchen," she said, flourishing her knife; "is it *you* walk to Bruff?"

"I must go to Bruff," said Julia again, almost mechanically; "but if you could give me a taste of sperrits, I think I'd be better able for the road."

Norry pulled open a drawer, and took from the back of it a bottle containing a colourless liquid.

"Drink this to your health!" she said in Irish, giving some in a mug to Julia; "it's potheen I got from friends of me own, back in Curraghduff." She put her hand into the drawer again, and after a little search produced from the centre of a bundle of amorphous rags a cardboard box covered with shells. Julia heard, without heeding it, the clink of money, and then three shillings were slapped down on the table beside her. "Ye'll go to Conolly's now, and get a car to dhrive ye," said Norry defiantly; "or howld on till I send Bid Sal to get it for ye. Not a word out o' ye now! Sure, don't I know well a pairson wouldn't think to put his money in his pocket whin he'd be hasting that way lavin' his house."

She did not wait for an answer, but shuffled to the scullery door, and began to scream for Bid Sal in her usual tones of acrid ill-temper. As she returned to the kitchen, Julia met her at the door. Her yellow face, that Norry had likened by courtesy to the driven snow, was now very red, and her eyes had a hot stare in them.

"I'm obliged to you, Norry Kelly," she said, "but

when I'm in need of charity I'll ask for it. Let me out, if you please."

The blast of fury with which Norry was preparing to reply was checked by a rattle of wheels in the yard, and Bid Sal appeared with the intelligence that Jimmy Daly was come over with the Bruff cart, and Norry was to go out to speak to him. When she came back she had a basket of grapes in one hand and a brace of grouse in the other, and as she put them down on the table, she informed her cousin, with distant politeness, that Jimmy Daly would drive her to Bruff.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE drive in the spring-cart was the first moment of comparative ease from suffering that Julia had known that day. Her tormented brain was cooled by the soft steady rush of air in her face, and the mouthful of "potheen" that she had drunk had at first the effect of dulling all her perceptions. The cart drove up the back avenue, and at the yard gate Julia asked the man to put her down. She clambered out of the cart with great difficulty, and going round to the hall door, went toilfully up the steps and rang the bell. Sir Benjamin was out, Lady Dysart was out, Mr. Dysart was out; so Gorman told her, with a doubtful look at the black Sunday gown that seemed to him indicative of the bearer of a begging petition, and he did not know when they would be in. He shut the door, and Julia went slowly down the steps again.

She had begun to walk mechanically away from the house, when she saw Sir Benjamin in his chair coming up a side walk. His face, with its white hair, gold spectacles, and tall hat, looked so sane and dignified, that, in spite of what Norry had said, she determined to carry out her first intention of speaking to him. She shivered, though the sun blazed hotly down upon her, as she walked towards the chair, not from nervousness, but from the creeping sense of illness, and the ground rose up in front of her as if she were going up-hill. She made a low bow to her landlord, and James Canavan, who knew her by sight, stopped the onward course of the chair.

"I wish to speak to you on an important matter, Sir Benjamin," began Julia in her best voice; "I was unable to see your agent, so I determined to come to yourself."

The gold spectacles were turned upon her fixedly, and the expression of the eyes behind them was more intelligent than usual.

"Begad that's one of the tenants, James," said Sir Benjamin, looking up at his attendant.

"Certainly, Sir Benjamin, certainly; this lady is

Miss Duffy, from Gurthnamuckla," replied the courtly James Canavan. "An old tenant, I might almost say an old friend of your honour's."

"And what the devil brings her here?" inquired Sir Benjamin, glowering at her under the wide brim of his hat.

"Sir Benjamin," began Julia again, "I know your memory's failing you, but you might remember that after the death of my father, Hubert Duffy—" Julia felt all the Protestant and aristocratic associations of the name as she said it—"you made a promise to me in your office that I should never be disturbed in my holding of the land."

"Devil so ugly a man as Hubert Duffy ever I saw," said Sir Benjamin, with a startling flight of memory; "and you're his daughter, are you? Begad, the dairymaid didn't distinguish herself!"

"Yes, I am his daughter, Sir Benjamin," replied Julia, catching at this flattering recognition. "I and my family have always lived on your estate, and my grandfather has often had the honour of entertaining you and the rest of the gentry, when they came fox-hunting through Gurthnamuckla. I am certain that

it is by no wish of yours, or of your kind and honourable son, Mr. Christopher, that your agent is pairsecuting me to make me leave the farm—" Her voice failed her, partly from the suffocating anger that rose in her at her own words, and partly from a dizziness that made the bath-chair, Sir Benjamin, and James Canavan, float up and down in the air before her.

Sir Benjamin suddenly began to brandish his stick. "What the devil is she saying about Christopher? What has Christopher to say to my tenants. D—n his insolence! He ought to be at school!"

The remarkable grimaces which James Canavan made at Julia from the back of the bath-chair informed her that she had lighted upon the worst possible method of ingratiating herself with her landlord, but the information came too late.

"Send that woman away, James Canavan!" he screamed, making sweeps at her with his oak stick. "She shall never put her d—d splay foot upon my avenue again. I'll thrash her and Christopher out of the place! Turn her out, I tell you, James Canavan!"

Julia stood motionless and aghast beyond the reach of the stick, until James Canavan motioned to her to

move aside; she staggered back among the long arms of a *lignum vitæ*, and the bath-chair, with its still cursing, gesticulating occupant, went by her at a round pace. Then she came slowly and uncertainly out on to the path again, and looked after the chariot wheels of the Cæsar to whom she had appealed.

James Canavan's coat-tails were standing out behind him as he drove the bath-chair round the corner of the path, and Sir Benjamin's imprecations came faintly back to her as she stood waiting till the throbbing giddiness should cease sufficiently for her to begin the homeward journey that stretched, horrible and impossible, before her. Her head ached wildly, and as she walked down the avenue she found herself stumbling against the edge of the grass, now on one side and now on the other. She said to herself that the people would say she was drunk, but she didn't care now what they said. It would be shortly till they saw her a disgraced woman, with the sheriff coming to put her out of her father's house on to the road. She gave a hard, short sob as this occurred to her, and she wondered if she would have the good luck to die, supposing she let herself fall down on the

grass, and lay there in the burning sun and took no more trouble about anything. Her thoughts came to her slowly and with great difficulty, but, once come, they whirled and hammered in her brain with the reiteration of chiming bells. She walked on, out of the gate, and along the road to Lismoyle, mechanically going in the shade where there was any, and avoiding the patches of broken stones, as possibly a man might who was walking out to be shot, but apathetically unconscious of what was happening.

At about this time the person whose name Julia Duffy had so unfortunately selected to conjure with was sitting under a tree on the slope opposite the hall door at Tally Ho reading aloud a poem of Rossetti's.

"Her eyes were like the wave within,
Like water reeds the poise
Of her soft body, dainty thin;
And like the water's noise
Her plaintive voice.

"For him the stream had never welled
In desert tracts malign
So sweet; nor had he ever felt
So faint in the sunshine
Of Palestine."

Francie's attention, which had revived at the descrip-

tion of the Queen, began to wander again. The sound in Christopher's voice told that the words were touching something deeper than his literary perception, and her sympathy answered to the tone, though the drift of the poem was dark to her. The music of the lines had just power enough upon her ear to predispose her to sentiment, and at present, sentiment with Francie meant the tender repose of her soul upon the thought of Mr. Gerald Hawkins.

A pause at turning over a leaf recalled her again to the fact of Christopher, with a transition not altogether unpleasant; she looked down at him as he lay on the grass, and began to wonder, as she had several times wondered before, if he really were in love with her. Nothing seemed more unlikely. Francie admitted it to herself as she watched his eyes following the lines in complete absorption, and knew that she had neither part nor lot in the things that touched him most nearly.

But the facts were surprising, there was no denying that. Even without Charlotte to tell her so she was aware that Christopher detested the practice of paying visits even more sincerely than most men, and was cer-

tainly not in the habit of visiting in Lismoyle. Except to see her, there was no reason that could bring him to Tally Ho. Surer than all fact, however, and rising superior to mere logic, was her instinctive comprehension of men and their ways, and sometimes she was almost sure that he came, not from kindness, or from that desire to improve her mind which she had discerned and compassionated, but because he could not help himself. She had arrived at one of these thrilling moments of certainty when Christopher's voice ceased upon the words, "Thy jealous God," and she knew that the time had come for her to say something appropriate.

"Oh thank you, Mr. Dysart—that's—that's awfully pretty. It's a sort of religious thing, isn't it?"

"Yes, I suppose so," answered Christopher, looking at her with a wavering smile, and feeling as if he had stepped suddenly to the ground out of a dream of flying; "the hero's a pilgrim, and that's always something."

"I know a lovely song called 'The Pilgrim of Love,'" said Francie timidly; "of course it wasn't the same thing as what you were reading, but it was awfully nice too."

Christopher looked up at her, and was almost convinced that she must have absorbed something of the sentiment if not the sense of what he had read, her face was so sympathetic and responsive. With that expression in her limpid eyes it gave him a peculiar sensation to hear her say the name of Love; it was even a delight, and fired his imagination with the picturing of what it would be like to hear her say it with all her awakened soul. He might have said something that would have suggested his feeling, in the fragmentary, inferential manner that Francie never knew what to make of, but that her eyes strayed away at a click of the latch of the avenue gate, and lost their unworldliness in the sharp and easy glance that is the unvalued privilege of the keen-sighted.

"Who in the name of goodness is this?" she said, sitting up and gazing at a black figure in the avenue; "it's some woman or other, but she looks very queer."

"I can't see that it matters much who it is," said Christopher irritably, "so long as she doesn't come up here, and she probably will if you let her see you."

"Mercy on us! she looks awful!" exclaimed

Francie incautiously; "why, it's Miss Duffy, and her face as red as I don't know what—oh, she's seen us!"

The voice had evidently reached Julia Duffy's ears; she came stumbling on, with her eyes fixed on the light blue dress under the beech tree, and when Christopher had turned, and got his eye-glass up, she was standing at the foot of the slope, looking at him with a blurred recognition.

"Mr. Dysart," she said in a hoarse voice, that, combined with her flushed face and staring eyes, made Christopher think she was drunk, "Sir Benjamin has driven me out of his place like a beggar; me, whose family is as long on his estate as himself; and his agent wants to drive me out of my farm that was promised to me by your father I should never be disturbed in it."

"You're Miss Duffy from Gurthnamuckla, are you not?" interrupted Christopher, eyeing her with natural disfavour, as he got up and came down the slope towards her.

"I am, Mr. Dysart, I am," she said defiantly, "and you and your family have a right to know me, and I ask you now to do me justice, that I shall not be

turned out into the ditch for the sake of a lying double-faced schemer—" Her voice failed, as it had failed before when she spoke to Sir Benjamin, and the action of her hand that carried on her meaning had a rage in it that hid its despair.

"I think if you have anything to say you had better write it," said Christopher, beginning to think that Lambert had some excuse for his opinion of Miss Duffy, but beginning also to pity what he thought was a spectacle of miserable, middle-aged drunkenness; "you may be sure that no injustice will be done to you—"

"Is it injustice?" broke in Julia, while the fever cloud seemed to roll its weight back for a moment from her brain; "maybe you'd say there was injustice if you knew all I know. Where's Charlotte Mullen, till I tell her to her face that I know her plots and her thricks? 'Tis to say that to her I came here, and to tell her 'twas she lent money to Peter Joyce that was grazing my farm, and refused it to him secondly, the way he'd go bankrupt on me, and she's to have my farm and my house that my grandfather built, thinking to even herself with the rest of the gentry—"

Her voice had become wilder and louder, and

Christopher, uncomfortably aware that Francie could hear this indictment of Miss Mullen as distinctly as he did, intervened again.

"Look here, Miss Duffy," he said in a lower voice, "it's no use talking like this. If I can help you I will, but it would be a good deal better if you went home now. You—you seem ill, and it's a great mistake to stay here exciting yourself and making a noise. Write to me, and I'll see that you get fair play."

Julia threw back her head and laughed, with a venom that seemed too concentrated for drunkenness.

"Ye'd better see ye get fair play yerself before you talk so grand about it!" She pointed up at Francie. "Mrs. Dysart indeed!"—she bowed with a sarcastic exaggeration, that in saner moments she would not have been capable of—"Lady Dysart of Bruff, one of these days I suppose!"—she bowed again. "That's what Miss Charlotte Mullen has laid out for ye," addressing herself to Christopher, "and ye'll not get away from that one till ye're under her foot!"

She laughed again; her face became vacant and yet full of pain, and she staggered away down the avenue, talking violently and gesticulating with her hands.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MRS. LAMBERT gathered up her purse, her list, her bag, and her parasol from the table in Miss Greely's wareroom, and turned to give her final directions.

"Now, Miss Greely, before Sunday for certain; and you'll be careful about the set of the skirt, that it doesn't firk up at the side, the way the black one did—"

"*We* understand the set of a skirt, Mrs. Lambert," interposed the elder Miss Greely in her most aristocratic voice; "I think you may leave that to us."

Mrs. Lambert retreated, feeling as snubbed as it was intended that she should feel, and with a last injunction to the girl in the shop to be sure not to let the Rosemount messenger leave town on Saturday night without the parcel that he'd get from upstairs, she addressed herself to the task of walking home. She was in very good spirits, and the thought of a new dress for church next Sunday was ex-

hilarating; it was a pleasant fact also that Charlotte Mullen was coming to tea, and she and Muffy, the Maltese terrier, turned into Barrett's to buy a tea-cake in honour of the event. Mrs. Beattie was also there, and the two ladies and Mrs. Barrett had a most enjoyable discussion on tea; Mrs. Beattie advocating "the one and threepenny from the Stores," while Mrs. Barrett and her other patroness agreed in upholding the Lismoyle three-and-sixpenny against all others. Mrs. Lambert set forth again with her tea-cake in her hand, and with such a prosperous expression of countenance that Nance the Fool pursued her down the street with a confidence that was not unrewarded.

"That the hob of heaven may be yer scratching post!" she screamed, in the midst of one of her most effective fits of coughing, as Mrs. Lambert's round little dolmaned figure passed complacently onward, "that Pether and Paul may wait on ye, and that the saints may be surprised at yer success! She's sharitable, the craythur," she ended in a lower voice, as she rejoined the rival and confederate who had yielded to her the right of plundering the last passer-by, "and

sign's on it, it thrives with her; she's got very gross!"

"Faith it wasn't crackin' blind nuts made her that fat," said the confidante unamiably, "and with all her riches she didn't give ye the price of a dhrink itself!"

Mrs. Lambert entered her house by the kitchen, so as to give directions to Eliza Hackett about the tea-cake, and when she got upstairs she found Charlotte already awaiting her in the dining-room, occupied in reading a pamphlet on stall feeding, with apparently as complete a zest as if it had been one of those yellow paper-covered volumes whose appearance aroused such a respectful horror in Lismoyle.

"Well, Lucy, is this the way you receive your visitors?" she began jocularly, as she rose and kissed her hostess's florid cheek; "I needn't ask how you are, as you're looking blooming."

"I declare I think this hot summer suits me. I feel stronger than I did this good while back, thank God. Roddy was saying this morning he'd have to put me and Muffy on banting, we'd both put up so much flesh."

The turkey-hen looked so pleased as she recalled

this conjugal endearment that Charlotte could not resist the pleasure of taking her down a peg or two.

"I think he's quite right," she said with a laugh; "nothing ages ye like fat, and no man likes to see his wife turning into an old woman."

Poor Mrs. Lambert took the snub meekly, as was her wont. "Well, anyway, it's a comfort to feel a little stronger, Charlotte; isn't it what they say, 'laugh and grow fat.'" She took off her dolman and rang the bell for tea. "Tell me, Charlotte," she went on, "did you hear anything about that poor Miss Duffy?"

"I was up at the infirmary this morning asking the Sister about her. It was Rattray himself found her lying on the road, and brought her in; he says its inflammation of the brain, and if she pulls through she'll not be good for anything afterwards."

"Oh, my, my!" said Mrs. Lambert sympathetically. "And to think of her being at our gate lodge that very day! Mary Holloran said she had that dying look in her face you couldn't mistake."

"And no wonder, when you think of the way she lived," said Charlotte angrily; "starving there in

Gurthnamuckla like a rat that'd rather die in his hole than come out of it."

"Well, she's out of it now, poor thing," ventured Mrs. Lambert.

"She is! and I think she'll stay out of it. She'll never be right in her head again, and her things'll have to be sold to support her and pay some one to look after her, and if they don't fetch that much she'll have to go into the county asylum. I wanted to talk to Roddy about that very thing," went on Charlotte, irritation showing itself in her voice; "but I suppose he's going riding or boating or amusing himself somehow, as usual."

"No, he's not!" replied Mrs. Lambert, with just a shade of triumph "He's taken a long walk by himself. He thought perhaps he'd better look after his figure as well as me and Muffy, and he wanted to see a horse he's thinking of buying. He says he'd like to be able to leave me the mare to draw me in the phaeton."

"Where will he get the money to buy it?" asked Charlotte sharply.

"Oh! I leave all the money matters to him," said

Mrs. Lambert, with that expression of serene satisfaction in her husband that had already had a malign effect on Miss Mullen's temper. "I know I can trust him."

"You've a very different story to-day to what you had the last time I was here," said Charlotte with a sneer. "Are all your doubts of him composed?"

The entrance of the tea-tray precluded all possibility of answer; but Charlotte knew that her javelin was quivering in the wound. The moment the door closed behind the servant, Mrs. Lambert turned upon her assailant with the whimper in her voice that Charlotte knew so well.

"I greatly regretted, Charlotte," she said, with as much dignity as she could muster, "speaking to you the way I did, for I believe now I was totally mistaken."

It might be imagined that Charlotte would have taken pleasure in Mrs. Lambert's security, inasmuch as it implied her own; but, so far from this being the case, it was intolerable to her that her friend should be blind to the fact that tortured her night and day.

"And what's changed your mind, might I ask?"

"His conduct has changed my mind, Charlotte," replied Mrs. Lambert severely; "and that's enough for me."

"Well, I'm glad you're pleased with his conduct, Lucy; but if he was *my* husband I'd find out what he was doing at Tally Ho every day in the week before I was so rejoiced about him."

Charlotte's face had flushed in the heat of argument, and Mrs. Lambert felt secretly a little frightened.

"Begging your pardon, Charlotte," she said, still striving after dignity, "he's not there every day, and when he does go it's to talk business with you he goes, about Gurthnamuckla and money and things like that."

Charlotte sat up with a dangerous look about her jaw. She could hardly believe that Lambert could have babbled her secrets to this despised creature in order to save himself. "He appears to tell you a good deal about his business affairs," she said, her eyes quelling the feeble resistance in Mrs. Lambert's; "but he doesn't seem to tell you the truth about other matters. He's telling ye lies about what takes

him to Tally Ho; it isn't to talk business—" the colour deepened in her face. "I tell ye once for all, that as sure as God's in heaven he's fascinated with that girl! This isn't the beginning of it—ye needn't think it! She flirted with him in Dublin, and though she doesn't care two snaps of her fingers for him she's flirting with him now!"

The real Charlotte had seldom been nearer the surface than at this moment; and Mrs. Lambert cowered before the manifestation.

"You're very unkind to me, Charlotte," she said in a voice that was tremulous with fright and anger; "I wonder at you, that you could say such things to me about my own husband."

"Well, perhaps you'd rather I said it to you now in confidence than that every soul in Lismoyle should be prating and talking about it, as they will be if ye don't put down yer foot, and tell Roddy he's making a fool of himself!"

Mrs. Lambert remained stunned for a few seconds at the bare idea of putting down her foot where Roderick was concerned, or of even insinuating that that supreme being could make a fool of himself,

and then her eyes filled with tears of mortification.

"He is *not* making a fool of himself, Charlotte," she said, endeavouring to pluck up spirit, "and you've no right to say anything of the kind. You might have more respect for your family than to be trying to raise scandal this way, and upsetting me, and I not able for it!"

Charlotte looked at her, and kept back with an effort the torrent of bullying fury that was seething in her. She had no objection to upsetting Mrs. Lambert, but she preferred that hysterics should be deferred until she had established her point. Why she wished to establish it she did not explain to herself, but her restless jealousy, combined with her intolerance of the Fool's Paradise in which Mrs. Lambert had entrenched herself, made it impossible for her to leave the subject alone.

"I think ye know it's not my habit to raise scandal, Lucy, and I'm not one to make an assertion without adequate grounds for it," she said in her strong, acrid voice; "as I said before, this flirtation is an old story. I have my own reasons for knowing that there was

more going on than anyone suspected, from the time she was in short frocks till she came down here, and now, if she hadn't another affair on hand, she'd have the whole country in a blaze about it. Why, d'ye know that habit she wears? It was your husband paid for that!"

She emphasised each word between her closed teeth, and her large face was so close to Mrs. Lambert's, by the time she had finished speaking, that the latter shrank back.

"I don't believe you, Charlotte," she said with trembling lips; how do you know it?"

Charlotte had no intention of telling that her source of information had been the contents of a writing-case of Francie's, an absurd receptacle for photographs and letters that bore the word "Papeterie" on its greasy covers, and had a lock bearing a family resemblance to the lock of Miss Mullen's work-box. But a cross-examination by the turkey-hen was easily evaded.

"Never you mind how I know it. It's true." Then, with a connection of ideas that she would have taken more pains to conceal in dealing with anyone else,

"Did ye ever see any of the letters she wrote to him when she was in Dublin?"

"No, Charlotte; I'm not in the habit of looking at my husband's letters. I think the tea is drawn," she continued, making a last struggle to maintain her position, "and I'd be glad to hear no more on the subject." She took the cosy off the tea-pot, and began to pour out the tea, but her hands were shaking, and Charlotte's eye made her nervous. "Oh, I'm very tired—I'm too long without my tea. Oh, Charlotte, why do you annoy me this way when you know it's so bad for me!" She put down the tea-pot, and covered her face with her hands. "Is it me own dear husband that you say such things of? Oh, it couldn't be true, and he always so kind to me, indeed, it isn't true, Charlotte," she protested piteously between her sobs.

"Me dear Lucy," said Charlotte, laying her broad hand on Mrs. Lambert's knee, "I wish I could say it wasn't, though of course the wisest of us is liable to error. Come now!" she said, as if struck by a new idea. "I'll tell ye how we could settle the matter! It's a way you won't like, and it's a way I don't like

either, but I solemnly think you owe it to yourself, and to your position as a wife. Will you let me say it to you?"

"Oh, you may, Charlotte, you may," said Mrs. Lambert tearfully.

"Well, my advice to you is this, to see what old letters of hers he has, and ye'll be able to judge for yourself what the truth of the case is. If there's no harm in them I'll be only too ready to congratulate ye on proving me in the wrong, and if there is, why, ye'll know what course to pursue."

"Is it look at Roddy's letters?" cried Mrs. Lambert, emerging from her handkerchief with a stare of horror; "he'd kill me if he thought I looked at them!"

"Ah, nonsense, woman, he'll never know you looked at them," said Charlotte, scanning the room quickly; "is it in his study he keeps his private letters?"

"No, I think it's in his old despatch-box up on the shelf there," answered Mrs. Lambert, a little taken with the idea, in spite of her scruples.

"Then ye're done," said Charlotte, looking up at

the despatch-box in its absolute security of Bramah lock; "of course he has his keys with him always."

"Well then, d'ye know," said Mrs. Lambert hesitatingly, "I think I heard his keys jingling in the pocket of the coat he took off him before he went out, and I didn't notice him taking them out of it—but, oh, my dear, I wouldn't dare to open any of his things. I might as well quit the house if he found it out."

"I tell you it's your privilege as a wife, and your plain duty besides, to see those letters," urged Charlotte, "I'd recommend you to go up and get those keys now, this minute; it's like the hand of Providence that he should leave them behind him."

The force of her will had its effect. Mrs. Lambert got up, and, after another declaration that Roderick would kill her, went out of the room and up the stairs at a pace that Charlotte did not think her capable of. She heard her step hurrying into the room overhead, and in a surprisingly short time she was back again, uttering pants of exhaustion and alarm, but holding the keys in her hand.

"Oh," she said, "I thought every minute I heard

him coming to the door! Here they are for you, Charlotte, take them! I'll not have anything more to say to them."

She flung the keys into Miss Mullen's lap, and prepared to sink into her chair again. Charlotte jumped up, and the keys rattled on to the floor.

"And d'ye think I'd lay a finger on them?" she said, in such a voice that Mrs. Lambert checked herself in the action of sitting down, and Muffy fled under his mistress's chair and barked in angry alarm. "Pick them up yourself! It's no affair of mine!" She pointed with a fateful finger at the keys, and Mrs. Lambert obediently stooped for them. "Now, there's the desk, ye'd better not lose any more time, but get it down."

The shelf on which the desk stood was the highest one of a small book-case, and was just above the level of Mrs. Lambert's head, so that when, after many a frightened look out of the window, she stretched up her short arms to take it down, she found the task almost beyond her.

"Come and help me, Charlotte," she cried; "I'm afraid it'll fall on me!"

"I'll not put a hand to it," said Charlotte, without moving, while her ugly, mobile face twitched with excitement; "it's you have the right and no one else, and I'd recommend ye to hurry!"

The word hurry acted electrically on Mrs. Lambert; she put forth all her feeble strength, and lifting the heavy despatch-box from the shelf, she staggered with it to the dinner-table.

"Oh, it's the weight of the house!" she gasped, collapsing on to a chair beside it.

"Here, open it now quickly, and we'll talk about the weight of it afterwards," said Charlotte so imperiously that Mrs. Lambert, moved by a power that was scarcely her own, fumbled through the bunch for the key.

"There it is! Don't you see the Brahmah key?" exclaimed Charlotte, hardly repressing the inclination to call her friend a fool and to snatch the bunch from her; "press it in hard now, or ye'll not get it to turn."

If the lock had not been an easy one, it is probable that Mrs. Lambert's helpless fingers would never have turned the key, but it yielded to the first touch, and

she lifted the lid. Charlotte craned over her shoulder with eyes that ravened on the contents of the box.

"No, there's nothing there," she said, taking in with one look the papers that lay in the tray; "lift up the tray!"

Mrs. Lambert, now past remonstrance, did as she was bid, and some bundles of letters and a few photographs were brought to light.

"Show the photographs!" said Charlotte in one fierce breath.

But here Mrs. Lambert's courage failed. "Oh, I can't, don't ask me!" she wailed, clasping her hands on her bosom, with a terror of some irrevocable truth that might await her adding itself to the fear of discovery.

Charlotte caught one of her hands, and, with a guttural sound of contempt, forced it down on to the photograph.

"Show it to me!"

Her victim took up the photographs, and, turning them round, revealed two old pictures of Lambert in riding clothes, with Francie beside him in a very badly made habit and with her hair down her back.

"What d'ye think of that?" said Charlotte. She was gripping Mrs. Lambert's sloping shoulder, and her breath was coming hard and short. "Now, get out her letters. There they are in the corner!"

"Ah, she's only a child in that picture," said Mrs. Lambert in a tone of relief, as she hurriedly put the photographs back.

"Open the letters and ye'll see what sort of a child she was."

Mrs. Lambert made no further demur. She took out the bundle that Charlotte pointed to, and drew the top one from its retaining india-rubber strap. Even in affairs of the heart Mr. Lambert was a tidy man.

"My dear Mr. Lambert," she read aloud, in a deprecating, tearful voice that was more than ever like the quivering chirrup of a turkey-hen, "the cake was scrumptious, all the girls were after me for a bit of it, and asking where I got it, but I wouldn't tell. I put it under my pillow three nights, but all I dreamt of was Uncle Robert walking round and round Stephen's Green in his night-cap. You must have had a grand wedding. Why didn't you ask me there to dance at

it? So now no more from your affectionate friend, F. Fitzpatrick."

Mrs. Lambert leaned back, and her hands fell into her lap.

"Well, thank God there's no harm in that, Charlotte," she said, closing her eyes with a sigh that might have been relief, though her voice sounded a little dreamy and bewildered.

"Ah, you began at the wrong end," said Charlotte, little attentive to either sigh or tone, "that was written five years ago. Here, what's in this?" She indicated the one lowest in the packet.

Mrs. Lambert opened her eyes.

"The drops!" she said with sudden energy, "on the side-board—oh, save me—!"

Her voice fainted away, her eyes closed, and her head fell limply on to her shoulder. Charlotte sprang instinctively towards the side-board, but suddenly stopped and looked from Mrs. Lambert to the bundle of letters. She caught it up, and plucking out a couple of the most recent, read them through with astonishing speed. She was going to take out another when a slight movement from her companion made her throw them down.

Mrs. Lambert was slipping off the high dining-room chair on which she was sitting, and there was a look about her mouth that Charlotte had never seen there before. Charlotte had her arm under her in a moment, and, letting her slip quietly down, laid her flat on the floor. Through the keen and crowding contingencies of the moment came a sound from outside, a well-known voice calling and whistling to a dog, and in the same instant Charlotte had left Mrs. Lambert and was deftly and swiftly replacing letters and photographs in the despatch-box. She closed the lid noiselessly, put it back on its shelf with scarcely an effort, and after a second of uncertainty, slipped the keys into Mrs. Lambert's pocket. She knew that Lambert would never guess at his wife's one breach of faith. Then, with a quickness almost incredible in a woman of her build, she got the drops from the sideboard, poured them out, and, on her way back to the inert figure on the floor, rang the bell violently. Muffy had crept from under the table to snuff with uncanny curiosity at his mistress's livid face, and as Charlotte approached, he put his tail between his legs and yapped shrilly at her.

"Get out, ye damned cur!" she exclaimed, the coarse, superstitious side of her nature coming uppermost now that the absorbing stress of those acts of self-preservation was over. Her big foot lifted the dog and sent him flying across the room, and she dropped on her knees beside the motionless, tumbled figure on the floor. "She's dead! she's dead!" she cried out, and as if in protest against her own words she flung water upon the unresisting face, and tried to force the drops between the closed teeth. But the face never altered; it only acquired momentarily the immovable placidity of death, that asserted itself in silence, and gave the feeble features a supreme dignity, in spite of the thin dabbled fringe and the gold ear-rings and brooch, that were instinct with the vulgarities of life.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FEW possessed of any degree of imagination can turn their backs on a churchyard, after having witnessed there the shovelling upon and stamping down of the last poor refuge of that which all feel to be superfluous, a mere fragment of the inevitable *débris* of life, without a clinging hope that in some way or other the process may be avoided for themselves. In spite of philosophy, the body will not picture its surrender to the sordid thraldom of the undertaker and the mastery of the spade, and preferably sees itself falling through cold miles of water to some vague resting-place below the tides, or wedged beyond search in the grip of an ice crack, or swept as grey ash into a cinerary urn; anything rather than the prisoning coffin and blind weight of earth. So Christopher thought impatiently, as he drove back to Bruff from Mrs. Lambert's funeral, in the dismal solemnity

of black clothes and a brougham, while the distant rattle of a reaping-machine was like a voice full of the health and energy of life, that talked on of harvest, and would not hear of graves.

That the commonplace gloom of a funeral should have plunged his general ideas into despondency is, however, too much to believe of even such a super-sensitive mind as Christopher's. It gave a darker wash of colour to what was already clouded, and probably it was its trite, terrific sneer at human desire and human convention that deadened his heart from time to time with fatalistic suggestion; but it was with lesser facts than these that he strove. Miss Mullen depositing hysterically a wreath upon her friend's coffin, in the acute moment of lowering it into the grave; Miss Mullen sitting hysterically beside him in the carriage as he drove her back to Tally Ho in the eyes of all men; Miss Mullen lying, still hysterical, on her drawing-room sofa, holding in her black-gloved hand a tumbler of sal volatile and water, and eventually commanding her emotion sufficiently to ask him to bring her, that afternoon, a few books and papers, to quiet her nerves, and to rob of its weari-

ness the bad night that would inevitably be her portion.

It was opposite these views, which, as far as tears went, might well be called dissolving, that his mind chiefly took its stand, in unutterable repugnance, and faint endeavour to be blind to his own convictions. He was being chased. Now that he knew it he wondered how he could ever have been unaware of it; it was palpable to anyone, and he felt in advance what it would be like to hear the exultant winding of the huntsman's horn, if the quarry were overtaken. The position was intolerable from every rational point of view; Christopher with his lethargic scorn of social tyrannies and stale maxims of class, could hardly have believed that he was sensible of so many of these points, and despised himself accordingly. Julia Duffy's hoarse voice still tormented his ear in involuntary spasms of recollection, keeping constantly before him the thought of the afternoon of four days ago, when he and Francie had been informed of the destiny allotted to them. The formless and unquestioned dream through which he had glided had then been broken up, like some sleeping stretch of river when

the jaws of the dredger are dashed into it, and the mud is dragged to light, and the soiled waves carry the outrage onward in ceaseless escape. Nothing now could place him where he had been before, nor could he wish to regain that purposeless content. It was better to look things in the face at last, and see where they were going to end. It was better to know himself to be Charlotte's prize than to give up Francie.

This was what it meant, he said to himself, while he changed his funereal garb, and tried to get into step with the interrupted march of the morning. The alternative had been with him for four days, and now, while he wrote his letters, and sat at luncheon, and collected the books that were to interpose between Miss Mullen and her grief, the choice became more despotic than ever, in spite of the antagonism that met it in every surrounding. All the chivalry that smouldered under the modern malady of exhausted enthusiasm ranged itself on Francie's side; all the poetry in which he had steeped his mind, all his own poetic fancy, combined to blind him to many things that he would otherwise have seen. He acquited her of any share in her cousin's coarse scheming

with a passionateness that in itself testified to the terror lest it might be true. He had idealised her to the pitch that might have been expected, and clothed her with his own refinement, as with a garment, so that it was her position that hurt him most, her embarrassment that shamed him beyond his own.

Christopher's character is easier to feel than to describe; so conscious of its own weakness as to be almost incapable of confident effort, and with a soul so humble and straightforward that it did know its own strength and simplicity. Some dim understanding of him must have reached Francie, with her ignorant sentimentalities and her Dublin brogue; and as a sea-weed stretches vague arms up towards the light through the conflict of the tides, her pliant soul rose through its inherited vulgarities, and gained some vision of higher things. Christopher could not know how unparalleled a person he was in her existence, of how wholly unknown a type. Hawkins and he had been stars of unimagined magnitude; but though she had attained to the former's sphere with scarcely an effort, Christopher remained infinitely re-

mote. She could scarcely have believed that as he drove from Bruff in the quiet sunshine of the afternoon, and surmounted the hill near its gate, the magic that she herself had newly learned about was working its will with him.

The corn that had stood high between him and Francie that day when he had ridden back to look after her, was bound in sheaves on the yellow upland, and the foolish omen set his pulses going. If she were now passing along that other road there would be nothing between him and her. He had got past the stage of reason, even his power of mocking at himself was dead, or perhaps it was that there seemed no longer anything that could be mocked at. In spite of his knowledge of the world the position had an aspect that was so serious and beautiful as to overpower the others, and to become one of the mysteries of life into which he had thought himself too cheap and shallow to enter. A few weeks ago a visit to Tally Ho would have been a penance and a weariness of the flesh, a thing to be groaned over with Pamela, and endured only for the sake of collecting some new pearl of rhetoric from Miss Mullen. Now

each thought of it brought again the enervating thrill, the almost sickening feeling of subdued excitement and expectation.

It was the Lismoyle market-day, and Christopher made his way slowly along the street, squeezing between carts and barrels, separating groups locked together in the extremity of bargaining, and doing what in him lay to avoid running over the old women, who, blinded by their overhanging hoods and deaf by nature, paraded the centre of the thoroughfare with a fine obliviousness of dog-carts and their drivers. Most of the better class of shops had their shutters up in recognition of the fact that Mrs. Lambert, a customer whom neither co-operative stores or eighteenpenny teas had been able to turn from her allegiance, had this morning passed their doors for the last time, in slow incongruous pomp, her silver-mounted coffin commanding all eyes as the glass-sided hearse moved along with its quivering bunches of black plumes. The funeral was still a succulent topic in the gabble of the market; Christopher heard here and there such snatches of it as:

"Rest her sowl, the crayture! 'Tis she was the good wife, and more than all, she was the beautiful housekeeper!"

"Is it *he* lonesome afther her? No, nor if he berrid ten like her."

"She was a spent little woman always, and 'tis she that doted down on him."

"And ne'er a child left afther her! Well, she must be exshcused."

"Musha, I'd love her bones!" shouted Nance the Fool, well aware of the auditor in the dog-cart, "there wasn't one like her in the nation, nor in the world, no, nor in the town o' Galway!"

Towards the end of the street, at the corner of a lane leading to the quay, something like a fight was going on, and, as he approached, Christopher saw, over the heads of an admiring audience, the infuriated countenance of a Lismoyle beggar-woman, one of the many who occasionally legalised their existence by selling fish, between long bouts of mendicancy and drunkenness. Mary Norris was apparently giving what she would call the length and breadth of her tongue to some customer who had cast doubts upon

the character of her fish, a customer who was for the moment quiescent, and hidden behind the tall figure of her adversary.

"Whoever says thim throuts isn't leppin' fresh out o' the lake he's a dom liar, and it's little I think of tellin' it t'ye up to yer nose! There's not one in the counthry but knows yer thricks and yer chat, and ye may go home out o' that, with yer bag sthrapped round ye, and ye can take the tay-laves and the dhrippin' from the servants, and huxther thim to feed yer cats, but thanks be to God ye'll take nothing out o' my basket this day!"

There was a titter of horrified delight from the crowd.

"Ye never spoke a truer word than that, Mary Norris," replied a voice that sent a chill down Christopher's back; "when I come into Lismoyle, it's not to buy rotten fish from a drunken fish-fag, that'll be begging for crusts at my hall-door to-morrow. If I hear another word out of yer mouth I'll give you and your fish to the police, and the streets'll be rid of you and yer infernal tongue for a week, at all events, and the prison'll have a treat that it's pretty well used to!"

Another titter rewarded this sally, and Charlotte, well pleased, turned to walk away. As she did so, she caught sight of Christopher, looking at her with an expression from which he had not time to remove his emotions, and for a moment she wished that the earth would open and swallow her up. She reddened visibly, but recovered herself, and at once made her way out into the street towards him.

"How are you again, Mr. Dysart? You just came in time to get a specimen of the *res angusta domi*," she said, in a voice that contrasted almost ludicrously with her last utterances. "People like David, who talk about the advantages of poverty, have probably never tried buying fish in Lismoyle. It's always the way with these drunken old hags. They repay your charity by impudence and bad language, and one has to speak pretty strongly to them to make one's meaning penetrate to their minds."

Her eyes were still red and swollen from her violent crying at the funeral. But for them, Christopher could hardly have believed that this was the same being whom he had last seen on the sofa at Tally Ho, with the black gloves and the sal volatile.

"Oh yes, of course," he said vaguely; "everyone has to undergo Mary Norris some time or other. If you are going back to Tally Ho now, I can drive you there."

The invitation was lukewarm as it well could be, but had it been the most fervent in the world Charlotte had no intention of accepting it.

"No thank you, Mr. Dysart. I'm not done my marketing yet, but Francie's at home and she'll give you tea. Don't wait for me. I've no appetite for anything to-day. I only came out to get a mouthful of fresh air, in hopes it might give me a better night, though, indeed, I've small chance of it after what I've gone through."

Christopher drove on, and tried not to think of Miss Mullen or of his mother or Pamela, while his too palpably discreet hostess elbowed her way through the crowd in the opposite direction.

Francie was sitting in the drawing-room awaiting her visitor. She had been up very early making the wreath of white asters that Charlotte had laid on Mrs. Lambert's coffin, and had shed some tears over the making of it, for the sake of the kindly little woman

who had never been anything but good to her. She had spent a trying morning in ministering to Charlotte; after her early dinner she had dusted the drawing-room, and refilled the vases in a manner copied as nearly as possible from Pamela's arrangement of flowers; and she was now feeling as tired as might reasonably have been expected. About Christopher she felt thoroughly disconcerted and out of conceit with herself. It was strange that she, like him, should least consider her own position when she thought about the things that Julia Duffy had said to them; her motive was very different, but it touched the same point. It was the effect upon Christopher that she ceaselessly pictured, that she longed to understand; whether or not he believed what he had heard, and whether, if he believed, he would ever be the same to her. His desertion would have been much less surprising than his allegiance, but she would have felt it very keenly, with the same aching resignation with which we bear one of nature's acts of violence. When she met him this morning her embarrassment had taken the simple form of distance and avoidance, and a feeling that she could never

show him plainly enough that she, at least, had no designs upon him; yet, through it all, she clung to the belief that he would not change towards her. It was burning humiliation to see Charlotte spread her nets in the sight of the bird, but it did not prevent her from dressing herself as becomingly as she could when the afternoon came, nor, so ample are the domains of sentiment, did some nervous expectancy in the spare minutes before Christopher arrived deter her from taking out of her pocket a letter worn by long sojourn there, and reading it with delaying and softened eyes.

Her correspondence with Hawkins had been fraught with difficulties; in fact, it had been only by the aid of a judicious shilling and an old pair of boots bestowed on Louisa, that she had ensured to herself a first sight of the contents of the post-bag, before it was conveyed, according to custom, to Miss Mullen's bedroom. Somehow since Mr. Hawkins had left Hythe and gone to Yorkshire the quantity and quality of his letters had dwindled surprisingly. The three thick weekly budgets of sanguine anticipation and profuse endearments had languished into a

sheet or two every ten days of affectionate retrospect in which less and less reference was made to breaking off his engagement with Miss Coppard, that trifling and summary act which was his ostensible mission in going to his *fiancée's* house; and this, the last letter from him, had been merely a few lines of excuse for not having written before, ending with regret that his leave would be up in a fortnight, as he had had a ripping time on old Coppard's moor, and the cubbing was just beginning, a remark which puzzled Francie a good deal, though its application was possibly clearer to her than the writer had meant it to be. Inside the letter was a photograph of himself, that had been done at Hythe, and was transferred by Francie from letter to letter, in order that it might never leave her personal keeping; and, turning from the barren trivialities over which she had been poring, Francie fell to studying the cheerful, unintellectual face therein portrayed above the trim glories of a mess jacket.

She was still looking at it when she heard the expected wheels; she stuffed the letter back into her pocket, then, remembering the photograph, pulled

the letter out again and put it into it. She was putting the letter away for the second time when Christopher came in, and in her guilty self-consciousness she felt that he must have noticed the action.

"How did you get in so quickly?" she said, with a confusion that heightened the general effect of discovery.

"Donovan was there and took the trap," said Christopher, "and the hall door was open, so I came in."

He sat down, and neither seemed certain for a moment as to what to say next.

"I didn't really expect you to come, Mr. Dysart," began Francie, the colour that the difficulty with the photograph had given her ebbing slowly away; "you have a right to be tired as well as us, and Charlotte being upset that way and all, made it awfully late before you got home I'm afraid."

"I met her a few minutes ago, and was glad to see that she was all right again," said Christopher perfunctorily; "but certainly if I had been she, and had had any option in the matter, I should have stayed at home this morning."

Both felt the awkwardness of discussing Miss

Mullen, but it seemed a shade less than the awkwardness of ignoring her.

"She was such a friend of poor Mrs. Lambert's," said Francie; "and I declare," she added, glad of even this trivial chance of showing herself antagonistic to Charlotte, "I think she delights in funerals."

"She has a peculiar way of showing her delight," replied Christopher, with just enough ill-nature to make Francie feel that her antagonism was understood and sympathised with.

Francie gave an irrepressible laugh. "I don't think she minds crying before people. I wish everyone minded crying as little as she does."

Christopher looked at her, and thought he saw something about her eyes that told of tears.

"Do you mind crying?" he said, lowering his voice, while more feeling escaped into his glance than he had intended; "it doesn't seem natural that you should ever cry."

"You're very inquisitive!" said Francie, the sparkle coming back to her eye in a moment; "why shouldn't I cry if I choose?"

"I should not like to think that you had anything to make you cry."

She looked quickly at him to see if his face were as sincere as his voice; her perceptions were fine enough to suggest that it would be typical of Christopher to show her by a special deference and friendliness that he was sorry for her, but now, as ever, she was unable to classify those delicate shades of manner and meaning that might have told her where his liking melted into love. She had been accustomed to see men as trees, walking beings about whose individuality of character she did not trouble herself; generally they made love to her, and, if they did not, she presumed that they did not care about her, and gave them no further attention. But this test did not seem satisfactory in Christopher's case.

"I know what everyone thinks of me," she said, a heart truth welling to the surface as she felt herself pitied and comprehended; "no one believes I ever have any trouble about anything."

Christopher's heart throbbed at the bitterness in a voice that he had always known so wholly careless and undisturbed; it increased his pity for her a thousandfold, but it stirred him with a strange and selfish pleasure to think that she had suffered. What-

ever it was that was in her mind, it had given him a glimpse of that deeper part of her nature, so passionately guessed at, so long unfindable. He did not for an instant think of Hawkins, having explained away that episode to himself some time before in the light of his new reading of Francie's character; it was Charlotte's face as she confronted Mary Norris in the market that came to him, and the thought of what it must be to be under her roof and dependent on her. He saw now the full pain that Francie bore in hearing herself proclaimed as the lure by which he was to be captured, and that he should have brought her thus low roused a tenderness in him that would not be gainsaid.

"*I* don't think it," he said, stammering; "you might believe that I think more about you than other people do. I know you feel things more than you let anyone see, and that makes it all the worse for anyone who—who is sorry for you, and wants to tell you so—"

This halting statement, so remarkably different in diction from the leisurely sentences in which Christopher usually expressed himself, did not tend to put Francie more at her ease. She reddened slowly and painfully as his short-sighted, grey eyes rested upon her. Hawkins filled so prominent a place in her

mind that Christopher's ambiguous allusions seemed to be directed absolutely at him, and her hand instinctively slipped into her pocket and clasped the letter that was there, as if in that way she could hold her secret fast.

"Ah, well,"—she tried to say it lightly—"I don't want so very much pity yet awhile; when I do, I'll ask you for it!"

She disarmed the words of their flippancy by the look with which she lifted her dark-lashed eyes to him, and Christopher's last shred of common sense sank in their tender depths and was lost there.

"Is that true?" he said, without taking his eyes from her face. "Do you really trust me? would you promise always to trust me?"

"Yes, I'm sure I'd always trust you," answered Francie, beginning in some inexplicable way to feel frightened; "I think you're awfully kind."

"No, I am not kind," he said, turning suddenly very white, and feeling his blood beating down to his finger-tips; "you must not say that when you know it's—" Something seemed to catch in his throat and take his voice away. "It gives me the greatest pleasure to do anything for you," he ended lamely.

The clear crimson deepened in Francie's cheeks.

She knew in one startling instant what Christopher meant, and her fingers twined and untwined themselves in the crochet sofa-cover as she sat, not daring to look at him, and not knowing in the least what to say.

"How can I be kind to you?" went on Christopher, his vacillation swept away by the look in her downcast face that told him she understood him; "it's just the other way, it's you who are kind to me. If you only knew what happiness it is to me—to—to be with you—to do anything on earth for you—you know what I mean—I see you know what I mean."

A vision rose up before Francie of her past self, loitering about the Dublin streets, and another of an incredible and yet possible future self, dwelling at Bruff in purple and fine linen, and then she looked up and met Christopher's eyes. She saw the look of tortured uncertainty and avowed purpose that there was no mistaking; Bruff and its glories melted away before it, and in their stead came Hawkins' laughing face, his voice, his touch, his kiss, in overpowering contrast to the face opposite to her, with its uncomprehended intellect and refinement, and its pale anxiety.

"Don't say things like that to me, Mr. Dysart," she said tremulously; "I know how good you are to me, twice, twice too good, and if I was in trouble,

you'd be the first I'd come to. But I'm all right," with an attempted gaiety and unconcern that went near bringing the tears to her eyes; "I can paddle my own canoe for a while yet!"

Her instinct told her that Christopher would be quicker than most men to understand that she was putting up a line of defence, and to respect it; and with the unfailing recoil of her mind upon Hawkins, she thought how little such a method would have prevailed with him.

"Then you don't want me?" said Christopher, almost in a whisper.

"Why should I want you or anybody?" she answered, determined to misunderstand him, and to be like her usual self in spite of the distress and excitement that she felt; "I'm well able to look after myself, though you mightn't think it, and I don't want anything this minute, only my tea, and Norry's as cross as the cats, and I know she won't have the cake made!" She tried to laugh, but the laugh faltered away into tears. She turned her head aside, and putting one hand to her eyes, felt with the other in her pocket for her handkerchief. It was underneath Hawkins' letter, and as she snatched it out, it carried the letter along with it.

Christopher had started up, unable to bear the sight of her tears, and as he stood there, hesitating on the verge of catching her in his arms, he saw the envelope slip down on to the floor. As it fell, the photograph slid out of its worn covering, and lay face uppermost at his feet. He picked it up, and having placed it with the letter on the sofa beside Francie, he walked to the window and looked sightlessly out into the garden. A heavily-laden tray bumped against the door, the handle turned, and Louisa, having pushed the door open with her knee, staggered in with the tea-tray. She had placed it on the table and was back again in the kitchen, talking over the situation with Bid Sal, before Christopher spoke.

"I am afraid I can't stay any longer," he said, in a voice that was at once quieter and rougher than its wont; "you must forgive me if anything that I said has—has hurt you—I didn't mean it to hurt you." He stopped short and walked towards the door. As he opened it, he looked back at her for an instant, but he did not speak again.

END OF VOL. II.

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