THE NOVELS OF G·A·BIRMINGHAM

LALAGE'S LOVERS
SPANISH GOLD
THE SEARCH PARTY
THE SIMPKINS PLOT
THE MAJOR'S NIECE

Irene Owen Andrews
May 6 - 1918

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UNIFORM EDITION *of the* WORKS *of*

G. A. BIRMINGHAM

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GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY
NEW YORK

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BY

G. A. BIRMINGHAM

AUTHOR OF "SPANISH GOLD," "LALAGE'S LOVERS,"
"THE SEARCH PARTY," ETC.

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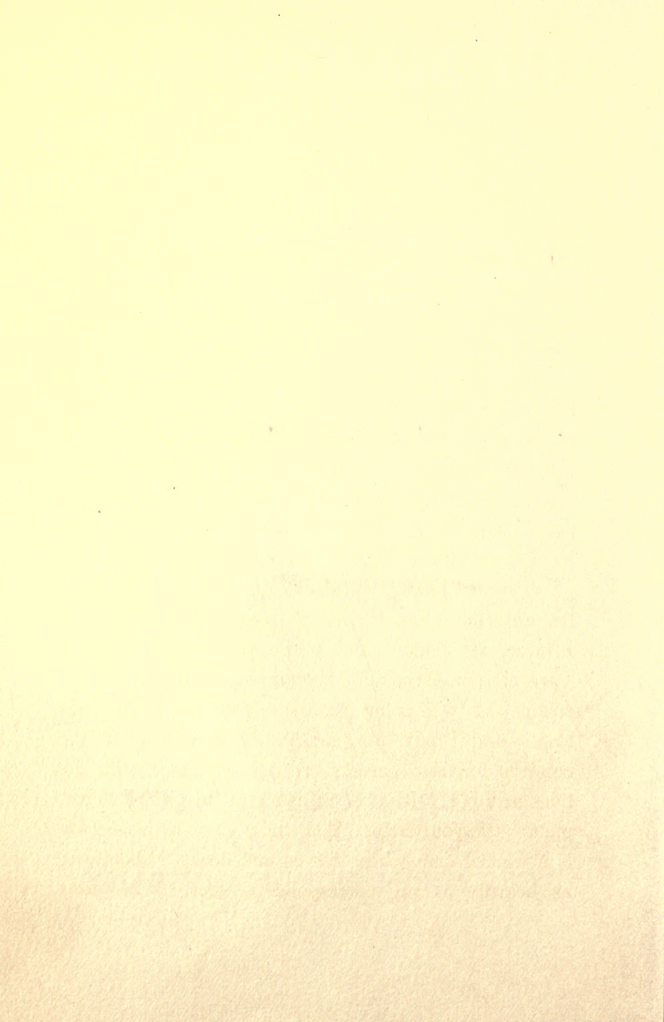

To A. S. H.

MY DEAR A.,

You know how sharply and how frequently I am snubbed on account of the things which appear in my novels. You know how much I suffer and you know how little I deserve it. Will you defend me?

While this story was appearing in the pages of *Cornhill* I found myself more than once in a painful position. I told you, I think, about the lady who expressed her anger so cruelly that I was ill for a week after seeing her — actually in bed with a horrible pain. The doctor gave the pain a Greek name, but he was mistaken. You and I know that it was simply a broken heart. I did not tell you about the gentleman who wrote to me on behalf of the Parents' Educational Union, and told me that its members "are all united in a passionate desire to give every chance of well-being to their children." He said also — and I felt this particularly keenly — that the children of these parents are quite familiar with the lives of kings. It is the injustice of this which drives me to ask your help. You know that J. J. Meldon is a wicked man whose words and deeds I abominate as heartily as my correspondent does. You know

that Mrs. Purvis appears in my pages as a parent with "a passionate desire to give every chance of well-being" to poor little Marjorie. You are a parent yourself and you are most careful about your children; but would you, could you, have done more than Mrs. Purvis did? And how am I to represent, for the encouragement of other good parents, the virtues of Mrs. Purvis if I am not allowed to contrast her admirable system of education with the loose, ill-regulated, and, I may frankly add, thoroughly immoral methods of J. J. Meldon? This is what my correspondent and, I fear, others like him do not see. This is what the lady whose cruelty reduced me to a sick bed and almost to the services of a professional nurse does not see. Her grievance was not, I think, J. J. Meldon's stupid remarks about the Parents' Union, but other things which he said. Will you try and explain, when you hear me threatened and attacked, that this red-haired curate is the villain, not the hero, of the piece, and that I must not be taken as approving the indefensible things he says and does? I shall be deeply grateful to you, dear A., if, in your own inimitable and tactful way, you will do me this service.

I am yours very sincerely,

G. A. B.

March 1911.

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CHAPTER I

THERE are still to be found in Ireland several towns of great importance, in the opinion of their inhabitants, which are twenty miles or more distant from any railway station. These places have a curious attraction for high government officials. The less accessible they are the more eager Lords Lieutenant and Chief Secretaries are to visit them. Now that motor-cars are plentiful and fairly reliable, the difficulty of getting to remote towns, which used to be serious, is very greatly diminished. Cabinet Ministers and errant Members of Parliament who have no particular business in Ireland have taken of late to bringing their wives with them on their pilgrimages. This gives great pleasure to the native inhabitants, and it should be reckoned for righteousness to the ladies themselves that they always profess a desire to benefit the towns they visit and to elevate the standard of comfort of the people. We may easily believe that these are their real objects, for no other reasons for their visits are imaginable. Bally-

moy, for instance, is one of these fortunate towns, and no one would go to Ballymoy for the sake of the scenery, which is uninteresting, or to play golf, for there are no links. Nor is the society of the place such as would be likely to attract great ladies accustomed to the brilliant political salons of London or the splendid festivities of Dublin Castle.

The district has in it one resident landlord, Major Kent, of Portsmouth Lodge, and he owns only a small property. He is a bachelor, devoted to the breeding of polo ponies as a business, and yachting as a recreation. The other landlord, Sir Giles Buckley, who has a much larger property, lives in Surrey, and employs a firm of Dublin land agents to collect such rents as the government still allows him to levy on his tenants. In the social life of the place he is of no account. There is a Resident Magistrate, Mr. Ford, spoken of generally as "the R.M.," who is married and lives in a house which has been let to generations of his predecessors; and will be let, no doubt, to Resident Magistrates yet unborn. There is the rector, Mr. Cosgrave, who suffers, summer and winter, from bronchitis. His wife is a lady of many sorrows, afflicted with difficult children, impossible servants, and her husband's incurable infirmities. There is a District Inspector of Police, Mr. Gregg, who, like the Resident Magistrate, is designated by the initials of his office and spoken of in the locality

as "the D.I." He has been married for about a year. There is also Mr. Cosgrave's curate, the Rev. J. J. Meldon. He is regarded as vulgar by Mrs. Ford; is liked by Mrs. Gregg, who is younger than Mrs. Ford; and enjoys the friendship of Major Kent. By the actual natives of the town he is treated with a sort of wondering contempt. They appreciate his easy manners and friendly helpfulness; but they have grave doubts about his sanity and speak of him among themselves as a "decent poor man, though, maybe, not quite right in his head."

So far, the upper classes. Next come the real rulers of the town and neighbourhood, Father McCormack, who has been parish priest of Ballymoy for twenty years, and Mr. Doyle. Mr. Doyle is the hotel keeper, the principal publican, the chief draper and the largest provision dealer in Ballymoy. He is the unanimously elected Chairman of all Leagues and Boards. He presides at all the public meetings and proposes all the resolutions of confidence in the Irish Party which are required. The other inhabitants take it in turn to second them and combine to pass them unanimously with cheers. Mr. Doyle is, of course, a strong Nationalist, and holds radical opinions on the land question. He manages, however, to live on excellent terms with Major Kent, who is a good customer, and divides the task of local government amicably with Father McCormack. Though a

devout Roman Catholic, Mr. Doyle is on terms of close intimacy with the Rev. Mr. Meldon.

The lot of most Church of Ireland curates in Ballymoy is dull, and therefore unhappy; Mr. Cosgrave has been obliged to appoint seven or eight in rapid succession ever since the failure of his health necessitated the keeping of an assistant. Meldon is the first of them who has shown any signs of settling down. He is an exceptional man and has succeeded better than any of his predecessors in adapting himself to his surroundings. He lodges, as all the other curates did, with the postmaster, and is looked after by the postmaster's wife. She cooks chops for his dinner on weekdays, and on Sundays adds to the chops a rice pudding. She makes his bed every morning, and, if nothing happens to prevent her, sweeps the floor of his sitting-room once a month. With this accommodation Mr. Meldon is perfectly content. He has no objection to dirt, and has a fortunate kind of appetite which enables him to enjoy an unvarying diet of fried chops. His habits are perfectly regular. Except on the days which he spends with Major Kent he appears at his lodging half an hour late for every meal. His books (he has a large number of books) lie about on the floor. His bicycle is kept behind his sitting-room door. He has a white dog which sleeps on the foot of his bed. It is called Maher-Shalal-

Hash-Baz, conveniently shortened to Baz in addressing the animal directly. He explains to the curious that this name, which is Hebrew, means Rending and Destruction. It was appropriate to the dog in the days of puppyhood when it used to eat, tear, and worry hearthrugs, shoes, gloves, counterpanes, tablecloths, and the lower parts of curtains. The postmaster's wife has from the very first greatly disliked Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz.

It is Mr. Meldon's custom to walk up and down the main street of Ballymoy on market days, and to enter into conversation with everyone whom he meets. He is on terms of intimacy with all the shopkeepers and with almost all the country people who come to do business in the town. He gives advice, freely and earnestly, to everybody on any subject, from the treatment of chickens with the pip and the proper way of spraying potatoes to the making of a marriage for a son or daughter. He always attends the Petty Sessions Court as an interested onlooker. When the law has been duly administered and the weekly batch of malefactors handed over to the care of Mr. Gregg, D.I., he usually leaves the Court House in company with his friend Major Kent.

It was on one of these occasions, a Wednesday afternoon early in August, that he noticed a look of depression and worry on the Major's face. Being a

man of quick sympathy and of readiness to help anyone in trouble, he addressed his friend at once.

"You're looking," he said, "a bit blue to-day, Major. Anything wrong?"

"There is not," said the Major—"nothing that you can cure, anyhow."

"Don't be too sure of that. I have a great deal of experience of life, besides all I've learned about human nature in books. If you'll take my advice, Major, you'll trot out your affliction, whatever it is, and let me see what I can do. Has the chestnut filly gone lame on you?"

The filly to which Meldon alluded was an animal of great promise for which Major Kent confidently expected a large price. She was therefore a subject of considerable anxiety, and her health was carefully watched. An accident to her would have been a serious misfortune.

"She has not," said the Major, "and I wouldn't care a hang if she had."

"Something must have gone wrong with the *Spindrift* then."

It was a natural inference. Next in importance to the ponies came Major Kent's yacht, a ten-ton cutter which lay at anchor in the bay below Portsmouth Lodge.

"No," said the Major, "the *Spindrift's* all right."

"Then unless that housekeeper of yours has cut up rough suddenly or got some kind of fit I don't know what's the matter with you. If it isn't the filly and it isn't the boat, what is it?"

"Mrs. O'Halloran's all right so far. What she may do in the way of a fit later on, of course I can't say. Up to the present I haven't told her."

"Major," said Meldon solemnly, "you're not going to be married, are you?"

"No, I'm not. I — I — could find it in my heart, J. J., to wish I was."

Everyone who was intimate with the Rev. Joseph John Meldon addressed him by his first two initials. Those who were not intimate with him spoke of him behind his back as the Rev. J. J.

"You'd better come home with me and have a bit of lunch," said the Major, "and I'll tell you the fix I'm in. I don't believe you can help me — nobody can — but it will be some relief to talk it over."

"'A friend,'" said Meldon, "'should bear a friend's infirmities.' That's in Shakespeare, but you're so miserably illiterate that you probably don't recognise the quotation. I've often deplored the want of some cultured and intellectual society in Ballymoy. As a University graduate I can't help feeling myself a bit isolated."

"You may get more of that sort of thing than you

want very soon. I don't say you will, for I'm not sure yet; but you may."

"Anybody wanting you to take the chair at a lecture on Irish antiquities?"

"No. Don't be an ass, J. J. Who'd lecture on antiquities in Ballymoy?"

They reached the hotel and passed into the yard where the Major stabled his cob while he sat on the Bench in the Petty Sessions Court. The yard man, who counted confidently on a liberal tip, wheeled the dogcart from the coachhouse and harnessed the cob. Major Kent and Meldon, seated side by side, started on their five-mile drive to Portsmouth Lodge. For awhile nothing more was said on the subject of the mysterious trouble. Meldon discussed a case which had been tried in Court that day. A woman had summoned her uncle for breaking down the stone wall which divided her farm from his. She believed that he did so in order to encourage his heifer to trespass on her meadow. The uncle had replied with a cross-summons against his niece for threatening language addressed to the heifer and followed by an assault with stones and a stick. The case presented points of interest, but Major Kent was inattentive and made short replies to the curate's remarks. At last he interrupted an able estimate of the amount of perjury committed by the witnesses.

" J. J.," he said, " you know all about girls, don't you?"

" I do, of course," said Meldon, cheerfully dropping the subject of the injured heifer. " I've been engaged to be married for more than two years, and for some time before that I was frequently in the society of Gladys Muriel. There's not a turn or a twist in any ordinary girl that I don't thoroughly understand. My own little girl is quite typical, only, of course, better looking than most. In fact I shouldn't be going too far if I described her as exceptionally pretty. Her hair is a sort of yellowish colour, not exactly gold, but ——"

" I don't want to know about her hair. You've told me all there is to tell about that little girl of yours a dozen times or more. You've shown me her photograph till I'm tired looking at it."

" All right. I'll say no more about her. But kindly recollect, Major, that it was you who turned the conversation on to the subject of girls. I was talking about perjury until you interrupted me."

" I had a letter from my sister this morning," said the Major.

" I didn't know you had a sister. Is she older or younger than you? I have a reason for asking that question."

" She's older."

"Ah! Well, now, putting you down as fifty years of age, your sister is very probably fifty-five. I don't want to be offensive in any way, and I am sure that Miss Kent is a delightful person, but you can hardly call her a girl, can you? When I said I understood girls thoroughly I didn't mean you to think that my knowledge extended to women of fifty-five. As a matter of fact, having aunts of my own, I do know something about middle-aged ladies; but I don't set up to be an expert. I mention this because I shouldn't like you to rely too confidently on any advice I may give you in the case of your sister."

"I don't know what you're talking about, J. J. I don't want any advice about my sister. If you knew her," the Major grinned feebly, "you would hesitate before offering advice about her."

"No, I shouldn't, not a bit, if I thought she needed it."

"Well, you might not. I must say for you there are few things you do hesitate about. Any way, my sister isn't Miss Kent. She married an Englishman called Purvis more than twenty years ago."

"Does she want a divorce? or a judicial separation? I'm more or less up in the law on that subject. As a parson I have to be, you know."

"No, she doesn't. In fact the very reverse is the

case. She seems to me to want to go on a sort of second honeymoon."

"Well, let her. I don't see any harm in that. In fact I regard it as a very fine exhibition of proper feeling in a wife. That sort of thing is rare after a quarter of a century of married life. But perhaps Purvis wants to get off the trip. Is that it? If so, my advice to you is not to mix yourself up in the matter. Let them fight it out together. There's nothing so foolish as meddling in these domestic broils."

"I wish to goodness, J. J., you'd stop talking for one instant and let me tell you the fix I'm in. There's no domestic broil of any sort. Purvis is just as keen as Margaret is on seeing the continent of Europe. That's where the trouble comes in. But here we are at Portsmouth Lodge. You'd better read the letter for yourself. That will be more satisfactory than talking at cross-purposes in the trap and my not being able to explain myself on account of the way you keep interrupting me."

CHAPTER II

PORTSMOUTH LODGE is utterly unlike any other house in the neighbourhood of Ballymoy. It would probably win first prize in all Connacht for the best kept homestead if such rewards were offered by social reformers for competition among landlords and professional men. Nowhere out of England itself would it be possible to find gravel more carefully raked than Major Kent's; ivy better clipped; fences with more rigid wires; gates and doors which glisten with brighter paint. The interior of the house is quite as exquisite as its surroundings. The linoleum which covers the hall is always slippery and on certain days in the week smells strongly of beeswax and turpentine. No chair is allowed to remain long out of its appointed place in any room. The *Times* and the local paper, which supply the Major with reading matter, are laid together folded into correct parallelograms on a polished table in the study. Numerous receptacles for tobacco ashes are to be found in every room. Fire grates, even in winter when the turf is blazing in them, are sacred from cigar ends. The havoc occasioned by a visit from Meldon, a lamentably untidy person, is set right with sweeping

brushes and dusters immediately after his departure.

Major Kent inherits from his grandfather, the first of the family who settled in Ireland, an English fondness for neatness. It took him years to educate his housekeeper, Mrs. O'Halloran, into a proper respect for his ideas of household management. Being a woman of strong common sense she had a great contempt for her master's fads; but she yielded to him and was compensated for the discomfort of the unnatural kind of life she was obliged to live by the pleasure she found in making generations of subordinate hand-maidens acutely miserable. Fresh from their pleasantly untidy homes, they could not understand what Mrs. O'Halloran desired of them, and suffered, not always patiently, in the effort to learn the difference between a thing which is clean and a thing which has been given a "rub over."

Meldon walked into the Major's study, kicking two mats crooked on his way. He disarranged, before sitting down in it, a deep armchair. He stretched out his legs and put the heels of his boots on the brass bar of the fender, a grave offence which would hardly have been passed over without a hint of rebuke if it had been committed by anyone except Meldon.

"Now," he said, "bring out that letter, Major, and let me get at this mysterious trouble of yours."

The letter, a long one, written closely over four sides of a sheet of notepaper, was handed to him.

"It's written," said the Major, "from Melbourne, but you'll see that my sister expects to be in England by the time I get it."

"Thank you," said Meldon. "Your sister, I suppose, lives in Australia?"

"She does. She went out with her husband and has been living on a sheep farm for the last twenty-two years, in fact ever since she was married. This is her first trip home."

Meldon read the letter carefully, spread it out on his knee, and proceeded to give the Major an abstract of its contents.

"Your sister," he said, "is coming home. She proposes to spend a month or perhaps more in visiting the capitals of the principal European states in the company of her husband. That's all clear so far, I hope."

"Yes," said the Major, "that's clear enough. I'm not complaining of any difficulty in understanding the letter. Margaret was always able to make her meaning quite plain — too plain sometimes."

"She brings with her a daughter, of whom she writes as 'Marjorie,' and occasionally 'dear Marjorie.' She intends to send this Marjorie to stay with

you here in Portsmouth Lodge, while she enjoys herself in Paris, Vienna and Rome. That, in a few words, is the news which her letter conveys. Now what is your grievance?"

"My grievance! My dear J. J., what am I to do with a girl? How can I keep her here? I'm not accustomed to girls. I am constitutionally unfitted to deal with them."

"In my opinion, Major, you're an uncommonly lucky man. Here you have pressed on you what many men spend half their lives trying to get, the companionship of a really charming, quite natural and unaffected young lady. Instead of dancing with joy as any ordinary man would, you go about with a face as long as if the chestnut filly had thrown out a splint."

"That's all very fine for you. You're accustomed to charming young ladies. I'm not. Besides, how do you know that she is a young lady? For all Margaret says in the letter she may be a baby in arms, or a long-legged shy creature of fifteen. For the matter of that, what ground have you for saying that she's charming, natural and unaffected?"

"I'll take your points one by one, Major. You ask how I know she's a grown-up young lady. I don't actually know her age, but you said that your

sister had been twenty-two years married, from which I infer that her eldest daughter must be twenty or twenty-one."

"How do you know that Marjorie is the eldest daughter?"

"She must be. There may be an elder son, though that's not likely. If there had been, your sister would have brought him home with her instead of the girl. But in any case, even if there is a son, Marjorie must be at least nineteen, and a girl of that age is always considered to be grown up. I say with confidence," he went on in an explanatory tone, "that she's the eldest daughter because she's obviously called after her mother. If there had been an older one she'd have been Marjorie, which is an abbreviation of Margaret, and this one would have been Susan or Millicent or something else. That disposes of your first point. Next, as to her being natural and unaffected. She has been brought up, according to your account, on a sheep farm. How could a growing child have a more unaffected companion than a sheep? Your niece has probably played with dear little woolly lambs ever since she was old enough to play with anything. She can't be anything else but natural. You may take my word for it that she'll turn out exactly like Lucy in Wordsworth's poem, who 'dwelt among untrodden ways, beside the streams

of Dove.' Ballymoy will be a metropolis to her and a travelling circus a wild joy. As for her being charming, that follows from her being perfectly natural. Everything natural is charming. Besides, she probably takes after her mother, and your sister must have had a certain amount of charm or else Purvis wouldn't have married her."

"She wasn't in the least charming," said the Major. "She was what I should call dictatorial."

"You may not have appreciated her charm, but it was there all the same. Otherwise, as I said, Purvis wouldn't have married her. You must give Purvis credit for some sense, Major. A man like that, who has shown himself capable of making money out of sheep farming, which is a difficult business, money enough to go travelling all over the continent of Europe, can't possibly have been such a fool as to marry a woman who didn't attract him."

"Well, supposing you're right, and you may be for all I can tell — supposing she is all you say, that only makes things much worse. What on earth am I to do with a charming young lady of twenty-one in a place like this? How am I to entertain her?"

"Don't let that get between you and your sleep. I'll entertain her for you. I'll be getting my holidays almost at once, and I'll not go away except for a week

just to see my own little girl. I'll stay here in Ballymoy and entertain your niece."

"No, you won't," said the Major firmly. "I couldn't, I simply daren't face Margaret if she heard that I'd allowed the girl to spend the summer flirting with the curate."

"She might do a great deal worse," said Meldon. "But, as a matter of fact, I don't mean to flirt with her. You forget that I'm engaged to be married. I wouldn't flirt with anyone. What I propose to do is to take her out for rides and get up picnic teas and boating parties and play lawn tennis with her. Don't you fret about her, Major. She'll enjoy her time all right."

"I haven't a room in my house fit to put a girl into. The place is furnished for men, not girls. I don't even know what a girl would want in a bedroom."

"A girl doesn't want anything particular. Give her any ordinary furniture and she'll manage along. I know girls well."

"I thought," said the Major, "that they might require long looking-glasses, and patent wire frames for fitting dresses on to, and special lamps for heating tongs at. I know I've seen those things advertised."

"She'll bring everything of that sort along with

her. She won't expect to have them provided for her, any more than you'd expect to find a razor strop and a trouser stretcher laid out for you in the bedroom of a strange house in which you happened to be staying."

"Then there's Mrs. O'Halloran. I don't know what she'll say. I am sure she'll object strongly. Perhaps she'll leave, and then where would I be?"

"If you're afraid of Mrs. O'Halloran, I'll tackle her for you. Ring the bell and I'll do it at once. Or wait, is there any point you'd like to have cleared up before Mrs. O'Halloran comes in?"

"Margaret says — where's the letter? — oh, yes, there it is on the floor beside you. She says, 'Dear Marjorie won't be any trouble to you. If you give her a book and a quiet corner she'll be quite happy.' Now I have no books that any girl could read."

"You have not," said Meldon. "So far as I know you possess five volumes of Spurgeon's Sermons, two books on horses, three on yacht building and an old encyclopaedia. I quite agree with you that no girl could read your books. But I'll bring you out a couple of dozen volumes — novels, you know, and poetry. Gladys Muriel reads Tennyson and any amount of novels. They're quite the right thing for girls."

"I don't know," said the Major doubtfully.

"Your books might not be the sort that Margaret would like her daughter to read."

"If you think that I'm the sort of man who'd give improper books to a girl you're utterly mistaken. As a matter of fact I don't read books that have anything objectionable in them myself, except the ancient Fathers of the Church. But if you like, just to make your mind quite easy, I'll write to my little girl and get her to draw up a list of really suitable books, her own favourite reading. That ought to satisfy you. Now ring for Mrs. O'Halloran."

The housekeeper appeared. At first she seemed to think that an untimely demand for luncheon was to be made on her.

"It was only this morning," she said, "before you made out after your breakfast, that you told me luncheon was for half-past one. The chicken isn't in the pot above ten minutes, and the potatoes isn't near boiled, nor won't be for another half hour."

"That's all right, Mrs. O'Halloran," said Meldon. "It isn't the chicken the Major wants. He quite agrees with you that when a meal's ordered for one particular hour, that's the hour at which it ought to be. What he wishes me to speak to you about now is something quite different."

"If it's Mary Garry and the way she has of dropping her hairpins out of her head in the morning when

she does be sweeping out the study floor, let the Major try and cure her of that himself. I'm tired talking to her. Many's the time I've said to her: 'Mary Garry, the master'll be raging mad; he'll face me, and he'll kill you so as you won't know after whether it's your head or your heels you're standing on, if you drop them pins about the floor and you sweeping it.' But I might as well be talking to the wind or to one of them horses beyond in the field or to yourself, Mr. Meldon, as to that same Mary Garry. She's got the notion of America in her head this minute, and she'll never settle down to a decent day's work till she's off out of this, if she does then itself."

"It's not Mary Garry I'm talking about now," said Meldon, "but another girl altogether."

"And what will the Major be wanting with another girl? Isn't one enough, and wouldn't I rather work my fingers to the bone cleaning and sweeping and cooking and mending after him, than have the life plagued out of me with another girl? What does he want with another girl? Tell me that."

The Major had got the better of Mrs. O'Halloran in so far as he had induced her to keep his house as no other house in Ballymoy was ever kept. But Mrs. O'Halloran, like every other woman who ever learned to polish, had also learnt to tyrannise. It was small wonder that Major Kent's courage quailed before the

task of announcing the visit of his niece. Fortunately Meldon was made of sterner stuff. Mrs. O'Halloran's tongue had no terrors for him. He actually enjoyed arguing with her.

"The Major doesn't want another girl any more than you do, Mrs. O'Halloran. The point is that he can't help himself. But the girl that's coming isn't a fresh edition of Mary Garry. She's a young lady, and we look to you to make her stay here pleasant for her."

"The Lord save us and help us! Is it a young lady you're bringing down on the house?"

"It is," said Meldon firmly, "a young lady of remarkable charm and personal beauty. A young lady who will come like a ray of sunshine into Portsmouth Lodge and make all your lives brighter. You'll hear her all day long singing her pretty songs as she goes tripping up and down the stairs. She will have a pleasant smile and a kind word for everyone. Even Mary Garry will learn to look up to her as a sort of angel in the house. You know that sort of young lady, don't you, Mrs. O'Halloran?"

"Tell me now," said the housekeeper, in a hoarse whisper, "is it the young lady that's to marry you — and the Lord help her when she does — that's coming here? For if so be that you've beguiled the poor

Major, who's as quiet and innocent as a child in the house, into inviting her ——"

"Well, it isn't her. You may make your mind easy about that."

"For if it is," went on Mrs. O'Halloran, "I may tell you this. There'll be no carrying on between her and you in this house while I'm in it. The Major's a respectable man and always was, and I'm a respectable woman, and Mary Garry comes of decent people, and as for carrying on ——"

"Sorra the woman or the girl ever attempted to carry on with me," said Meldon, "except yourself. And hard enough I've found it to keep you at arm's length more than once. If I wasn't a man of remarkable strength of character, you'd have married me twice over before now."

Mrs. O'Halloran snorted with indignation and delight. She recognised in Meldon a man who could get the better of her in a war of words, and she appreciated him fully.

"But any way," he went on, "the young lady who's coming here won't want to carry on with anyone. She's the Major's niece, and her name is Miss Marjorie Purvis."

"And who's to attend on the like of her? For I won't. Maybe now you think that Mary Garry can

be running after her all day, hooking up the backs of her dresses for her and doing her hair."

"We leave all those details to you," said Meldon. "Neither the Major nor I know anything about the backs of dresses, and we're not barbers. But I'll just say this, that unless Mary Garry learns to do her own hair better than she does at present — I'm relying on your account of her, Mrs. O'Halloran; I never noticed her hair one way or other — she'd better not lay a hand on anybody else's. Just think how you'd feel if you found yourself tripping over two lots of hair-pins every time you put out your foot in front of you."

Mrs. O'Halloran realised that she was not likely to produce any impression on Meldon. She turned to the Major.

"And will she expect me to be carrying up a cup of tea to her in the morning, and her in her bed?"

"I don't know," said the Major. "Will she, J. J.?"

"She will," said Meldon. "Every self-respecting young lady expects that. A cup of tea and a slice of bread and butter along with it, served on a small tray with a white cloth spread over it."

"And how long," said Mrs. O'Halloron desperately, "is the like of that work to be going on?"

"Six weeks at least," said Meldon. "Perhaps

longer. But you'll be surprised how you'll get to like it. What you and the Major want, both of you, is some sweet and civilising influence in this house. You may not care for the idea beforehand, but you'll enjoy being refined enormously when the time comes. Just think how nice it will be to have flowers settled regularly in all the vases, and pretty little bows of silk ribbon tied on to the antimacassars, and beautiful embroidered teacloths made for use at afternoon tea, and all the hundred and one little dainty touches added to life which only the hand of a highly educated and cultivated young lady can bestow. I shouldn't wonder a bit if she set to work and made chintz covers for all the chairs in the house! You'd like that, wouldn't you, Mrs. O'Halloran?"

"I would not then. The covers that's on the chairs this minute is good enough. But what's the use of talking? Whatever is to be must be, surely; and the thing that's before us is what we have to go through with, be the same easy or hard. I suppose now you'll be eating your lunch with the Major, Mr. Meldon?"

"I will."

"And you'll be wanting coffee or the like after it?"

"We will."

"Well, if so be there's nothing more to be said about the young lady, I'll be getting back again to the kitchen to see after the chicken."

CHAPTER III

MELDON and Major Kent spent two hours after luncheon making plans for the entertainment of Miss Marjorie Purvis. The Major agreed to rail off a portion of the paddock, mow and roll it. He wrote to a Dublin firm for a complete supply of all things necessary for the playing of lawn tennis and croquet. Meldon said that every girl delighted in playing either one game or the other, and that both must be provided, since it was impossible to know beforehand which Miss Marjorie might prefer. He proposed to instruct the Major in the games. He was, he boasted, very expert in lawn tennis and a croquet player of more than ordinary ability. Another letter was written to a newsagent and a cheque was enclosed sufficient to cover six weeks' subscription to three lady's papers. All women, young and old, married or single, Meldon said, enjoyed lady's papers and would only be really happy if kept well provided with them. The manager of the stores at which the Major dealt was asked to submit an estimate for a supply of cakes suitable for afternoon tea, to be posted regularly twice a week. Even Meldon

felt that it would be unfair to ask Mrs. O'Halloran to make cakes. The Major wanted at the same time to give a general order for every kind of food commonly eaten by young ladies. Meldon objected to his doing this, maintaining that girls required no special diet. After some discussion a compromise was arrived at and an order given for ten pounds of chocolate creams mixed with fondants.

The Major resolutely refused to buy a side-saddle. He said that he would not run the risk of putting an inexperienced niece on any of the horses in his stables. Meldon, after arguing at some length that high-spirited girls enjoy running risks, discovered suddenly that the Major's anxiety was for his own horses and not for Miss Marjorie's neck. Realising that this was a reasonable fear, he did not press for the purchase of the side-saddle. It was agreed that a bicycle should be obtained instead, and Meldon promised to speak to Doyle about it at once. Doyle, hotel keeper, grocer, draper and emigration agent, also dealt, when opportunity offered, in agricultural machinery, patent fertilisers, watches, sewing machines and bicycles.

A fashionable stationer was written to for two dozen "At Home" cards of the latest design. There were only four people in Ballymoy, including Meldon himself, to whom these could possibly be sent; so it

was calculated that the two dozen would suffice as summonses to six parties. The first, as Meldon planned them, would be a simple afternoon tea to be held at Portsmouth Lodge on the day after the niece's arrival. The next was to take the form of a tea picnic at some place not more than five miles distant to which the guests would convey themselves on bicycles. This, Meldon said, was a particularly fashionable and delightful form of entertainment, of which all young girls were very fond. Major Kent got out a notebook and began to make a list of his engagements. The tea picnic was to be followed by another party at Portsmouth Lodge, devoted either to lawn tennis or croquet; the game indulged in to be decided when it was known which of the two the niece preferred.

"That's three," said Meldon. "We want three more."

"Must we have three more?"

"We must. We can't have less than one every week. In fact one every week isn't really enough for a high-spirited, energetic young girl. But I think we may count on the other people giving a few parties in return. Each of them is bound to ask us twice at least if we ask them six times. They can't well do less. That will make six more parties, two at the rectory, two at the Fords', and two with the D.I. I

tell you what it is, Major, we'll make Ballymoy hum!"

"We will," said the Major without enthusiasm.

A picnic on one of the islands in the bay was Meldon's next suggestion, the guests to be taken out on the yacht. The Major objected to this because Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Cosgrave were invariably sick when they went on the sea. Meldon pointed out that as the object of the party was to give pleasure to Miss Marjorie Purvis, the sufferings of other people would not matter.

"In fact," he said, "if Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Cosgrave are sick it will rather increase the pleasure of the rest of the party. I don't know if you've noticed it, Major, but nothing gives most people such a feeling of solid satisfaction as seeing somebody else violently ill at sea. I expect your niece will enjoy herself all the more when she notices that Mrs. Ford is turning green about the gills."

"She might get sick herself."

"Not she. Is it likely that a girl who has voyaged all the way from Australia would get sick in our bay? Besides, from what I've heard of your niece, she's not at all the sort of girl who gets sick on a pleasure party."

"So far as I know," said the Major, "you've not heard anything about my niece except what you've

said yourself. I wouldn't advise you to build too confidently on that."

"After the picnic on the bay," said Meldon, "we could get up a polo match. You and I would play Ford and the D.I. The rector could umpire, if he's well enough."

"On my ponies, I suppose?"

"Of course. Nobody else has any ponies."

"Well, then you may scratch that entertainment off the list. Make what arrangements you like, J. J. — and I don't deny that you're doing well so far — but leave my ponies out. I won't have them destroyed."

"Except a bicycle gymkhana and a display of fireworks, I don't know that there's any form of entertainment left."

"What about a dinner party?"

"No. Girls hate dinner parties. They don't care to sit for hours stuffing themselves with heavy food. But we might have a dance. Doyle was telling me the other day about a boy who plays the melodeon splendidly. We'll clear out your dining-room, polish the floor and have a dance. I'll get the rector to allow his three eldest children to come. That's three. You and I make five ——"

"I can't dance."

"You can if you like. Don't be selfish, Major.

You mustn't expect a charming niece to stay with you and cheer you up and make life brighter in your home without putting yourself out a little to entertain her. You'll dance, of course. It'll do you a lot of good. The Fords are two more. That's seven. They might bring their eldest girl — she's only six, but I suppose she can dance more or less. She'll make eight. The D.I. and his wife, ten. And Miss Marjorie herself eleven. That's an odd number, but it can't be helped. There's no use counting on the rector or Mrs. Cosgrave. They may come and look on, but they won't dance."

Major Kent, with a sigh, wrote down the dance on his list.

"As a wind up," said Meldon, "a sort of grand *finale* of the season's entertainments, we might have a paper chase. I am sure that Miss Marjorie would enjoy a paper chase. You and she could be hares. I would lead the hounds in hot pursuit. I rather fancy myself cheering on Mrs. Ford when she gets entangled in a barbed-wire fence. I don't think now that we can improve on that list."

"I suppose that all this is quite necessary?"

"Absolutely. I'm giving you the irreducible minimum. You can't entertain a girl with less."

"And I suppose that we're doing quite the right things? Remember, J. J., I've no experience. I'm

relying entirely on you. You understand girls and I don't. You're quite sure now that she'll really enjoy these parties?"

"She will. It may seem odd to you that she should ——"

"It does. In fact I scarcely believe that she can."

"All the same she will. You may take my word for it, Major, that if you were to put a blank sheet of paper in front of any ordinary good-looking girl of twenty or twenty-one, and were to ask her to write down exactly the things she'd like best to do, she'd produce a list practically identical with yours. The events might be placed in a different order, but they'd all be there, and there'd be nothing else. Of course it is understood that Ballymoy is Ballymoy. If we had her somewhere else, in London or Dublin, the things we'd have to do would naturally be different."

"I suppose it's all right," said the Major a little wearily. "I wish to goodness Margaret hadn't insisted on dumping her daughter down here. But she always did things of that kind. When I was a boy she used to bully me frightfully. I've never known her show the slightest consideration for my feelings. Why couldn't she have taken her daughter round Europe? You'd think a mother would like to have her daughter with her on a trip of the sort."

"She has good reasons for not taking her. You

may be sure of that. As a matter of fact there are lots of things in those European capitals which a careful mother wouldn't at all like her daughter to see. She may intend to enjoy herself in ways which wouldn't be suitable to a girl of twenty-one. I shouldn't wonder if she and Purvis mean to run a bit of a rig now they've got loose from the sheep farm. Monte Carlo, perhaps, or ——" Meldon winked. "You know the kind of thing I mean."

The Major grinned.

"I wish Margaret heard you," he said. "My dear J. J., she's absolutely the last woman in the world you can imagine going on any kind of spree. I've never known her do anything that the strictest moralist could call even fast."

"That's just the most dangerous sort of woman there is. When those sober, proper ones break out they run into the most frightful excesses. You can't altogether blame her and Purvis. Just fancy living for years and years closely surrounded by sheep, seeing nothing, day after day, but sheep, hearing nothing but bleats, eating nothing but mutton. The sheep, as you must have observed, is the most appallingly respectable beast there is. It occupies a sort of old-fashioned, evangelical position among the other animals. You can't imagine a sheep voting any way but Conservative. Nobody ever heard of any-

thing but a staid, quiet sheep. A bull goes mad occasionally and runs amuck. So does a dog. We all know that horses and pigs have queer tempers, but a sheep is quite different. If you had lived among sheep for twenty-two years, you wouldn't judge your sister and Purvis as hardly as you do. You'd be more ready to make allowances. I daresay she isn't going to do anything really very bad; but I respect her for wanting to keep her daughter safe. I can tell you a girl of that age has to be considered. I expect that's the reason your sister is sending Miss Marjorie to us. She knows we'll look after her."

"She didn't actually mention you in her letter."

"No, she didn't. But I expect she had me in the back of her mind. She realised that I was the sort of man who understood girls and would see that Miss Marjorie came to no harm."

"As a matter of fact, I don't suppose she ever heard of you. She certainly never did from me. I don't often write to her, and when I do, I don't fill up the letter with descriptions of your character."

"I think," said Meldon, "I'll be off now. I'll take those letters of yours into Ballymoy and post them. Let me see, one to the stores, one to the newsagent — you're sure you put the cheque into that one? It won't do to expect a man you don't deal with regularly to send you papers on credit. One about the

tennis and croquet things, and one for the 'At Home' cards. When they come I'll give you a hand at filling them up. If your niece is to be here this day week we ought to get them out at once."

"We send them out in both our names, I suppose," said the Major. "'The Rev. J. J. Meldon and Major Kent At Home — Paper Chase — R.S.V.P.' That's the kind of thing, isn't it?"

The Major frequently indulged in sarcasms of this sort in conversation with his friend. They glanced quite harmlessly off Meldon's coat of self-esteem. He very rarely took any notice of them.

"I'll see Doyle this evening about the bicycle," he said. "I suppose I may run to ten pounds and get a decent one. You wouldn't care to see your niece riding about the country on a cheap machine."

"Oh, yes, spend what you like. Luckily I have a little money put by, but if I go bankrupt over this visit, it can't be helped."

"Don't be a screw, Major. You ought to be very thankful to get off with a bicycle. If you happened to live near any decent shops you'd have to buy hats and dresses and gloves, and perhaps expensive furs for every single niece who came to stay with you. I knew an uncle once who took his niece into a shop in London and told her to choose a hat. He'd never bought a thing of the sort before and he thought fif-

teen shillings would be the outside figure. What do you think they stuck him? Five guineas! And they very nearly had him run in for another guinea for half of a stuffed bird. The girl wanted it, but the uncle said he belonged to the Wild Birds' Protection Society and was solemnly pledged not to buy any dead fowl except a chicken. As a matter of fact he joined the society the next day and has subscribed to it ever since. He says it's one that ought to be supported in the interests of uncles. Now you see how cheap you get off only having to buy a bicycle. If there was a hat or a dress in Doyle's drapery store that Miss Marjorie would wear on a desert island in a downpour of rain you'd have to buy it for her. Luckily for you there isn't."

CHAPTER IV

MELDON left Portsmouth Lodge at four o'clock and walked back to Ballymoy. It took him two hours to accomplish the five miles, though he was a rapid and energetic walker. The country people were returning from the market in a straggling procession, and Meldon found it necessary to greet each group and to stop for a few minutes' conversation with his more intimate friends. The people had come into the town in the morning with cart-loads of turf, or with potatoes, fowl, butter and young pigs in the panniers of their donkeys. It was interesting to learn the prices at which these had been disposed of. The same carts and donkeys on their homeward journeys were laden with sacks of flour, loaves of bread, lamp-oil in bottles, parcels of drapery goods and smaller parcels of groceries. Meldon liked to find out, as far as possible, what was in the parcels, and nobody seemed to resent his curiosity. About half a mile outside the town he stopped for a long talk with a man on a shaggy grey horse, who had his wife perched uncomfortably behind him. He had been selling a salmon, poached from the upper reaches of the Bally-

moy river, and Meldon was particularly anxious to know what he got for it.

While he was talking to this man, Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, looking dejected and cowed, slunk along the road and rubbed himself against his master's legs. Meldon guessed at once, from the animal's appearance, that he had been ill-treated by the postmaster's wife. He dropped the subject of the poached salmon and set off homewards at a brisk pace, intending to restore the dog's self-respect by scolding his landlady. It turned out afterwards that the dog had stretched himself outside the kitchen door and that the postmaster's wife, having at the time a tray in her hands, had tripped over him and broken several valuable cups. It was not necessary, however, to lecture her for her carelessness. The dog's spirits revived before he got home. In the main street of the town he met another dog, a brown Irish terrier, whom he particularly disliked. The feeling was evidently mutual. After a few preliminary growls the two animals rushed together and a fierce fight began. Meldon recognised the brown terrier at once. It belonged to Doyle. He sent a small boy, one of several who were enjoying the spectacle of the fight, to fetch the hotel-keeper. While waiting for his arrival Meldon struck at both dogs with his walking-stick, hitting whichever he could with fine impartiality. Doyle came out of

the hotel in his shirt-sleeves and took in the situation at once. Both he and Meldon were, in fact, well accustomed to acting the part of peace-makers. Each of them seized his own dog by the tail — a matter of some difficulty in the case of the Irish terrier, which had been docked — and dragged them apart.

"There'll be murder done one of these days," said Doyle, "and it'll be a good thing for the town if the both of them is killed at once."

"Can you," said Meldon, holding fast by his pet's tail, "get a bicycle for Major Kent before this day week?"

"I can, of course — but — will you wait a minute, Mr. Meldon, till I lock up this dog in the stable? I can't hear myself speak with the way he's yapping to get away from me."

"What does the Major want with another bicycle?" he said, when he returned from imprisoning the brown dog. "Didn't he get a new one only last April? And I wouldn't say he'd been on it a dozen times since."

"It isn't for himself he wants it. It's for a lady."

"Do you tell me that? Surely to goodness now old Biddy O'Halloran isn't taking to the bicycle, and her after burying two husbands and putting six childer out into the world before she went housekeeping for the Major?"

"It's not for Mrs. O'Halloran he wants it."

"Do you mean to tell me he's thinking of getting a bicycle for that red-headed girl of old Thomas Garry's, the one he has within in the house along with Biddy O'Halloran? Not but what it might be handy enough to have one for the like of her, the way she could run into the town on it and post the letters, or get half a pound of tea, or whatever Biddy O'Halloran might come short of on a sudden in the house."

"It's not for Mary Garry," said Meldon. "I don't mind telling you, Mr. Doyle, who it is for, and I will tell you some time again; but I can't be standing here all the evening in the middle of the street holding a white dog by the tail, and shouting out the Major's private affairs for half the town to hear."

"That's true, as true as if I said it myself."

"It's a great deal truer. If you said it there'd be precious little truth in it. I never knew you tell the truth — not what the Major would call the naked truth — since I've known you, but the once, and that was this day last week, when you said that brown dog of yours was an ugly blackguard."

Mr. Doyle grinned his approval of this remark, which he regarded as a compliment. It was a handsome appreciation of his astuteness, and was therefore very agreeable to him. No man but a fool tells the truth in business or politics, and Doyle had a

reputation to sustain. He could not afford to be thought a fool either in the conduct of public affairs or in his private capacity.

"Would you step inside the hotel with me, Mr. Meldon," he said, "and we can settle about the bicycle the Major wants? I was wishing to speak a word to you anyway, and I may as well do it now as again. You can let go that dog of yours. Now that my own's locked up, there isn't one in the town but what that white beast of yours has fought it and beaten it. He'll lie quiet till you come out if it's only for the want of something more agreeable to do."

Meldon followed Doyle into the hotel.

"We'll have to go into my private apartment, for there's a commercial gent in the coffee-room," said Doyle, after opening the door on the right-hand side of the passage and looking in. "He travels in hardware for Clements and Ball of Sheffield. He was in the shop with me this morning trying to sell me some sort of new patent razor. I told him the only use we had for razors in this country — that is, barring the clergy, of course, Mr. Meldon — was for cutting throats with. I asked him was the safety razor any improvement on the old sort for that sort of work. 'For if it is,' said I, 'I'll take a gross of them.' You never met a man with less idea of business than that fellow. Instead of telling me that his patent razor

was the finest weapon out for cold-blooded and deliberate murder, and then booking my order for the whole gross of them, the poor man said that the point about his razors was that they wouldn't cut a baby."

Mr. Doyle's private apartment was a small room at the back of the hotel premises. It smelt very strongly of whisky, bottled porter, and tobacco. It was furnished with a round table stained to imitate mahogany, six rickety chairs with horse-hair seats, and a sofa deeply dinged near the upper end where Mr. Doyle usually sat. There was a sloped writing-desk under the window, littered with dusty account-books and bill-forms. Over the fireplace hung a cracked mirror in a tarnished gilt frame. The other walls were adorned with two pictures of eminent race-horses and a handsomely framed portrait of an ecclesiastic, a relative of Doyle's, who had risen to high honour in the United States.

"What will you take?" asked Mr. Doyle.

The meaning of the question became apparent at once. Mr. Doyle turned the key in the door of a cupboard as he spoke, opened it, and displayed an array of bottles and tumblers, clean and dirty, on the shelves within.

"Nothing, thank you," said Meldon. "You know well enough that I don't touch a drop except at my meals."

"Excuse me," said Doyle.

He left the cupboard, walked over to the window and drew down the blind. Then he winked at Meldon.

"That idle spalpeen of a Paddy Clancy," he said, "spends half the day looking in at this window and talking round the town after about what goes on in here."

The thought in Mr. Doyle's mind was plain. Mr. Meldon, as a clergyman, would naturally be unwilling to take any form of refreshment under the eye of the garrulous Paddy Clancy. Assured of decent privacy, it was natural to suppose that he would drink whisky when it was offered to him.

"I have a bottle of good stuff here," said Doyle persuasively. "The like of it is what you wouldn't get at the bar outside; no, nor at any other bar."

"I won't touch it," said Meldon. "It isn't Paddy Clancy nor his talk that would stop me if I wanted to drink, but I don't. You've been acquainted with me long enough now, Mr. Doyle, to know that I don't go in for promiscuous drinking."

"Will I send for a bottle of lemonade for you?" said Doyle with fine scorn.

"You will not. Do you think I'd go blowing myself out with that sort of fizzy stuff? Let's get to business now, Mr. Doyle, without any more of your

talk and your foolishness. The lady the Major wants the bicycle for is his own niece that's coming to stay with him. He wants a good one, and he'll give ten pounds for it. Now what sort of a bicycle can you be sure of having here in the inside of a week?"

Mr. Doyle sat down at his writing-table and began to take a note of the order.

"What sized frame will you want?" he asked. "Is the lady tall?"

"She's a well-grown girl, but not what you'd call exactly tall. I can't tell you her height to an inch, for I never measured her. The best thing will be to get a low frame, in case of accidents, and then if she's too big for it the saddle can be raised."

After a quarter of an hour of brisk discussion, the make, grade, and size of the bicycle were settled. Doyle, acting, so he said, in a way that would get him into trouble with the makers if the transaction came to their ears, agreed to sell the bicycle at considerably less than the advertised price, thereby foregoing his own legitimate profit.

"It's on account of the respect I have for the Major," he said, "and on account of the liking I have for yourself, Mr. Meldon, that I'm selling the bicycle at the price I am. If it was anyone else that asked it of me, I'd ——"

"You'd do just what you're doing this minute,"

said Meldon, "and make a good profit on the transaction."

"I'll not be making a penny!"

He spoke with such conviction that Meldon hesitated in his disbelief.

"If you're not making money on the bicycle," he said, after a pause, "you'll be expecting to get something out of the Major some other way. What is it?"

Mr. Doyle rose slowly from his writing-table, crossed the room, and sat down in the accustomed corner of the sofa.

"I was telling you before," he said, "that there's a matter I want to speak to you about."

"Trot it out then; and if the particular job you want the Major to do isn't too obviously objectionable, I'll do my best to help you to persuade him."

"You might have heard," said Mr. Doyle, "that the Lord Lieutenant is to pay a visit to the town and the Lady Lieutenant along with him."

The Lord Lieutenant was a well-known English nobleman, the Marquis of Chesterton. His wife, a young American lady of large fortune, had devoted herself to the task of regenerating Ireland. After a careful study of the conditions of Irish life, she arrived at the conclusion that the work of reform ought to begin with the children. So far she was

entirely original. None of her predecessors had attempted to improve the Irish nurseries. But the traditions of office were too strong in the end even for the daring mind of the American marchioness. For the working out of her reform she lapsed into commonplace methods. She founded a society, non-political and non-sectarian in principle, called the "Association for the Amelioration of the Irish Child," and solicited subscriptions for its support. Whether the money was to be spent in presenting hygienic underclothes to the poorer mothers for the use of their babes, or in providing tins of patent foods at a cheap rate to large families, did not appear in the rules of the association.

Lady Chesterton's energies were devoted at first to the task of enrolling members. Not content with swearing in the fashionable parents who attended the levées and drawing-rooms at the Castle, she went round the country in a motor-car, accompanied by His Excellency and a private secretary, and sought recruits among the fathers and mothers of very unlikely places. No district was too remote for Lady Chesterton. She wished to dredge up parents from the streets of the most backward country towns, and Ballymoy was, naturally, one of the places she determined to visit. It seemed likely, since Ballymoy was twenty miles from a railway station, that the chil-

dren there would be badly in need of amelioration.

"Father McCormack," said Doyle, "thinks we ought to have a public meeting and an address of welcome presented. Lord Lieutenants is common enough, and nobody'd put themselves about for one of them, nor yet for a Chief Secretary; but this is the first time a Lady Lieutenant ever came to these parts, and it's my opinion and Father McCormack's opinion that we ought to make the best we can of the occasion."

"I'm surprised at you, Mr. Doyle," said Meldon. "You that are a Nationalist and the President of every kind of league there is, would you be the first to welcome the representative of the English King?"

"You're not looking at the matter in the right way," said Doyle. "It isn't the representative of the King that I'm proposing to welcome — for I wouldn't do the like — but an amiable lady that has shown the greatest sympathy with the people of this country in a practical way. Why wouldn't I welcome her?"

"I suppose now," said Meldon, "that what you're going on is the thing the newspapers call the traditional courtesy of the Irish people towards the fair sex. Is that it?"

"It is," said Doyle, looking Meldon straight in the face without winking.

"And there might be money in it?"

"Of course there's money in it!" said Doyle. "Didn't you hear about the society she has started for ameliorating the Irish children? You can't do that without money. I saw a list of subscriptions the length of your arm in the *Irish Times* a week ago. And what I say is this: Why shouldn't Ballymoy get its share of what's going as well as another place?"

"So we're to have a public meeting, are we?"

"We are. And an address of welcome, illuminated. Now what I want to speak to you about is this: We're in a bit of a difficulty about who is to present the address."

"I'll do it for you if you like," said Meldon. "I never have presented an address of welcome, but I'm sure I could if I tried."

"It wasn't you I had in my mind; though I needn't tell you, Mr. Meldon, I'd sooner see you do it than another. I've a respect for you and a liking. But I'm not sure that it would suit for you to present that address." Doyle's voice sank to a whisper. "Father McCormack mightn't altogether like it."

"Very well, then. Let Father McCormack do it himself. I shan't mind."

"He won't," said Doyle. "He says that, the society being undenominational, and the Lord Lieutenant being a strong Protestant, it wouldn't do for a priest to be presenting the address."

"Do it yourself, then."

"It wouldn't answer me at all. There's people in Ireland, and, what's more, there's newspapers in Dublin, that takes the greatest possible delight in misconstruing the actions of public men like myself. You'll hardly believe me, Mr. Meldon, but them fellows is capable of saying that I was putting in for a knighthood if I presented that address. But I'll tell you what I was thinking. Maybe Major Kent would do it. He's a magistrate and a public man, and he's well liked in the town."

"Ah!" said Meldon, "that's where the Major comes in, is it? I thought we'd get to him soon."

"I'm sure now," said Doyle, "that if you was to ask him he'd do it."

"I'm quite sure he wouldn't, not if I went down on my knees to him and kissed his boot. The Major hates making a show of himself in public. He's not that kind of man at all."

"Well, then, I don't know what's to be done. The address is up in Dublin being illuminated at the present minute, and we're sending a couple of the boys round the town on a house-to-house collection to-night to gather the money to pay for it. It'll be a terrible pity to have it all go to waste on us."

"I'll tell you what now. When did you say they were coming?"

"The date's not fixed yet, but it'll be in about a fortnight."

"Very well," said Meldon; "that'll suit perfectly. I'll get the Major's niece to present the address. She'll be here next week, and she's just the sort of young lady who'd enjoy presenting an address, and, what's more, would present it uncommonly well."

"She might do."

"She will do. You can't possibly get anyone better. The Lord Lieutenant will be delighted, and the Lady Lieutenant, as you call her, will ripple all over with pleasure. I'll arrange with the Major, but if I do you'll have to take another ten shillings off the price of the bicycle."

"I'll lose money on it so."

"You will not, but you'll make. You'll make more than you deserve. But I'll tell you what I'll do so as to meet you halfway: I'll get the Major to give five shillings towards the price of the illuminated address. That's as good as putting it into your pocket, for you'll have to pay up whatever they're short in the price. I don't see how anything could be fairer than that to both parties. And I can tell you that you're uncommonly lucky in getting a hold of Miss Purvis. There won't be another address in the whole province of Connacht presented with the same stately grace and general appropriateness of gesture and expression."

CHAPTER V

THE reputation of the Major's niece spread through all sections of society in Ballymoy during the week which preceded her arrival. Mr. Doyle, since Miss Purvis was to present the illuminated address, felt that he must create a public opinion in her favour. Chatting casually to customers at his bar, he spoke of her as a young lady whose beauty had taken English society by storm, who had been presented to the King, whose company was eagerly sought after by the rich and great. It came by degrees to be generally believed that the visit of the Lord Lieutenant and Lady Chesterton to Ballymoy was to be made in reality for the sake of becoming acquainted with Miss Marjorie Purvis, and that the formation of a branch of the Association for the Amelioration of the Irish Child was a mere excuse. Mrs. Ford, the wife of the Resident Magistrate, Mrs. Cosgrave at the Rectory, and Mrs. Gregg, who had only been a year married to the District Inspector of Police, received their invitation cards and met frequently to discuss the clothes they would wear on the festive occasion. They gradually came to think of Major Kent's niece as a young

lady of splendid and most fashionable attire, in whose company even the remaining glories of Mrs. Gregg's trousseau would be dimmed.

Meldon's society was eagerly sought after. He alone appeared to be in a position to give detailed information about Miss Purvis. He always disclaimed any personal knowledge of her. He said repeatedly and distinctly that he had never seen her, that there was no photograph of her at hand and that he could do no more than guess at her appearance. He was nevertheless quoted as the authority for the portrait which fancy drew. Miss Marjorie — it was thus that everyone spoke of her — was believed to possess a mass of auburn hair, large brown eyes, a lovely complexion, and a figure of surpassing excellence. Her favourite colours, those in which she almost invariably dressed, were said by Mrs. Ford, who gave Meldon as her authority, to be a warm shade of heliotrope and a rich brown. Her hats were spoken of sometimes as "picture"; at other times, more vaguely, as "matinée." Even the country people, dwelling in remote and boggy regions, took an interest in Miss Marjorie and held a theory of their own about her. She was, so they were assured that Meldon had said, a cousin of the Lord Lieutenant's wife. Meldon enjoyed himself amazingly during the week.

Major Kent, who had a natural dislike to being

questioned, and who felt besides that gossip was fixing a reputation on his niece which she might not be able to sustain, shut himself up as much as he could in Portsmouth Lodge. When caught one day in the main street of Ballymoy and asked for more information about his wonderful relative, he vehemently denied everything that anybody had said. His action merely served to stimulate the growth of what may be described as the "Marjorie myth." It was felt that the Major, as a modest man, could not be expected to boast publicly about the professional beauty of the Kent family.

The bicycle arrived four days after it had been ordered, which was regarded in Ballymoy as a remarkable proof of Doyle's business energy. The congratulations which poured in on him were well deserved. He had written three letters and sent no less than four telegrams about the bicycle. It was unpacked from its case under Meldon's personal supervision and polished to the highest possible degree. Then it was placed on show in the window of Doyle's drapery store, surmounted by a large card which bore in red letters an extremely mendacious notice. "This bicycle," so the public were informed, "was specially manufactured by the British and Irish Cycle Company to the order of Major Kent, Esq., J.P., of Portsmouth Lodge." The saleswoman of the drapery

store, who had been obliged to remove a number of exquisite blouses from her window, resented the bicycle. The next morning she made up for the loss of advertisement which her goods suffered by placing in front of the bicycle a corset labelled "Special and Elegant — The Marjorie." Very fortunately Meldon happened to pass down the street shortly after the garment was exposed to view. He called on Doyle at once and insisted that the corset should be removed. He said that no self-respecting uncle, least of all Major Kent, would tolerate the publication of his niece's name in connection with underclothes.

The meeting of Miss Marjorie at a railway station twenty miles distant from Ballymoy was a serious business, and arrangements were made in good time. Jamesy Deveril, the groom, was sent off early in the morning with a spring-cart. He was to feed his horse in Donard and be ready to set off home with the luggage as soon as the train arrived. Major Kent and Meldon started at nine o'clock on the car. The train by which Miss Marjorie travelled was due in Donard at a quarter-past one. Luncheon could be eaten in the hotel and a start made for home at about half-past two o'clock, the horse by that time being sufficiently rested to travel his second twenty miles at a reasonable speed. There was thus every hope of Marjorie's reaching Portsmouth Lodge in time for

a late afternoon tea and finding her luggage there to meet her. Mrs. O'Halloran was charged to have the tea ready. The Major himself unpacked and put out on plates the first instalment of cakes which arrived from the stores. Two of the ladies' papers were laid on the drawing-room table; the third and largest the Major put in his niece's bedroom. Meldon objected to this arrangement, arguing that it was a pity not to display the papers to the best advantage. The Major stuck to his own plan. He said that the illustrations of the advertisements in that particular paper were not suitable for public exhibition and that it would be embarrassing for his niece to look at them in Meldon's company. The tennis net was erected in the paddock and the ground marked out. Mrs. O'Halloran was told to see that Mary Garry adorned herself with a cap and apron. Meldon, acting on the advice of the young lady in Doyle's drapery store, had bought a supply of these garments and was particularly pleased at the enormously long white streamers which depended from them.

Mr. and Mrs. Gregg, who happened to be on the road in front of their house when the car started, waved a greeting to the Major. Doyle, at the door of the hotel, where the car had to stop to pick up Meldon, wished the expedition good luck. A straggling cheer, led by Paddy Clancy, gave a final send-

off as the horse trotted along the main street of Ballymoy.

Travelling quietly, so as not to exhaust the horse, the Major and Meldon arrived in Donard shortly after twelve o'clock. They went at once to the hotel and saw their horse stabled and fed. Then they went indoors to order luncheon. The landlord offered them a choice of chops or chicken. The Major ordered both — a wise precaution, for the chicken destined for the meal was still at large, pecking Indian meal in the yard. The question of a pudding was more difficult. A custard pudding, suggested by the landlord, was not satisfactory. The Major himself detested custard pudding and found it difficult to believe that his niece would eat it. The landlord did not seem hopeful of his cook's being able to make anything else.

Driven to despair by the Major's persistent objections to the custard pudding, he recollected at last that there was a "tin of what they call pineapples in the shop beyond." He supposed that the Major could have it if he liked; but, foreseeing possible disappointment, he disclaimed any responsibility for its condition.

"I wouldn't say but it might have gone bad on us. I mind seeing it there on the shelf along with the jam and the starch for maybe five years."

The wrangle about luncheon lasted half an hour,

and it was one o'clock when the Major and Meldon reached the railway station. Jamesy Deveril and the spring-cart stood at the gate. A rope was ready at hand to bind the niece's luggage securely into its place.

"I suppose," said the Major, "she won't have more luggage than the cart can carry."

"No," said Meldon, "she won't. From my experience of girls, I should say that at the very outside she won't have more than one trunk, a smaller one, a hold-all, two hat-boxes, a dressing-case, and a small hand-bag; not counting rugs, umbrellas, and perhaps golf clubs. The dressing-case and the hand-bag we shall, of course, take with us on the car. She will very likely want them in the hotel before luncheon. The rest will easily fit on the cart. I hope you told Jamesy to start at once and drive lively."

"I did. I told him to be off the minute he got the luggage."

"That's all right. The luggage ought to get there before we do. She'd naturally want to change her dress before tea. I wish now that we'd thought of telling Mrs. O'Halloran and Mary Garry to unpack her things for her."

"We could wire to them," said the Major, "if you think it's necessary."

"Better not," said Meldon. "We'd only confuse

Mrs. O'Halloran. What with the afternoon tea and Mary Garry's cap and apron, she's over-excited already. A telegram might upset her seriously, and from what I saw of Mary Garry yesterday I should say that the sight of an orange envelope would drive her into hysterics."

They paced the platform together in silence for nearly five minutes. Then the Major spoke again.

"You'll take her on your side of the car, J. J., and talk to her. I'll drive."

"All right. I think it would show more family affection if you sat with her and let me drive. But she's your niece, not mine, so, of course, you can arrange it any way you like."

"I don't understand girls," said the Major. "I couldn't possibly talk to one for two hours and a-half straight on end. You can point out all the objects of interest we pass on the way."

"Of course, if you're afraid of your own niece, Major, I'll tackle her for you. I'm not nervous. So far as Miss Marjorie herself is concerned, I daresay she'll prefer sitting with me. She certainly would if she knew that your only idea of conversation is pointing out objects of interest. But I should have thought you'd have liked to hear the latest news about your sister. You haven't seen her for twenty-

two years, you know. You ought to want to hear about her."

The Major made no apology for his want of interest in Mrs. Purvis. For five minutes more they paced the platform in silence. Then Meldon looked at his watch and remarked that the train was late. The station-master, being appealed to, assured them that "she" had been signalled from the next station and would arrive in less than ten minutes. He was right. Shortly after he spoke the engine panted round the corner outside the station and dragged up to the platform two coaches and a luggage-van. The Major and Meldon peered eagerly into the two first-class compartments. One of them contained a Government official, a dignified gentleman with a despatch-box and a cigar. The other was empty. In the second-class compartments there was nobody at all. From the other coach, which was made up of five third-class compartments, there emerged three commercial travellers, two labourers, and a dishevelled little girl of about ten years old.

"She hasn't come!" said the Major.

"No," said Meldon, "she hasn't. We may as well go home."

"What on earth are we to do? Where can she be? My sister Margaret ——"

"From what you've told me about your sister,"

said Meldon, "I think it highly likely that Miss Marjorie, having once got off by herself, has made up her mind to have a gay time of it in Dublin for a few days before coming down to a dull hole like Ballymoy. Lots of girls do that sort of thing nowadays. It's what's called asserting their economic independence."

"She's lost!" said the Major. "Either she's missed the train in Dublin or she's forgotten to change at Athlone. Margaret will never forgive me! I must send wires to every station along the line. I shall take the next train to Dublin myself and look for her."

"There isn't a train till ten o'clock to-night. Don't get fussy, Major. The girl's all right. She's probably rushing about the streets on top of a tram this minute, enjoying herself immensely. I know exactly the sort of things a girl would do. She'll turn up all right in two or three days."

The station-master approached them from the other end of the platform and touched his hat:

"There's a young lady here, Major, who says she's expecting you to meet her."

"Where?" said the Major.

The station-master pointed to the little girl, who stood alone but apparently quite self-possessed near the luggage-van. A porter had laid a small leather-

bound cabin-trunk on the platform beside her.

"Good Lord!" said the Major. "Can that be Marjorie?"

"She's not exactly what you led us to expect," said Meldon, "but she's evidently your niece. She's the only niece you'll get here to-day anyhow, so you'd better make the most of her."

"But — but — she's a mere child!"

Meldon left him and walked up to the little girl.

"Are you Marjorie Purvis?" he asked.

She stretched out her hand to him with frank friendliness. Her face was very dirty and her hair was dishevelled, but she was neither shy nor embarrassed.

"You're Uncle John, I suppose?" she said.

"No, I'm not," said Meldon. "My name is Meldon — Joseph John Meldon — and you can call me 'J. J.' for short if you like. Lots of people do. Your Uncle John is standing over there beside the man with the gold band on his hat and the brass buttons on his coat. He doesn't seem to be a very affectionate uncle, but in reality he is. When you get to know him better, you'll find that the stiffness of manner which strikes you now will wear off and he'll become quite demonstrative. The thing for you to do now is to go over to him and kiss him heartily on both cheeks."

"He doesn't look as if he wants to be kissed," said Marjorie doubtfully.

"All the same, he does. That's what he's waiting for."

Marjorie took Meldon's hand and led him along the platform to the Major.

"Uncle John," she said, "here I am."

"How do you do?" said the Major, putting out his right hand.

"J. J. said you'd like me to kiss you," said Marjorie, "but I can't unless you stoop down."

The Major scowled ferociously at Meldon and stooped. Marjorie kissed him decisively, first on one cheek and then on the other. The station-master grinned.

"Come on now," said Meldon, "and we'll get a bite to eat. I expect you're hungry, aren't you, Marjorie? Your Uncle John and I have arranged to have a chicken and some chops ready for you, and a custard pudding and some tinned pineapple which has probably gone bad. After that we're going for a long drive on a car."

"With a nice gee-gee," said the Major.

He felt disappointed in his niece and puzzled; but he did not intend to allow Meldon to take entire possession of her. He believed that the term "gee-gee" was the proper one to use in speaking of a horse to a child. Marjorie looked at him with pity-

ing scorn. Then she took Meldon's hand and hurried him along the platform.

"Come along," she said, "and let's feed. I've got a rare old twist on!"

"Good God!" said the Major.

"Marjorie," said Meldon, "does your Aunt Margaret — I mean to say, does your mother, Mrs. Purvis, allow you to use language of that kind? Do you in your own home, in the presence of your parents, speak of 'a rare old twist'?"

The child looked up at him and a smile broadened out on her face.

"You're not mother. You don't mind what I say. No more does Uncle John. He was silly just now about the gee-gee, but I think he's a nice man really."

"He is," said Meldon, "and so am I. But it doesn't follow that we're the sort of men who habitually use bad language."

"'Twist' isn't bad language," said Marjorie. "But I do know some bad language, real bad. I learned it from a sailor on the ship. It's terrible bad and shocking. Shall I say it for you?"

"No," said Meldon, "don't! It might be too much for me. I'm young and innocent — younger than I look, a good deal. But some time, when you're alone with your Uncle John, say it to him, all you know of it, straight out. You'll enjoy watching the way he takes it."

CHAPTER VI

MARJORIE displayed a healthy appetite at luncheon. The chops were hardly less tough than the chicken, but she ate first one and then the other with apparent enjoyment. To the amazement of her uncle she also liked the custard pudding. The pineapple, after Meldon had smelt it and carefully dissected a slice with his knife, was pronounced unfit for human food, to the great disappointment of Marjorie.

When luncheon was over, Major Kent whispered to Meldon that he wished to speak to him privately. After a profusion of apologies, which Marjorie accepted graciously, the two men left the room.

"Well," said Meldon, when they got outside the hotel and had lit their pipes, "I must say Miss Marjorie has rather let us in. She's a charming little girl, of course — I wouldn't ask a nicer, but she's not exactly what the people of Ballymoy have been expecting."

"It's entirely your fault, J. J.," said the Major, and it was evident that he was seriously vexed.

"I don't see that. How on earth can it be my fault that your niece is only ten years old? Blame

your sister Margaret if you must blame anybody, or blame Purvis; though I think you will be acting unjustly if you do even that. But you can't possibly blame me or speak about it's being my fault."

"I do blame you. If you hadn't gone gassing about the town saying that Marjorie was a grown-up young lady, this trouble would never have come on us. Now we're in an utterly ridiculous position. We're committed to a series of parties and an address to a Lord Lieutenant, and everybody is expecting to see a fashionable beauty. Good heavens, J. J! What are we to do?"

"The address to the Lord Lieutenant will be all right. I'll settle that with Doyle. The parties are a bit awkward, I admit. I suppose we couldn't buy her a long frock and pretend she's grown-up, could we? She wouldn't look so very young if we rigged her out properly. Mary Garry would do up her hair. Marjorie herself would enjoy it. It would be the best of games for her."

"Don't be an infernal ass! We've got to see the thing through as it stands. But whatever possessed you to say that she was a grown-up young lady?"

"I deduced her age from the information you afforded me," said Meldon. "You distinctly said that the Purvises had been twenty-two years married, and that the girl's name was Marjorie. I still maintain

that the inference that I drew from those two facts was perfectly sound in principle. It has turned out to be wrong. I admit that, of course. But nine times out of ten — ninety-nine times out of a hundred — I should have been perfectly right. I don't see that I can be blamed in any way. The responsibility for our unfortunate position — and I quite grant that it is unfortunate — rests entirely on you."

"It doesn't! I never opened my mouth except to say that I knew nothing about her whatever."

"It does! You ought to have known the age of your own sister's child. It's a great shame for a man like you not to have kept in touch with his sister. There you were, grossly ignorant of the very existence of your only sister's only child."

"She's not the only child. I happen to know that much. Margaret has written to me again and again, and each time she has announced the birth of either a son or a daughter. I think there must be ten of them at least. I'm nearly sure that I'm godfather to four. I suppose this one is the youngest."

"If you'd told me all that at the time when we first talked the matter over, I shouldn't have been so confident about Marjorie's age. However, there's no use in going back on your past mistakes. I don't want to twit you with them and rub them in. We must get back to that poor child. She'll be lonely."

"Wait a minute, J. J.! There's no hurry. I want to make some arrangements. We must spend some hours here."

"Why?"

"Because I'm not going to drive through Ballymoy till after dark. I couldn't face it. Everybody will be out watching for us. You saw the way they turned out to see us off. It will be worse going home. I should have to offer some kind of public explanation."

"Be a man, Major! Face the inevitable. After all, you'll have to explain sooner or later. It will be easier for you to do it once for all in a public speech from the car outside of Doyle's hotel, than to be dribbling out the miserable truth to one person after another as you happen to meet them. Far better get the thing over at one gulp."

"No. If I get safe home to-night I'll shut myself up and leave you to do the explaining. I'll write round and put off those six abominable parties."

"You can't do that. It would be absolutely cruel. Mrs. Ford's got a new dress. She told me so herself. One or two of the parties must come off. If they don't she'll fall into a rapid decline and her death will lie at your door."

"Let her die! What does it matter to me whether she dies or not?"

"And even if we put off all the parties, you've still got to face the Lord Lieutenant. He's not likely to die just to oblige you, and I don't see any other way of escaping that ceremony. You're absolutely committed to it."

"I'll send round word that the child's in bed with the measles."

"You may," said Meldon. "You may tell a deliberate lie in public. You may cast a slight upon the representative of the King, insult him wantonly in a far worse way than any Nationalist ever did; but don't imagine that you'll escape by doing that. You'll be found out to a certainty, and then the consequences will be worse than anything you can imagine. From what I have seen of Marjorie so far, I should say that she's not at all the sort of little girl who'd stay in bed all day when she hasn't got the measles. She'd get out as soon as your back is turned and go wandering somewhere about the roads while you're perjuring yourself to the Lord Lieutenant. Somebody will see her, and then you'll be in a much worse position than you are now."

The Major remained silent, overwhelmed perhaps by the prospect of the failure of his plan.

"You'll hardly go so far," said Meldon, "as to actually inoculate the unfortunate child in such a way as to make her really ill. If you do, I'll denounce

you publicly. I'm very fond of poor little Marjorie, although she's not my niece. The Lord Lieutenant's wife is coming round here specially to protect children from ill-usage. If I tell her that you've been injecting any kind of vile bacillus into your niece Marjorie, she'll have you prosecuted with the utmost severity, even if she has to get a special Act of Parliament passed for the purpose, and she'll be perfectly right."

"Anyhow," said the Major sullenly, "I'm not going home till after dark."

"All right. I suppose I must do my best to amuse Marjorie for the afternoon. There is an old castle and almost half a ruined abbey just outside the town. I don't expect she'll care much about them, but, unless you can suggest something better to do, I'll take her to see them. I expect the poor child is weeping at this moment in the hotel from sheer loneliness and from having nothing to read except railway time-tables."

Meldon was wrong. Marjorie was not weeping. She was not even in the coffee-room, where she had been left. He and Major Kent looked at each other anxiously.

"There!" said Meldon. "Now you've gone and lost your niece. You'll have to be more careful about her or there'll be trouble afterwards with your

sister Margaret. She may have ten children, as you say; she may have a dozen, but you'll find she'll resent the loss of Marjorie."

A loud burst of laughter from the bar of the hotel reached the coffee-room.

"I'll get those people to come and help to look for her," said the Major.

He crossed the passage, followed by Meldon, and pushed open the door which led to the bar. Round the counter stood the landlord, two maids, the three commercial travellers who had come in the train with Marjorie, and several of the inhabitants of the town of Donard. On the counter, picking her steps very carefully among the glasses, was Marjorie.

"Hullo, J. J.!" she said. "Hullo, Uncle John! I thought you were never coming."

"The young lady," said the proprietor of the hotel apologetically, "was just showing us the way the captain did be walking about the deck of the steamer she came home in."

"Marjorie," said the Major, "get down at once!"

"I hope," said Meldon, "that you're convinced now, Major, that your measles plan won't work. Is that the kind of child who'd spend a day in bed when she's perfectly well?"

Marjorie was lifted from the counter in the arms of a grinning housemaid and deposited beside the Major.

"Come along," said Meldon, taking her hand. "We're going to see an ancient castle. It's a perfectly fascinating ruin of immense antiquity, full of every sort of secret chamber and hidden cave, and ghosts which walk at night in clanking chains."

The description evidently appealed strongly to Marjorie. She passed out of the hotel at a run, dragging Meldon after her. The Major followed. They were obliged to stop several times in order that Marjorie might admire some sight that was new to her. The turf-laden carts excited her curiosity. The fact that few of the children wore shoes and stockings aroused in her a desire to take off her own. The castle, when they reached it, proved disappointing. Nothing survived in the way of a secret chamber or a hidden cave. No ghost put in an appearance. Meldon saw Marjorie's face fall. He roused himself to provide some entertainment for her.

"Let's play hide-and-seek," he said. "You and I will hide and your Uncle John will seek for us."

"No," said Marjorie decidedly; "I'll seek! You two can hide."

"Very well. Turn your face to that wall and don't look round until we shout. Come along, Major."

Meldon climbed half-way up a broken stone staircase and stood hidden by a projecting corner of the wall.

"As soon as you're concealed, Major," he said, "shout 'Cuckoo' as loud as you can."

Several minutes passed in silence, and Meldon descended to discover what had happened to the Major. He found him wandering among the ruins, quite unable to decide on a hiding-place.

"Hurry up!" said Meldon. "You mustn't keep the poor child waiting there all day. Here, lie down flat behind that stone — flatter than that. Your shoulders are sticking up, and she'll see you the moment she turns round. Now, give me a minute to get up my staircase again, and then shout 'Cuckoo.'"

"I can't do that — I really can't, J. J. It's — it's too ridiculous."

"You must. You'll have to play this game every day more or less for the next six weeks — except Sundays, of course. You may as well get used to it at once. When you undertake to entertain a child, there's no greater mistake than to do the thing half-heartedly. Buck up, Major, and throw yourself into the game."

The Major shouted a feeble and wavering "Cuckoo!" Marjorie started on her search and almost immediately discovered him.

"Run, Uncle John; run!"

"Where to? Why?"

"To the den, of course. Don't you understand the game?"

The Major ran. Marjorie pursued him. After an exciting chase he took refuge breathlessly on Meldon's staircase. Then Marjorie had them both at her mercy and enjoyed her position immensely. The game went on again and lasted till every possible hiding-place in the ruin had been exploited.

"It's five o'clock," said Meldon. "Let's go and get tea. Then we'll start for home."

It was nearly nine o'clock when the car reached Ballymoy. Marjorie was sound asleep, with her head on Meldon's shoulder. His arm was round her and he had covered her with a rug. It was fortunate that there were very few people in the street. If Mr. Doyle or any other of the chief inhabitants of the town had seen the position of Major Kent's famous niece, the young lady's reputation for propriety of conduct would certainly have suffered.

"J. J.," said the Major, "how do you suppose that Mrs. O'Halloran will take this — this alteration in our plans?"

"It's very difficult to tell," said Meldon. "I should say myself that if we'd told her at first that your niece was a child she'd have packed up her box and left you on the spot. As it is, I expect she'll be

so relieved to find that she isn't a grown-up young lady that she'll be quite kind to Marjorie."

"I hope she will," said the Major. "I expect, I am confident she will. What I'm afraid of is that she'll ill-treat you and me, especially me. Marjorie will be a shock to her after all the preparations she has made."

Mrs. O'Halloran had, in fact, got over any shock she may have received many hours before the car arrived at Portsmouth Lodge. Jamesy Deveril, who drove the spring-cart, brought home the news that Miss Marjorie was no more than "a little slip of a girleen, maybe ten year old, and maybe not that itself." Mrs. O'Halloran was at first very indignant. The honour of Portsmouth Lodge, of which she felt herself the chief supporter, was in danger of being brought into public contempt by Miss Marjorie's failure to come up to the descriptions given of her beforehand. After awhile her anger gave place to anxiety. As the appointed time of the arrival passed and hour after hour went by, she expressed fears about the safety of the party. She despatched Mary Garry again and again to "the top of the hill beyond to take a look if there might be a car coming up along the road." When, at last, she heard the wheels on the gravel, she rushed from the kitchen to the front door and assailed Major Kent and Meldon with an outburst of indignant reproach.

"What was on ye at all," she said, "to keep the child out till this hour of the night? Have ye no sense, the pair of yez? Here it is near ten o'clock and the little lady ought to have been in her bed two hours ago. Where have you her hid? Is it drinking ye were beyond at Donard?"

"It was not," said Meldon, "but playing hide-and-seek in the old castle."

"I wouldn't wonder at you to do the like, Mr. Meldon. Sure, everybody knows that you've no sense, no more than the youngest gossure that does be going to school. But the Major's old enough to know better."

"Come here now, Mrs. O'Halloran," said Meldon, "and take the child from me. I'm afraid to get off the car with her the way she is. Stop your nonsense and come here."

"Nonsense, is it? No, but sense, more sense than ever came out of your mouth, for all you think you can build a nest in a body's ear with your talk." She took Marjorie in her arms. The child, half awakened, began to cry. "Come then, alanav," said Mrs. O'Halloran. "Come to me, agra. Will you loose your hold on her, Mr. Meldon? Haven't you made trouble enough for one day with your hide-and-seek in the old castle?"

"Take her," said Meldon. "Hold her carefully, and don't drop her. Give her a cupful of hot milk —

more if she'll take it. Then put her to bed. And if you can't do it yourself, get Mary Garry to help you."

Mrs. O'Halloran stood speechless with Marjorie in her arms. She looked at Meldon, and longed for words which would express her feelings towards him. She failed to find them. She turned and entered the house in silence.

"Mind the step," said Meldon. "You'll trip over the front of your dress if you don't take care. You'd better let Mary Garry help you."

"Me," muttered Mrs. O'Halloran, "that has reared six of my own. It beats all, so it does! The Lord forgive the woman that was mother to the like of him and sent him out to be the plague of the world. Will you get away out of that, Mary Garry, from under my feet? What would suit you would be to be fetching the nightdress for the little lady that I have airing before the kitchen fire. And when you have that done you can go in and attend on the master and Meldon. They'll be wanting something to eat after their gallivanting and play-acting."

CHAPTER VII

MELDON sat late that night at Portsmouth Lodge. It was twelve o'clock before he succeeded in reducing the Major to what he called a reasonable frame of mind. In the end it was settled that the first, at least, of the parties for which invitations had been issued should be held; that Meldon should undertake the duty of explaining to Doyle, and through him to the Ballymoy public, that the Major's niece was not a professional beauty but a shabby-looking little girl of ten years old. He undertook to make it quite clear that the Major himself was in no way to blame for the disappointment which would certainly follow the discovery of the truth about Marjorie.

"I shall," said Meldon, "take the initiative in this matter of explaining. *Venienti occurrite morbo.* You know the maxim, Major; or very probably you don't, as it's in Latin. But the advice is perfectly sound. It may be freely translated in this way: If you suspect that Doyle is going to tackle you, and you have a weak position, don't wait, but dart in and tackle Doyle."

"If you can get us out of the Lord Lieutenant

business, J. J., I hope you will. I can't tell you how I shrink from that."

"I hardly expect to put a stop to the whole presentation project. In fact, I don't intend to try. My idea is to make such alterations in the plan as will be suitable to the existing circumstances. I shall see Doyle first thing to-morrow morning and talk the matter over with him. I'll let you know how I get on. I shall be out here in good time for the tea-party in the afternoon. I'll see you safe through that. And now I'll say good-night. Sleep sound, Major. Nothing unpleasant can happen before to-morrow morning anyhow, and I don't see why anything unpleasant should happen then."

At half-past ten o'clock the next morning Meldon walked into the hotel and called for Doyle. He had a delicate and difficult negotiation before him and intended to conduct it as skilfully as possible. It was above all things necessary to avoid being apologetic and to show no signs of anxiety. Therefore he began the conversation without any reference to the Major's niece.

"I called round," he said, "to tell you that I'm going out to Portsmouth Lodge this afternoon at about three o'clock. I'm taking my dog, Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, with me. I shall be very much obliged if you'll lock up your brown terrier. I don't mind a

fight in the ordinary way, but I hate to have dogs rushing up against the front wheel of my bicycle and upsetting me in the middle of the road."

"I know a man down in Donard," said Doyle slowly, "who'd be glad to buy that dog off you if you were thinking of selling him."

"Well, I'm not."

"He'd give you ten shillings," said Doyle, "and what's more he'd pay you back the half-crown you spent on the license last March."

"You must be pretty flush of money, these times, Doyle, if you'd give all that for a white dog, and you with a brute of a terrier about the place already. I suppose you think you're going to make a fortune and all out of this visit of the Lord Lieutenant."

"Is it me? What would I do with your dog? What I was saying was that a man away back in Donard, a cousin of my own, wants him for killing rats."

"I know very well what you were saying, and I know what you were meaning, too. What's more, I know what you'd do with my dog if you had him. It shows me the kind of man you are and the way you stick at nothing. Just so as to have it to say that your beast of a brown terrier could bite the head off every dog in Ballymoy, you're prepared to spend ten shillings, to spend twelve and sixpence and the price

of a dose of strychnine, to get hold of the one dog in the place that can lick yours and always will."

"There's them that holds," said Doyle, "that the clergy is the curse of this country, and that Ireland will never be anything but a poor backward place till we get rid of the whole pack of you, Catholic and Protestant together. I'm coming to be very much that way of thinking myself. Divil the man ever I met but you'd get the better of him. It's too cute you are. But what good is it to you at the latter end? Listen to me now. What would you say if we was to shut the two of them up in the cow-house together, your white dog and my terrier, and lock the door on them the way nobody would interfere with them? Then they could have it out together in peace and the town wouldn't be plagued after with their goings on in the public streets."

"I'm surprised at your suggesting such a thing," said Meldon. "You that's a magistrate, and the chairman of the committee that's going to welcome the Lord Lieutenant to the town. I didn't think you'd propose to me to get up a dog fight. By the way, I suppose you have it all settled about the presentation of that address of welcome."

"The Lord Lieutenant," said Doyle, "is to be here this day week, and her ladyship along with him. Father McCormack had a letter about the visit yes-

terday. We have the address ready. It was last night it came down from Dublin in a packing-case. I had it put up in the drapery window, instead of the bicycle that the Major took away yesterday. You might have taken notice of it as you came in."

"I did not notice it, but I'll take your word for it that it's there all right. I suppose, now, your milliner will put out those corsets again with a notice to say that they're the same make that Lady Chesterton always wears. If she does I expect Mrs. Ford will buy a pair. She has a great respect for everything connected with the Castle. She has to, of course, on account of her husband's being an R.M."

Doyle took no notice of this suggestion.

"What I was wanting to speak to you about," he said, "is the programme of the proceedings of the day. I have it here drawn up and written out by a nephew of my own, the young man that does be reporting the meetings of the Board of Guardians for the *Donard Gazette*. He's got the job of sending an account of the proceedings on the occasion of the Lord Lieutenant's visit up to the Dublin papers. He has it ready, all to one little bit, so as he won't be behind with it when the time comes. I have it here in my pocket, and if it's pleasing to you, I'll read it out, so as you'll be able to tell the Major just what it is that we're proposing to do, and then he'll know

that it's all to be conducted decent and proper. Listen to me now. 'At twelve o'clock sharp the Viceregal party drove into the town in their luxuriously upholstered motor-car, preceded by the town band in a two-horse brake. The cortège reached the convent gate, where a halt was called. The girls of the industrial school'—all the whole lot of them in white stockings and white cotton frocks—'rendered with striking expression the touching song, "Come back to Erin."' That's a non-political song, Mr. Meldon, and commits nobody to anything. The Major can't have any objection to make to that."

"The Lord Lieutenant's an Englishman," said Meldon, "and his wife's an American. What's the good of telling them to come back to Erin, the land of their birth?"

"Is that in the song? But sure what odds does it make? Nobody minds the words of a song. For the matter of that it's few ever hears the words of a song, barring the singers themselves. Listen to me now, till I go on with the report: 'When the procession moved on, Father McCormack had taken his seat in the motor-car opposite the Lord Lieutenant.' He'll be looking as affable as he's able. 'The band then struck up "The Wearing of the Green."'"

"That's a political song: not that I think the Lord Lieutenant will mind."

"He won't. Last Patrick's Day, when I was up in Dublin, I seen a military band at the head of a whole regiment of British soldiers in red coats, playing that tune as if they'd burst with the pleasure of it, on the north side of Stephen's Green, no less. Believe you me, they wouldn't have done the like of that without they'd got their orders direct from the Castle, so it's not likely the Lord Lieutenant will have any objection. Where was I now? I've lost my place and the handwriting is mighty crabbed. 'The next halt was made at the door of the Imperial Hotel, where a sumptuous luncheon awaited their Excellencies and suite.'"

"It seems to me, Doyle, that you're doing yourself middling well in this business from start to finish. You'll charge them five bob a head for that lunch, not counting drinks, and all those white stockings will have to be bought in your shop."

Doyle winked, so slowly and emphatically that his right eye remained closed for nearly a quarter of a minute. Then he went on reading from his nephew's manuscript:

"'At the door of the hotel stood Miss Marjorie Purvis, the charming niece of Major Kent, Esq., J.P., of Portsmouth Lodge, supported by the Rev. J. J. Meldon, B.A.'"

"Right. I'll be there; but tell your nephew to put

in T.C.D. after the B.A. I'm most particular about that."

"'Major Kent, Esq., J.P.——'"

"I'm not so sure of him. If I were you I wouldn't forward the account to the newspapers till you've actually seen the Major supporting his niece."

"'Mr. Doyle, J.P., Chairman U.D.C., and other prominent citizens of Ballymoy. Miss Marjorie Purvis, who held in her hand an address of welcome, beautifully illuminated in a chaste Celtic design by Messrs. O'Donovan & Smiles of Dublin, wore a gown of ——' The young fellow that wrote that out said he'd have to rely on you to let him know beforehand what the Major's niece's dress is made of and the colour of it. I suppose now it's all right about her presenting the address?"

"It is," said Meldon. "There'll be no hitch about that. I'll rehearse it with her."

"There now," said Doyle. "Doesn't that just show the way the people of this town will take the greatest delight in telling lies? Would you believe it, Jamesy Deveril, the same that's the Major's groom, was round and in and about last night putting it out that the Major's niece was no more than a little slip of a girl, maybe ten year old and maybe not that? I said to them that told me, that I'd see you, Mr. Meldon, and if I didn't care to be asking the question

of you right out, and I wouldn't, I'd draw the subject down in the course of conversation."

"As a matter of fact," said Meldon, "I've been thinking for some time back that it would be a great deal better for us if the Major's niece turned out not to be quite grown up."

Doyle looked at him suspiciously. Meldon felt that he had reached the critical point of his explanation. He pulled himself together and spoke with an air of deep conviction.

"What we want," he said, "is to give the Lord Lieutenant a thoroughly happy day, the sort of day he'll look back on in after-years as one of the most agreeable he ever spent. Now I need hardly tell you, Doyle, that the Lord Lieutenant's enjoyment will largely depend on the amount of pleasure we give his wife. You agree with me there, I suppose?"

"I wouldn't say but that may be right enough," said Doyle cautiously.

"Very well. Now what is it that Lady Chesterton really likes? It isn't the town band playing tunes. She hears better tunes every day of her life at the Viceregal Lodge in Dublin. It isn't seeing magistrates and Urban District Councillors in their best clothes. It isn't getting illuminated addresses. They simply bore her. She has whole stacks of them piled away in one of the back rooms of the Castle. It

isn't any lunch you'd be likely to give her, for she's accustomed to a solid four-course meal every day at that hour in her own home. What is it then? What do you know about the real tastes of the lady?"

"I shouldn't wonder but I know as much as you do."

"You do not then. I don't set up to be a regular tame cat in Dublin Castle, an aide-de-camp or a Vice-regal chaplain, or a State dentist, or anything of that sort, with a right to the private entrée at the levées; but I've carefully considered the habits of every Lord Lieutenant's wife who has ruled Ireland since I was a boy, and I give it to you as my opinion that there's nothing any of them really enjoy so much as kissing little girls."

"I never heard the like of that in all my born days!"

"It's true all the same. Read the newspapers, Doyle. I'm always saying that to you, but you don't do it. Read the accounts of the receptions given to every Lord Lieutenant's wife who visits anything — convent, technical school, hospital, or any other mortal thing — and you'll find that if there's a little girl on the premises anywhere the Lord Lieutenant's wife kisses her. I've known her pick out one from the middle of a crowd on a railway-station platform and

kiss her on the spot. Now would she do that if she didn't like it?"

"I've heard of it being done," said Doyle. "I don't deny that."

"Very well. Now if we provide a grown-up young lady — in other words, if Miss Marjorie Purvis had turned out to be the age we were led to expect — the Lord Lieutenant's wife couldn't very well have kissed her. I've felt that difficulty all along, though I didn't like to throw cold water on the plans you had made by saying anything about it. But now that the Major's niece turns out to be just exactly the age and size that Lord Lieutenants' wives like best, why it's a jolly good thing for us, and we ought to be thankful. It will make all the difference in the success of the party. Besides ——"

"You'll excuse me interrupting you," said Doyle, "but Father McCormack ——"

"I'll come to him in a minute," said Meldon. "What I want to say just now is this. Your nephew wants to know what sort of a dress the Major's niece intends to wear, so that he can put a description of it in his report for the Dublin papers. As it happens, she hasn't brought a really suitable dress with her. What I propose is to get her one and to order it from your dressmaker. That'll be as good as a pound into your pocket, net profit."

"It will, of course," said Doyle.

"The Major won't jib at the bill, whatever it is. On an occasion of this sort he'll want to do the thing decently. I wouldn't wonder if you made a clear thirty shillings on the dress."

"And what will it be like?" said Doyle. "On account of my nephew, who's writing up the report of the proceedings, I'd be glad to have a description of the dress."

"It'll be white — white muslin trimmed with silk. You may put it down as 'a simple but charming white frock, relieved with bows of blue ribbon and gathered at the waist with a sash of the same colour.' Will that do you?"

Doyle inserted the description of this toilet into his nephew's manuscript.

"I'd say green for the ribbons," said Meldon, "only that the Major's such a strong Unionist I'm afraid he'd object. But anyway, you and I know that blue is the real national colour of ancient Ireland. Green's a mere modern invention."

"Blue will do," said Doyle; "but you'd better bring her in to the dressmaker as soon as you can. There's a lot of dresses ordered for the girls up at the convent."

"Right. I'll have her in to-morrow morning. And now about Father McCormack. This alteration

in the Major's niece will have to be explained to him, and you'd better do it. You needn't go into all that about the kissing. It wouldn't interest him, and he mightn't like it; though, of course, he couldn't say there was anything actually wrong about it, even if it was the Lord Lieutenant himself that did it. Kissing at that age isn't at all what it becomes later on. But it might be better not to mention it. The thing for you to say to him is this: Considering that the main object of the Viceregal visit to Ballymoy is the amelioration of the Irish child, we thought it better that the Major's niece, who is to present the address of welcome, should be a child herself. He'll see at once that that's quite reasonable."

"I'll tell him that," said Doyle, "and if anybody else says a word ——"

"Nobody else will. If you and I and Father McCormack and the Lord Lieutenant's wife are satisfied, I don't see that it's anybody else's business to make a row."

"Nobody'd dare. If anybody did ——"

"You'd deal with him. You and Father McCormack between you. Very well, then, we'll consider all that settled. I must be getting on now, for I've a lot to do. Good-bye, Doyle. Next Tuesday. I'll make a note of the day so that there'll be no mistake, and you'll see Father McCormack."

CHAPTER VIII

MELDON arrived at Portsmouth Lodge at half-past three in the afternoon. He left Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz and his bicycle outside the hall door and walked straight into the study. Major Kent sat in a chair near the window and smoked moodily. His copy of the *Times,* which had arrived an hour before, lay unopened on the table. It was plain that he was suffering from an acute fit of depression.

"J. J.," he said reproachfully, "you said that you could manage girls. Now is the time for you to show that you were speaking the truth."

"I said I understood girls," said Meldon; "I never said I could manage them. No man living can manage a girl if she has made up her mind not to be managed. At the same time, I don't anticipate any difficulties with Marjorie. She struck me yesterday as remarkably tractable and amenable. All you have to do is to show her that a thing is really for her good and she'll do it at once without grumbling."

"All right," said the Major grimly. "Here's a letter from my sister Margaret. It's written from Paris and it arrived here by the midday post. In it

she says she hopes I'll see that Marjorie washes her teeth regularly every morning when she gets up and every evening before she goes to bed. She wastes half a sheet of good notepaper explaining to me why teeth should be washed, and recommending different sorts of tooth-powder. Now, J. J., what do you think of that? And I may tell you that's only the beginning. There's more later on."

"There's no particular difficulty about that. I don't myself attach undue importance to the washing of teeth or anything else. I think there's a lot of time wasted in the world washing things that don't really need to be washed, especially perhaps teeth. In all these matters the great thing is to follow the guidance of nature. If we'd been meant to wash our teeth there'd have been some sort of brush arrangement fitted to our tongues so that the process would have gone on automatically every time we talked. However, that's not the point. The child's mother has a perfect right to decide whether Marjorie's teeth are to be washed or not. All you have to do is to follow out her directions."

"Do you mean to suggest, J. J., that I'm to go prowling into the girl's bedroom every morning and evening and examining her toothbrush to see whether she's used it or not?"

"No," said Meldon, "I don't suggest anything of

the sort. Your plan is to ask her at breakfast whether she's done the deed or not. Marjorie is a truthful little girl. You can see that by looking at her. She'd tell you at once; and if you found that she was shirking her duty in the matter you should take the necessary steps afterwards."

"Perhaps you'll ask her."

"No, I won't. I'm not her uncle. Coming from me, a complete outsider, a question of that sort would be a gross impertinence. It would scarcely be decent. Marjorie would certainly resent it, and get to dislike me."

"So far you've not turned out to be very much use to me," said the Major. "The next thing I am to see is that Marjorie eats slowly."

"Why? Is she inclined to bolt her food?"

"I don't know. How can I possibly know a thing like that? Margaret says she's to chew each mouthful seventeen times before she swallows it. I don't know how you feel about that, J. J., but I simply can't sit opposite a child at table and count how often she moves her jaws. It would look as if I grudged her the bit she eats; and besides, I'd never get a comfortable meal myself."

"Is there anything else?" said Meldon. "Let's have the whole thing at once, and not exhaust ourselves by discussing each detail separately."

"I'm to see," said the Major, "that she wears her blue dress only on Sundays, and her cotton frocks are to last her three days each before they're washed."

"That's simple enough, anyhow. You've only got to go at night and lock up all the dresses she isn't to wear, and then she must put on the right one in the morning."

"It's not so simple at all. As a matter of fact, she has on the blue dress this minute, and has been wearing it all morning."

"Let's ring the bell," said Meldon, "and get up Mrs. O'Halloran. If the child's clothes are to be changed, either she or Mary Garry must do it. We can't."

"You'd better be quick," said the Major. "Mrs. Ford and the rest of the tea-party may be here at any moment."

"Come on," said Meldon, "we'll go into the kitchen and interview Mrs. O'Halloran there."

After making a few preliminary remarks about the weather and the condition of the crops, which seemed to have rather an irritating effect on Mrs. O'Halloran, Meldon seated himself on the corner of the kitchen table and opened his subject.

"It's the Major's particular wish," he said, "that Miss Marjorie should wash her teeth thoroughly

morning and evening with the toothbrush provided for the purpose. Also that she should chew all her food seventeen times before swallowing it, and never be hurried over her meals. Also that she should wear her blue dress only on Sundays, and the others turn about for three days each."

"The Lord save us and deliver us!" said Mary Garry, who had retired from the kitchen when Meldon entered it, and now stood in the scullery doorway.

Mrs. O'Halloran remained severely silent.

"The Major expects," Meldon went on, "that you will see his wishes in these matters punctually and exactly carried out — you and Mary Garry between you."

Mary Garry exploded into a convulsive giggle and retired to the depths of the scullery.

"If you've nothing better to do," said Mrs. O'Halloran, "than to spend your time coming into a decent woman's kitchen and talking to her like a born omadhaun, it's a pity of you! Here I am with the sweat running down off my face striving to get ready the tea for them that you're bringing down on the top of what was a quiet and peaceable house till you took to disturbing it, and as if that wasn't enough, you must come in here on me with a pack of folly the like of which I never heard!"

"It's not folly," said Meldon. "It's sound common-sense. And, what's more, it's what the Major wishes done."

"You may talk," said Mrs. O'Halloran, "and you may swear it any way you like; but if you talked and if you swore till you was to raise blisters on the front of the close range beyond there, I wouldn't believe that the Major — God bless him! — ever thought of the like of that."

Meldon looked round for support, but got none. Major Kent had slipped quietly out of the kitchen. Mary Garry's head, surmounted by the white cap with the long streamers, appeared again at the scullery door.

"Well," said Meldon, "you're right so far. The plan didn't, so to speak, originate with the Major. Mind you, I expect he would have hit on pretty much the same things if he had sat down quietly and thought the matter out. It happens that he didn't, and all I've just said to you is written down in a letter from Miss Marjorie's mother which came by post to-day."

"Arrah, get out!" said Mrs. O'Halloran. "Is it the child's mother? No, but it's yourself. There isn't in the inside of the four seas of holy Ireland another but just yourself that would have thought of such divilment."

"If you don't believe me," said Meldon, "I'll go and get the letter and show it to you."

"You might. You might get twenty letters, and twenty more on the top of them, and you might spread the whole of them out on the floor in front of me so as a hen wouldn't be able to step in between them the way they'd be covering the flags; but you wouldn't get me to believe that there's e'er a woman such a fool as you'd like to make out the Major's sister is. Haven't I had six childer of my own, and don't I know what belongs to the rearing of them?"

"I'll get the letter," said Meldon, "and maybe that will convince you."

"Get it, then. Get it, if you like. But you'll not convince me, as you call it. Glory be to God! I couldn't read the letter if I had it, and it's well you know that same. Unless it's print, and big at that, I couldn't read it. So you'll not impose on me with your letters. Musha, but there's the bell, and the company at the door, and the tea not wetted. Mary Garry, will you go and answer the door, and will you put that white cap with the ribbons to it straight on the top of your head before you go, if so be that there's any straightness in the like of it? That's more of your work, Mr. Meldon, making the poor girl, whose father is a decent man and all her people respectable — making her look like a play-actor out

of one of them circuses. Go on with you, Mary Garry, and don't be delaying. When you have Mrs. Ford and the rest of them set out in the drawing-room and the Major opposite to them, you can come back to me here, and I'll give you the teapot and the sup of cream to take to them."

"Mrs. O'Halloran," said Meldon, "where's Miss Marjorie?"

"Let the child be. She's where she ought. She's playing herself."

"That's all very well; but she's got to come in to see the ladies. Either you or I must go and get her. Where is she now?"

"The last I seen of her," said Mrs. O'Halloran, "she and Paudeen Canavan, the boy, was coursing the black polly calf round the tennis court, as you call it, with the help of the white dog that came out along of yourself."

"Her blue dress will be ruined!" said Meldon — "utterly destroyed, and the Major will never hear the end of it."

"The master says," said Mary Garry at the kitchen door, addressing Meldon, "will you go to him this minute in the drawing-room."

"Mrs. O'Halloran," said Meldon, "for the sake of the credit of the family and the good name of the house that shelters you, will you get Miss Marjorie

and mend her up a bit before Mrs. Ford sees her? You'll never be able to hold up your head in the country again if the R.M.'s wife gets a sight of that child in the state she'll be in after coursing calves with Paudeen Canavan and Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz."

"When I've wetted the tea," said Mrs. O'Halloran, "I'll go after her. If there's a second pot wanted, Mary Garry, you'll have to wet it yourself. The kettle's on, and it's boiling."

The scene in the drawing-room when Meldon entered it was depressing. On the sofa, with their backs to the window, sat Mrs. Ford, Mrs. Cosgrave, and Mrs. Gregg. Opposite them, on a low stool, was Major Kent. Near the door stood Mr. Ford, the Resident Magistrate, and Mr. Gregg, the police officer, with their hands in their pockets. In the middle of the room was the tea-table, covered with cups, saucers, and an abundance of cakes.

"You look," said Meldon, "as if you were playing some kind of game and the Major was trying to guess the word you'd thought of. Hullo, Ford! Hullo, Gregg! I didn't see you behind the door. I suppose, now, that you're waiting for your turns till the Major has given it up."

Mrs. Ford greeted Meldon frigidly. She was a lady with a strong sense of propriety, which his manners were continually outraging. Mrs. Gregg, who

was younger, permitted herself a wavering smile. In her heart she wished she was playing a game of some sort. The Major's efforts at polite conversation wearied her. Mrs. Cosgrave sighed deeply. Her husband's bronchitis was worse than usual. The impossibility of educating her children was weighing upon her heavily. Her outlook upon life was gloomy.

Mary Garry entered with the tea.

"I hope," said Mrs. Ford, "that Miss Purvis will be here to make tea for us."

The Major had already apologised for his niece's absence. His courage failed him when he reached the point at which it was necessary to explain that she was not of an age to pour out tea for a party.

"Will she be in soon, J. J.?" he asked feebly.

"She will," said Meldon; "but don't wait for her. She doesn't care about pouring out tea, in any case. She'd much rather you did it, Mrs. Ford. I know you can, for I saw you pouring out gallons on the day of the school feast. By the way, Mrs. Cosgrave, have you ever gone into the subject of how often food ought to be chewed before it's swallowed? There is an extraordinary difference of opinion on the subject. The Major's sister, Mrs. Purvis, says that every morsel ought to be masticated seventeen distinct times."

Mrs. Cosgrave sighed again. Mr. Ford, who was

a singularly well-informed man, took up the subject.

"The late Mr. Gladstone," he said, "used to attribute his good health and great mental vigour to the fact that he chewed —— My goodness! What's that?"

A loud shriek rang through the room, followed by another, and then a series of anguished appeals for help.

"It's all right," said Meldon; "that's Mrs. O'Halloran's voice. I've often heard her giving directions to Mary Garry, and I should recognise the way she speaks anywhere. There's not likely to be anything wrong. I expect she's found Miss Purvis and Paudeen Canavan cutting the throat of the black polly calf. Sit down, Mrs. Ford; there's nothing to disturb yourself about."

Mr. Gregg, with the instinct of a policeman paid to maintain law and order, jumped out of the window at the first alarm. He returned obviously in a state of high excitement.

"They've got your filly, Kent," he shouted—"the chestnut filly, and they're galloping her round the lawn."

"Who?" said the Major. "Get a gun, J. J.! Shoot the ruffians! That filly's worth a hundred pounds this minute."

Then he, followed by Mr. Ford and Mrs. Gregg,

who was young and active, got out through the window. Meldon conducted Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Cosgrave decorously through the hall door.

At the gate of the paddock stood Mrs. O'Halloran, shrieking wildly. Mary Garry rushed across the grass, also shrieking, her white streamers waving like flags in the breeze. She had the dinner-gong in her hands and was beating it violently. Paudeen Canavan was urging the chestnut filly to a gallop, striking at her flanks with a stick. Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, barking with mad excitement, was leaping at the filly's nose. Marjorie, mounted bareback, was cheering and enjoying herself enormously.

"It's all right," said Meldon· "she's quite safe. She has a seat like a monkey, and there's no vice in the filly. Don't be alarmed, Mrs. Ford. Here, Gregg, catch that boy Canavan and wallop him with his own stick. Don't spare him. He's an orphan, so nobody will take an action against you afterwards!"

"My God!" said the Major. "Can't somebody do something?"

"We're all doing what we can," said Meldon. "Ford, you catch my dog. He's exciting the filly. Just be careful how you grip him. He very nearly had the hand bit off Doyle last week. Mrs. O'Halloran, will you stop shrieking? It's all your fault

If you'd taken that child upstairs and washed her teeth when I told you, this wouldn't have happened. Now, Mrs. Gregg, if you could manage to get a hold of Mary Garry you might sit on her head till she's quiet, and then tie her hand and foot with the ribbons of her cap and apron. I always knew those things would come in useful somehow. I'll creep up to the filly and get the child off her back."

Gregg was the first of the party to accomplish his allotted task. The wails which arose from the mouth of Paudeen Canavan gave such satisfaction to Mrs. O'Halloran that she stopped shrieking to listen to them. Mr. Ford pursued Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz to the remotest corner of the paddock and seemed in some danger of becoming heated in the chase. Mrs. Gregg, by the exercise of much tact, persuaded Mary Garry to leave the paddock, sit down on the gravel, and stop beating the dinner-gong. Meldon approached the filly cautiously, uttering words of endearment which seemed to have a soothing effect on the animal. He succeeded at length in lifting the laughing Marjorie from her back. He set the child on the ground and surveyed her solemnly.

"Marjorie," he said, "you've torn a hole in your blue dress the length of your arm. I don't believe you've washed your teeth once to-day; and just when you ought to be sitting in the drawing-room, chewing

bits of cake seventeen times you're off riding a wild horse in a field. Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

"Come on, J. J.," she said, taking his hand confidently, "and let's get the cake. I'm hungry."

CHAPTER IX

PAUDEEN CANAVAN suffered a great deal at the hands of Mr. Gregg. He was sorry that he had cut so stout a stick for the purpose of belabouring the chestnut filly. His lamentable howls diverted Marjorie's mind from thoughts of cakes. She stopped on her way into the house and demanded pardon for her accomplice.

"Please, J. J., tell the man not to beat poor Paudeen any more; I can't bear him to be hurt."

"Paudeen richly deserves every whack he gets," said Meldon; "it's good for boys to be beaten."

"But I don't think he likes it."

"He doesn't. If he did, there'd be no point in going on, but the less he likes it the more good it is for him. You may take my word for it, Marjorie, he'll be glad afterwards. Everybody is glad afterwards. If I hadn't been well whacked when I was a boy I shouldn't be the man I am now."

Marjorie still hung back.

"Please," she said, "don't beat him any more."

"If it's any comfort to you to know it," said Meldon, "I don't mind telling you that he's only howling now for the love of the exercise. Mr. Gregg stopped

beating him more than a minute ago. He broke the stick in two and there wasn't another handy."

"Come on, then, and let's get our cake. I'll take a bit out to Paudeen afterwards."

"Hullo, Major!" said Meldon. "Hullo! all you people. Marjorie and I are going in to get some tea. Come on, Mrs. Ford, and pour it out for us."

Ford, giving up the chase of the dog, joined Gregg and the Major. Mrs. Gregg, whose spirits had been improved by her conflict with Mary Garry, returned to the drawing-room, as she had left it, through the window. Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Cosgrave went into the house together by the door.

"I thought," said Mrs. Cosgrave, "that the Major's niece was grown up."

"So we were certainly given to understand," said Mrs. Ford, "but if that is the way she rides, perhaps it's as well that she isn't."

Marjorie had of necessity, since there was no saddle, adopted the seat on horseback favoured by lady warriors of primitive times and by certain modern sportswomen whose portraits grace the illustrated papers.

"She's very young," said Mrs. Cosgrave apologetically.

"Still, it's not a nice way to ride. I shouldn't like my little girl to do it, and she's only six."

Mrs. Cosgrave adopted a bolder line of defence. "She comes from Australia," she said. "Perhaps Australian ladies ——"

"No, they don't," said Mrs. Ford.

She sat down opposite the tea-table and looked at Marjorie with strong disapproval.

"Now," said Meldon, when everyone had been provided with tea and cake, "we have three ladies here. Which of them will volunteer to mend the tear in Marjorie's blue dress? Neither the Major nor I are any good at sewing."

Marjorie's escapade had the effect of brightening the wits of the whole party. There were jokes made by Ford and Gregg about the torn dress and the coursing of the calf. Mrs. Gregg crossed the room and sat down beside Marjorie.

"Will you be so good, Mrs. Gregg," said Meldon, "as to see that she chews that piece of cake seventeen times at least? As she has now arrived at a solid chunk of almond icing, it might be as well to chew it twenty times. Ought a little girl to eat almond icing in large quantities, Mrs. Ford?"

Even Mrs. Ford thawed a little. She hinted at an invitation to Marjorie to spend the day with her little girl. Marjorie, hearing that the friend proposed for her was only six years old, did not seem particularly pleased. The tea-party began to bore her.

"If you've finished, J. J.," she said, "will you come and take some cake to poor Paudeen and some to the white dog?"

"Mrs. Gregg will come too," said Meldon as he rose. "Don't you fret about Marjorie, Major. We'll take her out and keep her safe, and Mrs. Gregg will mend the blue frock to-morrow."

The astonished Paudeen was given two large slices of cake. He had retired to the stable to nurse his bruises and was only discovered after a long search. There was no difficulty about finding Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. He lay with his tongue out in the middle of the paddock. His eyes were fixed on the door through which Mr. Ford had disappeared. He was evidently ready for another chase as soon as any-one cared to pursue him. He also was fed with cake.

"Marjorie," said Meldon, "would you like to present an address of welcome to the Lord Lieutenant's wife?"

"Should I be dressed up," said Marjorie, "the same as I was at the charades we had last year?"

"Not perhaps in the same costume," said Meldon. "But you would be dressed up. What I had in my mind for you was a white frock with blue ribbons."

"I'd rather be a fairy," said Marjorie, "with gold wings and a star in my hair, and a wand and shiny things all down my front."

"I'm more or less committed to the white frock," said Meldon. "Still, the fairy dress might be managed if your heart is set on it. I don't suppose the account of the reception is actually in print yet. The question is, could the dressmaker in Doyle's shop make a fairy costume? What do you say, Mrs. Gregg?"

"She'd look sweet," said Mrs. Gregg, "but perhaps it wouldn't do. The Major mightn't like it."

"He'd love it," said Meldon. "All he wants is to have the business carried through in the best possible style. Besides, in any case he won't be there. He never puts in an appearance at things of the kind."

"Fairies," said Marjorie, "have gold shoes, and their wings are made so as you can see through them, with gold spots on them. I do want to be a fairy."

"I'd love to dress her up," said Mrs. Gregg.

"I am sure," said Meldon, "that the Lord Lieutenant will be delighted. So will Lady Chesterton. They are coming here to ameliorate the children, and they're sure to be pleased if we have one child ready ameliorated before they come. You can't ameliorate a child more than by making her into a fairy."

"I know I have a lot of tinsel and stars laid by somewhere," said Mrs. Gregg. "I had them for tableaux vivants before I was married."

"Very well," said Meldon, "we'll consider that settled. You'll come round here to-morrow morning at eleven, Mrs. Gregg, and drive Marjorie in to the dressmaker. Bring all the gold and silver gauze you have. I'll leave the whole matter in your hands, and I'm sure you'll do it admirably."

"But the Major ——"

"I'll settle with the Major. You can leave that entirely to me. I'll see Doyle about the matter too. I'll tell him that Marjorie will be dressed as an Irish fairy of the most strictly patriotic kind, either as Maeve or Granuaile, or one of the Tuath de Danaan princesses. I'll get him to sound Father McCormack about having some of the convent-school girls down to act as a body of attendant leprechauns."

"What is a leprechaun?" said Marjorie. "I don't know if I'd like leprechauns."

"Mrs. Gregg," said Meldon, "will explain to you the nature and habits of leprechauns while she drives you in to Ballymoy to-morrow."

"But I'm afraid I don't ——"

Meldon interrupted the lady's confession of ignorance.

"If you'll forgive my saying so, you ought to. There's no excuse nowadays for any person of average education who doesn't know what a leprechaun is. The country is simply inundated with literature about

them. You won't, of course, get an article on the subject in that encyclopaedia which Mr. Gregg was fool enough to buy. It's hopelessly out of date. But take any poet — Irish poet or artist — and you'll find all you could possibly want to know about the habits, tastes, and personal appearance of the ordinary leprechaun."

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Gregg, "we'd better be going back into the house. Major Kent and the others will be wondering what's become of us."

They found Mrs. Ford in the act of taking leave of her host. Mrs. Cosgrave, who was driving home with her, had already said a sorrowful good-bye. Mr. Ford was in the yard harnessing his cob with the help of Paudeen Canavan.

"Major," said Meldon, after the departure of the three elder guests, "Mrs. Gregg is going to take Marjorie for a drive to-morrow morning. Remember to see Mrs. O'Halloran this evening and arrange with her about the poor child's hat and gloves and things."

"Mother says I needn't wear gloves," said Marjorie, "except on Sundays."

"Very well," said Meldon, "I should have said myself that wearing gloves was much more important than washing teeth; but, of course, if your mother says you're not to wear them, you needn't."

When the Greggs drove away a few minutes later,

Marjorie announced that she was going into the kitchen to learn to make potato-cake.

"Mrs. O'Halloran promised she'd teach me," she said, "as soon as ever she had a minute to herself."

"J. J.," said the Major, "come into the study and have a pipe. Stay and dine with me, like a good fellow. I'd like to have a talk with you."

"If you have it in your mind," said Meldon, "that you'll persuade me to see after Marjorie's teeth to-night, you may give the idea up at once. I've spoken to her twice this afternoon on the subject, and I'll do no more."

"It's not that. It's — but come and smoke."

"Look here," said the Major firmly when his pipe was lit. "I can't and won't stand any more of this. I've put in a very trying afternoon talking to Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Cosgrave. I've talked till — till ——"

"Till your tongue clave to the roof of your mouth. That's in the Psalms. You ought to know the Psalms better than you do. They'd often help you out when your feelings are too strong for ordinary words."

"I've had an awful fright. I thought the chestnut filly would be lamed and the child killed. I can't go through many more days like this. I have made up my mind to get a competent woman of some sort to look after Marjorie while she's here — a governess

or a lady companion, or a mother's help. I shall advertise to-morrow."

"I'll tell you what to do," said Meldon. "Invite my little girl down for a month. She'd come like a shot for the sake of being near me, and she'd simply love Marjorie."

"No," said the Major decidedly. "She'd turn out to be worse than Marjorie. I'd have two of them on my hands then instead of one."

"Gladys Muriel is quite grown up."

"I've only your word for that, and, to put the thing quite plainly, I don't trust you. You said Marjorie was grown up, and look at what she turns out."

"Hang it all, Major, be reasonable! I'm engaged to be married to Gladys Muriel. How could I possibly be engaged to her if she was only ten years old?"

"Anyhow, what I want is someone who's not only grown up but elderly. I want a woman with grey hair, who has some sense of responsibility."

"If you bring one of that sort into the house," said Meldon, "Mrs. O'Halloran will leave at once. Don't be so frightfully despondent. Nothing very bad has happened yet, and I don't expect that anything will."

"You don't know my sister Margaret."

"You're thinking of the tear there is in the blue

dress," said Meldon. "Now I'll tell you what to do about that. You sneak up to-night when the child's asleep and collar the dress. Do it up neatly in a brown-paper parcel and take it in to-morrow to Doyle's dressmaker. Tell her to make another dress exactly similar in all respects — barring the tear, of course. When she has finished, keep it yourself in a safe place until the time comes for Mrs. Purvis to see it. Then slip it in among Marjorie's other clothes, and nobody will be a bit the wiser."

"It's not only the dress," said the Major; "it's a lot of other things. It's Mrs. Ford. I could see that she disapproved strongly of the way in which I was treating Marjorie. She looked at me this afternoon in the most frightful manner. If she gets a chance of talking to Margaret — and she may when the Purvises come to get the child — I shall be ——"

"If you like," said Meldon, "I'll go round to Mrs. Ford to-morrow morning and tell her that if she so much as looks crooked at Marjorie I'll get Doyle to speak to the Lord Lieutenant and have Ford jolly well cleared out of this. As President of the League in this locality, Doyle has, of course, a lot of influence with the Government, and if Father McCormack backs him up — as I haven't the slightest doubt he will — the thing will be as good as done. The Fords know that just as well as you and I do."

"Nothing on earth would induce me to do anything of the sort. Do you think I'd go on my knees to a fellow like Doyle?"

"You needn't do that. All that's required is to let me threaten Ford that if his wife goes on making herself objectionable to Marjorie ——"

"No," said the Major decisively. "After all, J. J., Mrs. Ford is only a small part of the trouble. How do I know what Marjorie will do next?"

"You and Mrs. O'Halloran and Mary Garry between you ought to be able to keep an eye on her from breakfast-time to-morrow morning till eleven o'clock. Then Mrs. Gregg will have charge of her till luncheon. After that you can turn her on to learn to ride the bicycle you bought her. Paudeen Canavan can run up and down alongside of her and keep her from falling. It will be fine exercise for him, and from what I've seen of Marjorie I think she's likely to keep him at it once she gets him started. When he'd had three hours or so of that work, he'll not be so keen as he was this afternoon on coursing calves and chasing fillies. He'll be looking out for some more sedentary occupation. I shall be busy to-morrow and may not be able to get out to Portsmouth Lodge myself, but you'll find that if you follow the plan I've laid down nothing really unpleasant will happen."

CHAPTER X

IT was two o'clock when Meldon sat down to dinner on the day after the tea-party at Portsmouth Lodge. The meal had been ready for him at half-past one, and there was nothing to prevent his eating it at that hour except his dislike of punctuality. The postmaster's wife, who had a kind heart and knew that cold chops are considered unpalatable, remonstrated with him. He explained to her at some length a favourite theory of his. He held that the human soul is degraded by bondage of any kind, and the obligation to observe fixed hours, even when self-imposed, is a particularly vicious kind of slavery. The explanation occupied some time, and it was not until a quarter-past two that Meldon actually uncovered his chops. Before he had begun to eat Mr. Doyle tapped at the door and entered the room.

"Where were you all morning?" he said in an aggrieved tone. "I was looking for you since twelve o'clock, and sorra the man or woman seemed to know where you had hid yourself. I wanted to speak to you about the presenting of this address to the Lord Lieutenant and his lady."

"I was engaged," said Meldon grandly, "in pur-

suing my professional avocation. I was performing the duties for the sake of which I am placed here in Ballymoy. You mustn't suppose I've nothing to do but run round cleaning up the mess you make in arranging for the Lord Lieutenant's visit. That business may seem very important to you, Mr. Doyle, but I've other things to think of — though, of course, if you and Father McCormack are in any kind of trouble, I'll be delighted to help you out."

"What's this I hear from the dressmaker?" said Doyle. "She was round with me at a quarter to twelve with some talk about fairies or such."

"I don't know what she may have said, or how you may have misunderstood her, or what sort of a muddle you may be making of the matter between you, but the plain facts of the case are these: Your dressmaker, acting under the directions of Mrs. Gregg, is putting together for the Major's niece a dress such as the early Irish fairies habitually wore, and in that costume Miss Marjorie Purvis will present your illuminated address to the Lord Lieutenant's wife."

"Well I'm damned!"

"I don't deny," said Meldon, "that you very probably will be. But I strongly object to your saying so. I can't stand bad language, and if you insist on using it you'll go straight out of this room with the

toe of my boot pressed against the seat of your breeches; and what's more, I'll set on Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz to worry the life out of your brown dog the next time I catch sight of him. I detest swearing."

"I'll not be made a fool of," said Doyle, "with your fairies and your play-acting. What I say is that the thing must be done decent or not at all."

"If you weren't a fool already without making of any kind, you'd be up this minute at the convent with the reverend Mother arranging to have a troop of attendant leprechauns to wait on the Major's niece when she's presenting the address."

"Who wants fairies? Is it likely, now, that Father McCormack will put up with such nonsense? I tell you now, Mr. Meldon, we'll have the whole country laughing at us. Fairies, is it? And leprechauns! It's enough to set every newspaper making jokes and drawing pictures of us. We'll never hear the end of it."

"Look here; I'm eating my dinner. I'm half-way through one chop, and there's another in the dish in front of me. I'll talk to you till I have the second one eaten, and two potatoes along with it, and after that out you'll go. I haven't time to waste over you."

"You'll talk. I wouldn't doubt you."

"First of all, then, I'll say this. I know a jolly sight better than you or Father McCormack, or anyone else in Ballymoy, how Lord Lieutenants ought to be treated. I don't suppose you ever spoke to one in your life, and if Father McCormack has talked to two of them, it's as much as he's done. When I say that fairies are the proper thing you may take it that they are. You set up to be president or vice-president of half a dozen different leagues, as well as being Chairman of the Urban District Council and an *ex-officio* magistrate, but you're an utterly uneducated man. It's just as well for you to realise that fact at once. You don't know what's going on in Ireland outside of your own wretched board-room. As it just happens, every intellectual man in the country at the present moment is simply devoted to folk-lore and popular mythology and esoteric mysticism generally. You probably don't know what those sciences are, but I'll tell you. They're fairies, pure unmitigated fairies — which, of course, includes leprechauns — and nothing else. Very well. The Lord Lieutenant naturally wants to associate with intellectual men. That's what brings him to Ireland. He knows that there's more real genius in Ireland than anywhere else. You have the usual old-fashioned notion in your head that Dublin Castle is full of landlords going up the front stairs, priests going down the back

stairs, and politicians waiting about in the basement storey expecting to be made into County Court judges. That's what you think; and, of course, you're perfectly right as to the facts. Where you make the mistake is in supposing that the Lord Lieutenant likes that kind of thing. He doesn't. He puts up with it simply because he's paid to put up with it. In reality he hates the whole business. The sight of a landlord turns him actually sick, and he's so fed up with priests and politicians that he wouldn't care if every one of the whole crew was at the bottom of the sea with some kind of a floating tombstone anchored to his dead body. What he really wants — what he indulges in when he gets away by himself to a quiet place where nobody sees him — is poets and philosophers; that is to say, the men who will talk to him freely about really interesting things — fairies, the earth-spirit, and everything else of that kind."

At this point Meldon helped himself to his second potato and handed the bone of his first chop to Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. Doyle, a little bewildered, waited in silence until the discourse began again.

"Now, as the Lord Lieutenant drives along here in his motor-car, what do you suppose he's saying? You don't know; but I'll tell you. 'Smith,' he says, or 'Jones,' or 'Robinson,' or whatever his private

secretary's name is, 'who shall we be likely to meet to-day at Ballymoy?' The secretary turns up his notebook and tells His Excellency that he'll be received by Major Kent, Father McCormack, and Mr. Doyle. 'Do you hear that, my dear?' says the Lord Lieutenant to the marchioness; 'the same old lot — a landlord, a priest, and a politician. We'll be bored to tears as usual.' 'It can't be helped,' says the lady. 'After all, we're earning our living by it. The salary's not bad, and the Viceregal Lodge is a pleasant place enough when we get it to ourselves.' 'That's all very well,' says he. 'I'm not shirking my duty, and I don't intend to; but in a country like Ireland, full of romantic possibilities, with the Celtic glamour oozing out of every bog in it, and the most fascinating folk-lore in the world running to absolute waste, why can't the people get up something in the way of a pageant? If there was a man with a spark of originality about him in Ballymoy, he'd have us met at the door of Mr. Doyle's Hotel — the Imperial, it's called — by a procession of fairies.' That is the substance of the conversation which will be going on in the Viceregal motor-car as it drives along the road towards Ballymoy. You see my point, don't you? You understand now why I'm running the Major's niece as a fairy. You'll find that you'll get more money out of their excellencies for ameliorating the

lot of the Ballymoy child if you follow my advice and have a proper troop of fairies to meet them. Just you toddle off and explain the matter to Father McCormack and the reverend Mother. Get the thing done. Mrs. Gregg will design the dresses for you, and you may take my word for it you won't be sorry afterwards."

Doyle allowed himself to be hustled from the room. He was not in the least convinced of the suitability of the demonstration which Meldon proposed. He felt as strongly as ever the absurdity of setting up a little girl in a muslin frock and tinselled wings to receive the representative of the British Sovereign at the door of a public-house. But previous experience had convinced him that there was nothing to be gained by opposing any plan which Meldon was determined to carry out. He foresaw that unless he gave way at once his life for the next few days would be made unbearable by the continuous flow of Meldon's arguments. The peace of Father McCormack's presbytery would be disturbed. Even the sanctuary of the convent might be invaded; and in the end, after all tempers had been worn thin by opposition, there would be a troop of fairies headed by the Major's niece waiting for the Lord Lieutenant. Doyle had known Meldon for two years, and he had no doubts at all about the ultimate issue of the matter.

Nor had Meldon himself.

"It's rather a nuisance," he murmured, when Doyle had left him. "I wish Marjorie hadn't set her heart on dressing up as a fairy. However, that can't be helped now. The poor little thing is having a dull time of it out at Portsmouth Lodge, and I'm bound to see that she gets any little pleasure she happens to fancy."

There was a tap at the door and Major Kent entered. Meldon, who was filling his pipe, laid it on the floor and stood up.

"Nothing wrong with Marjorie, I hope?"

"No," said the Major. "So far as I know she's all right. I told Mrs. O'Halloran to give her her dinner at half-past one, and then to turn her loose for the afternoon with Paudeen and the bicycle. I came into town to wire to Dublin for a governess. I told you I was going to, and I'm glad now that I have."

"All right," said Meldon. "You'll be sorry afterwards, but you will have your own way. In all probability the governess will marry you before you get her out of the house."

"I can't help it if she does," said the Major. "I must have her. I've got another letter from Margaret. It was given me in the post-office just after I'd sent off the wire, and it made me feel glad I'd

done it, whatever the consequences to myself may be."

He drew a bulky package from his pocket.

"That seems a longish letter," said Meldon.

"It's not all letter. In fact, the letter itself is very short. The rest of the parcel is pamphlets and magazines, and directions for use. I haven't read them, of course, but that's what they look like. I thought perhaps you'd run your eye over them with me."

"Certainly. It'll be a pleasure."

"Perhaps I'd better tell you what is in the letter before you read the papers. It's very short. Margaret says she forgot to mention that she is a member of the Parents' Union, and that she hopes I'll carry on Margaret's education according to the system outlined in the enclosed papers."

"That's all right," said Meldon. "I needn't read them. I understand the system perfectly. I made a special study of it at one time. You needn't have bothered getting a governess for that. You'll be able to work it quite well yourself. Any intelligent and moderately well-informed person could."

"I'll get the governess all the same."

"It's ten to one if you happen upon one who understands this system. Simple as the thing is, very few regular governesses do. They pretend they don't anyhow. Professional jealousy, you know. Where did you wire to?"

"To 'O. G. Box 241, Office of the *Irish Times,*'" said the Major. "She had an advertisement in yesterday's paper, and I thought she'd suit."

Meldon collected the fragments of the paper which lay scattered about the room, and found the advertisement column headed "Tuition, &c." He ran his eye down it.

"'Wanted holiday engagement,'" he read, "'by a young lady employed in a high-class school. Satisfactory references offered. Address O. G. Box 241, this Office.' That's your damsel, I suppose."

"That's her. She sounds all right, doesn't she?"

"I suppose when you were wiring you said, 'Knowledge of the Parents' Union system of education essential,' and 'Nature study a *sine quâ non'?* Nature study is one of the most characteristic features of the system."

"No, I didn't. I didn't get Margaret's letter till after I'd sent the wire."

"Oh, well, never mind. I'll explain it to her when she arrives. But keeping a governess won't get you off your share of the work. That's another of the features of the system."

"I can't do it."

"Oh, yes, you can. The great idea is this. Always impart instruction to the child under your

charge, whether she's supposed to be learning lessons or not. For instance, we'll say that you and Marjorie are out for a walk together and you meet a snail. Marjorie naturally picks up the snail. Under the old system of education it would have been your duty to tell her to drop the snail at once. 'Little girls,' you would have said, 'ought not to play with snails.' But that way of dealing with children is quite out of date. As a member of the Parents' Union, you encourage Marjorie to examine the snail. You tell her to poke her little finger into the shell and find out what's there."

"She'd do that in any case."

"Not if you told her to drop the snail. She'd drop it. Next, you stick the lighted end of your cigar against the snail's shell so as to make it poke out its head. Then in every way you can think of at the moment you make the snail show its points and trot about — just as if it was a horse that Marjorie was thinking of buying from you."

"I don't quite see," said the Major, "where the education comes in."

"Of course, all the time Marjorie is fiddling with the snail you are explaining the nature of the creature and its uses in simple language. You tell her that the French eat snails, but that she, not being French, doesn't. You mention that the slug, though

very like the snail in flabby sliminess, differs from it in not having a shell."

"She'd know that without my telling her."

"She would, of course, but she'd be much too polite to tell you so. She'd recognise that you were doing your duty towards her, and she'd respect you for it. She'd pretend to be frightfully interested in what you were saying, and when you went on to tell her the story about the snail which raced with the tortoise she'd give you to understand she'd never heard it before."

"Was it a snail which ran the race with the tortoise? I always thought it was a hare."

"It was a hare in the original, and, of course, if it happened to be a hare which Marjorie picked up you'd have told the story in what I may call the authorised version. But as you are on the subject of snails, and not hares, you have to adapt the narrative to your circumstances."

"Well?"

"After you've told her all you know about the snail, you go on walking until you meet something else. Then you start on it. It's a magnificent system. No walk is ever the least dull, and Marjorie is learning the whole time without knowing it."

"It seems to me," said the Major, "that we'd be a long time getting anywhere."

"You would, of course. In fact, if you do the thing properly, you'll never get more than a few yards away from your hall-door before it's time to go home again. But if you really want to get anywhere, you either have to stop being a member of the Parents' Union for the time, or else not take Marjorie with you."

"I'm not sure that I think much of that system of education, J. J."

"Well, nor do I. It bores the parents a lot, and it must be perfectly maddening for the child. You can't wonder that the ordinary governess, who has been brought up herself on Butter's spelling and the dates of the Kings of England, rather despises it. The child hardly ever meets a king out walking, and so gets no instruction on royal families. I don't myself set an excessively high value on kings. I'm not a fanatic on the subject. I believe a man might be a good man enough for all practical purposes without knowing the date of George I. Still, kings have their place in any proper education, and I must say I think the Parents' Union, with that hand-to-mouth system of theirs, undervalues kings."

"Marjorie," said the Major, with a grin, "will have the advantage of meeting a Lord Lieutenant."

"Yes. That's the very next thing there is to a king. In fact, for educational purposes he is in some

ways better than a real king. He is sure to be affable, being selected for his office principally for that reason; whereas a king who comes into his job merely by being born to it, may be as cross as a bear."

"I hope," said the Major, "that you'll take the opportunity of this Lord Lieutenant's visit to give Marjorie a lesson on kings, in the sort of way you have just been explaining to me. I'm sure you'd do it well."

Meldon treated this suggestion, which was meant for a sarcasm, with contempt.

"When does Miss O. G. arrive?" he asked.

"I told her in my wire to come as soon as possible. I practically offered her her own terms and took her word for it that the references were all right."

CHAPTER XI

MARJORIE ate her dinner under the eyes of Mrs. O'Halloran and Mary Garry untroubled by any advice as to how she ought to chew. At her own special request she was allowed to have the meal in the kitchen. This would probably have shocked any right-minded member of the Parents' Union, but Mrs. O'Halloran knew nothing of the later theories of education, and, having successfully reared six children of her own, had no idea whatever of the sacred responsibility of those in charge of the young. She even allowed Marjorie to choose her own food. Major Kent, who had some ideas of his own on the subject of nursery diet, ordered a chicken, boiled, and a rice-pudding. When he was told that no chicken was available he left the arrangement of the *menu* to Mrs. O'Halloran, stating at the same time that he would not himself be at home for luncheon. Mary Garry, after consultation with Mrs. O'Halloran, asked Marjorie what she would like. She chose sardines on toast, to be followed by whipped cream and raspberry-jam. There were no sardines in the house, so Paudeen Canavan was sent into Ballymoy with orders to get a box at Mr. Doyle's

shop and bring it home in his pocket. This errand was the cause of an argument between Mrs. O'Halloran and Jamesy Deveril. Paudeen, who was called a yard boy, though his duties in the Major's establishment were very varied, was supposed to be under the control of Jamesy Deveril.

Jamesy had been at the forge, getting new shoes for the cob, on the previous day, while Paudeen was helping to course the black calf and to bridle the chestnut filly. On discovering what had been done in his absence he had beaten Paudeen severely, hitting much harder, and finding the tenderest spots more skilfully than Mr. Gregg. He intended to make life very bitter and irksome to Paudeen for several days afterwards, and was annoyed at the boy's escaping to go on a message into Ballymoy.

"He'll be spending the whole of the morning at it," he said bitterly to Mrs. O'Halloran, "and me wanting him to be shifting dung in the barrow. Why couldn't you send Mary Garry if there's commands to be done in the town? What good is a great stravaguing lump of a girl like her about the place if she's not fit to be sent into the town on a message?"

"Is it Mary Garry?" said Mrs. O'Halloran. "And if I send her, who's to brush the Major's clothes for him, and clean up after the mess the company made in the drawing-room yesterday, and wash

two pair of stockings for Miss Marjorie, and shell the peas for the dinner to-night, and answer the door and polish the silver teapot, and iron out one of them aprons — aprons indeed! no, but pinafores! — that Meldon, bad luck to him, fetched out for the poor girl to wear? Tell me that now, Mr. Jamesy Deveril."

Jamesy was a reasonable man. He was forced to acknowledge that Mary Garry's duties were more varied than those he had planned for Paudeen. Mrs. O'Halloran pursued her advantage.

"So you may leave the dung where it is for another day, for you'll not get Paudeen in the evening no more than the morning. As soon as ever he has his dinner ate, he's to be out on the road teaching Miss Marjorie to ride the bicycle."

"I'd have thought she'd have had riding enough to content her yesterday without wanting bicycles after. What would hinder her to sit quiet in the house and let Paudeen do his work?"

"Them's the Major's orders anyway; and if you don't like them it's to the Major you'd better be speaking."

"Well, but childer is an upset in a house. Divil the thing can be got done right the way it ought to be done when there's the like of them to be humoured."

"You may say that," said Mrs. O'Halloran. "I'm

after rearing six of my own, and I know well that there's neither ease nor comfort where they are."

Thus Paudeen escaped a task which in the bruised condition of his body would have been a painful one for him, and spent a pleasant morning sauntering along the road between Ballymoy and Portsmouth Lodge. In the afternoon he was forced to bestir himself more actively. Marjorie rapidly acquired such mastery of the bicycle as enabled her to make short and erratic rushes at high speed. Steering proved a great difficulty, and the ditches at the sides of the road seemed to have a strong attraction to the machine. It was Paudeen's duty to prevent any kind of catastrophe. The afternoon was hot, and the work was much harder for him than it was for Marjorie. There were moments when he wished himself back in the yard under the eye of Jamesy Deveril. The demands on his activity there were intermittent. Jamesy, having duties of his own, could not always watch his subordinate. When he was at work elsewhere it was Paudeen's habit to rest, sitting on the handles of the barrow or on any convenient stone. Marjorie allowed him no breathing-time. No sooner had he saved her from a crash which seemed inevitable than she was off again, and Paudeen was obliged — so he described his experience to Mary Garry at tea-time —" to make after her

if it was the last breath I could squeeze out of my body."

But of the joy of learning to ride a bicycle there comes satiety at last, even when the learner is an active child of ten years old. Marjorie dismounted, breathless and dishevelled, and addressed the perspiring Paudeen.

"I'm tired of the old bike," she said; "let's go and explore somewhere."

Paudeen was uncertain as to the exact meaning of the proposal, but he had a strong suspicion, based on the experience of the day before, that any plan made by Miss Marjorie would be likely to end in trouble for him.

"I'd be afeard," he said. "I might be bet."

"Mr. Gregg isn't here," said Marjorie. "There's nobody to beat you. You're not afraid of Mrs. O'Halloran, are you? or Mary Garry?"

"Mary Garry dursent," he said; "and what's more, she wouldn't be fit."

He was prepared to assert the dignity of his sex against her at any time. With regard to Mrs. O'Halloran he was less confident. He recollected certain shrewd blows given with rolling-pins or other weapons, and the arm of Mrs. O'Halloran was strong. But he would not humble himself before Miss Marjorie by admitting that he feared any woman.

"Mr. Deveril'd beat me," he said.

Marjorie tossed her head. She refused to acknowledge that Mr. Deveril had any right to control her actions. It did not occur to her that he might possess the power of life and death over Paudeen.

"Come on," she said; "we'll go down to the sea."

Paudeen yielded, foolishly. He might have known — the story of his remotest ancestor's first transgression should have warned him — that he would not be able to evade punishment afterwards by saying "The woman tempted me." The blame might be, would be, justly and properly hers alone, but no man from the days of Adam down has escaped the consequences of evil-doing by urging that plea.

"You take the bike into the yard," said Marjorie, "and leave it there. I'll wait for you."

"She'd see me," said Paudeen, "and Mr. Deveril would see me, and then I'd be bet, the way I was bet yesterday, only worse."

"You're a little coward. I'll take it myself, and you can wait.

The taunt was too much for Paudeen. He was prepared to run a very considerable risk rather than suffer it. He took the bicycle and wheeled it up the drive towards Portsmouth Lodge, but courage, even taunt-driven, has its limits. He stopped short at a place out of sight of the kitchen windows, and de-

posited the bicycle under a tree. Then he returned to Marjorie. They crossed two fields hand in hand, and arrived at the shore of the little bay in which Major Kent's *Spindrift* lay at anchor. If Paudeen had been a member of the Parents' Union, and therefore anxious to increase Marjorie's interest in nature-study, the sandy shore of the bay would have offered him a splendid opportunity. It was strewn with the corpses of jelly-fish, and Marjorie's curiosity was immediately aroused. She had never before come across jelly-fish, and she wanted to know all about them. Unfortunately Paudeen had been brought up on a bog many miles from the sea, and marine biology has not as yet been imposed on Irish National schools as part of the regular programme of instruction. He had but one piece of information to offer.

"Them ones stings," he said.

Marjorie only half believed him. She urged him to take one up in his hand and demonstrate that it did sting. Paudeen was most unwilling to make the experiment. He would have waded through a bed of nettles bare-legged; he would have faced the dangers of attacking a wasps' nest; but a jelly-fish was an unknown creature, and its sting might easily be worse than anything he had ever experienced. He hesitated.

"You're a little coward," said Marjorie for the second time. Then she took up one of the jelly-fish very cautiously in her own hand.

"Mind it, Miss," said Paudeen, in an agony of apprehension. "Arrah, leave go of it! Sure, the bites of them is terrible."

Either because it was dead, or because it was not a venomous kind of jelly-fish, it lay passive and harmless in Marjorie's hand. She prodded it with her finger, squeezed it, rolled it into a ball, submitted it to every kind of indignity possible to a jelly-fish, and yet it did not sting. Finally, with a gesture of contempt, she flung it at Paudeen. It occurred to him as possible that, though the jelly-fish abstained from offering any kind of violence to a young lady like Miss Marjorie, it still might sting him. Yet he would not admit himself the inferior in daring of a girl several years younger than he was. With a show of careless boldness he too picked up a jelly-fish, examined it, and flung it into the sea. Marjorie took another and threw it at him; then another, and another after that. Soon she was pelting him with jelly-fish. Coming quite close to him she blobbed the creatures into his face. Paudeen loathed the feel of them; yet, so great was his instinctive chivalry and respect for the Major's niece, he flung no jelly-fish at her. Only, lest

the game should lose its delight through being altogether one-sided, he too gathered jelly-fish and threw them over and past Miss Marjorie.

At last the sport palled. The remaining jelly-fish were left to perish in peace, and for a delightful half-hour Marjorie and Paudeen launched empty limpet-shells in the sea. Every single shell was swamped immediately. Even when Paudeen heroically waded out up to his knees to get beyond the broken water of the wavelets no limpet-shell survived afloat for more than a single instant. He got very wet — much wetter than Marjorie, because once in a moment of ecstasy he stepped quickly backward and sat down in shallow water. What view the managing committee of the Parents' Union would have taken of the condition of Marjorie's shoes and stockings it is impossible to say, but no doubt an enthusiast might have seized the opportunity of giving a profitable exposition of the laws which govern the buoyancy of limpet-shells.

Further adventures became necessary after some hundreds of limpet-shells had been launched and swamped.

"Is there," said Marjorie, "a cave anywhere about — a smuggler's cave?"

"I never heard tell of the like," said Paudeen,

"though I wouldn't say but what there might. They do say there was Fenians and such in it the time of the Land League."

"Then let's look for their cave. We'll go on looking till we find it, and then we'll play at being smugglers and Fenians."

They found no cave, but in the course of their search they came upon the Major's punt. The oars had been carried up to the coach-house, but by lifting the floor-boards they provided themselves with all they required for a voyage on dry land. Paudeen, convinced that he had now earned a beating so severe that no further iniquity could make it any worse, flung himself with ardour into the new game. Acting under Marjorie's orders, he rowed, spread sails, pulled ropes, fired guns, captured after a desperate conflict a pirate craft, and finally accomplished a shipwreck on a desert island. In the course of these manœuvres it was discovered that the punt, which lay heeled on one side, could by violent and combined exertion, be made to rock over and lie on her other side. Some instinct warned Paudeen that this rocking was far from beneficial to the punt. He understood nothing about boats, but his experience of life had taught him that anything which is rapturously pleasant to do is extremely injurious to the thing it is done to. Nothing could have been pleasanter, for

instance, than coursing the black polled-Angus calf round the tennis-court. It therefore turned out afterwards that the game was harmful both to the calf and the lawn. He knew in his heart that it could not be right to leap from one side of the punt to the other, and bear her down with a bump upon the stones which strewed the upper part of the beach. His conscience made a last effort to assert itself.

"We'll be bet," he said, "the both of us, for sure.".

He included Marjorie in the prophecy, not because he really believed that Mrs. O'Halloran, Mr. Gregg, the Major, or even Jamesy Deveril himself would dare to take a stick to her, but because he hoped to induce her to stop rocking the punt. He failed. Marjorie continued, and commanded him to continue, leaping from side to side of the boat and swaying her over, until the novelty of the thing completely wore off. Then she proposed that they should launch the punt and voyage in her to the *Spindrift*. Paudeen made but a feeble protest.

"We'll be drownded," he said, "if we do, for the water is terrible strong, and there was a man drownded in it one time, and it wasn't for a week after that they found him."

He did not really fear drowning. It is said to be an easy and pleasant death, and life, after the afternoon's adventures, was likely to be hard for Paudeen.

He and Marjorie seized the punt, and, after immense toil, succeeded in dragging her several yards down the beach towards the sea. The success of their enterprise seemed assured. They would, no doubt, have actually launched the boat if they had not been interrupted. The sound of the Major's dinner-gong, beaten vigorously, startled them. They stopped tugging at the punt, and looked behind them. Far off, a solitary figure, silhouetted on the sky-line against the setting sun, stood Mary Garry with the gong in her hands. She had climbed the hill behind Portsmouth Lodge, and was sounding a clamorous summons.

"Run," said Paudeen—"run as if the divil was after you and Meldon's white dog along with him."

Marjorie knew little of the devil, and had no fear whatever of the dog; but she recognised the wisdom of the advice. Paudeen grasped her hand, and they fled together across the fields. Reaching the road, they felt it wise to proceed more cautiously. They crept along the ditch. Paudeen's idea was to get the bicycle, if possible, before they were seen. Once in possession of it, they might assume an air of conscious rectitude and leave the authorities to infer that the whole afternoon had been innocently spent in learning to ride. He explained his plan to Marjorie as they crawled along the ditch.

" Mary Garry'll not tell on us," he said, " if so be she saw us, and she might not."

" I don't care if she does," said Marjorie.

Her spirit, the first nerve-shattering alarm once passed, revived in her. Shaking off Paudeen's restraining hand, she stepped boldly out of the ditch. She found herself face to face with Mrs. O'Halloran.

" Your tea's ready for you, Miss Marjorie, and Mary Garry has the face near beat off the Major's drum trying to discover where you'd got to. Is that you in the ditch, Paudeen Canavan? It's another skelping you want, and, what's more, it's another you'll get if I tell Jamesy Deveril on you. What would ail you that you wouldn't bring the young lady in to her tea, and you knowing well it was ready for her? "

It seemed to Paudeen possible that after all he might escape the punishment which a few minutes before was all but inevitable. Miss Marjorie had Mrs. O'Halloran by the hand, and was evidently giving to the housekeeper's questions those soft answers which turn away wrath. Paudeen found the bicycle under the tree, and, with a care that was almost reverent, wheeled it into its place in the coach-house.

CHAPTER XII

AFTER tea Mary Garry, supervised in the work by Mrs. O'Halloran, dried Marjorie, changed her frock, tied up her hair with a blue ribbon, and then led her to the door of her uncle's study. The Major had given orders that his niece should be handed over to him between the hours of six and seven. Both Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Cosgrave, who were separately consulted, said that all parents and those who for any reason found themselves in the position of parents, devoted that particular hour of the day to their children. At all other times, so the Major gathered from the two ladies, an uncle might neglect his niece and be held blameless; but from six o'clock until seven he must personally attend to her wants.

Major Kent's conscience glowed with a warm approval most comfortable to feel when Mary Garry opened the study door and let in Marjorie. Every other part of him except his conscience was uncomfortable and embarrassed. He had no experience of little girls nor the slightest idea of what he ought to talk about. He had some thought at first of sending Mary Garry out to find a snail, and repeating, as

well as he could, the model lesson given him in the morning by Meldon; but he rather feared the comments which Mrs. O'Halloran would make on snails as playthings, and doubted whether he could explain to her the advantages of nature-study.

Marjorie was perfectly self-possessed. She made a tour of the study, examining minutely all the objects which interested her. She discovered a hookah, which stood by itself on a small table in a corner of the room. The Major found the Parents' Union method of imparting instruction easier than he expected. He told all there was to tell about the hookah. He got into difficulties in the end when Marjorie demanded to have the thing filled, lit, and smoked. She proposed to sit opposite her uncle and make use of one of the two tubes with which the hookah was furnished. The Major, so she planned the entertainment, was to smoke through the other, sitting cross-legged on a sofa-cushion. Thus the illusion of being real Turks would be complete. He resisted the proposal, feeling sure that a smoke from a hookah would make Marjorie violently ill. He was even uncertain of the consequences which might ensue for himself. He said that he had never smoked the hookah. This confession lowered him in Marjorie's estimation. She thought, and said, that a man who found himself in possession of a hookah with-

out making any attempt to smoke it must be lamentably wanting in enterprise.

The Major diverted her attention from this dangerous game by producing a book of photographs. They were not thrillingly interesting, being, in fact, for the most part, portraits of the horses he had bred and sold. They dated back to a period long before Marjorie's birth, and a student of human nature might have taken pleasure in noting how few and slight were the changes which had taken place in the appearance of Jamesy Deveril. He was in all the pictures. He held each horse by the head, and his face wore the same look of suppressed pride in the beauty of the animals he had reared. He apparently wore the same suit of clothes during the whole period covered by the photographs, and the same tight leggings. His hair showed a little thinner, but the lines on his lean cheeks grew scarcely any deeper as the pages of the book were turned over. Marjorie, after viewing the first ten or twelve horses, showed signs of being bored. The Major was unable to interest her in the special merits of each animal, though that was a subject on which he was well qualified to give instruction.

Among the horses there were scattered here and there pictures of one of the Major's yachts. There were altogether five of these photographs — one of a

small schooner of very antique build, two of yawls, and two of cutters, the *Spindrift* and her immediate predecessor. In the *Spindrift* Marjorie suddenly displayed the acutest interest. She asked an immense number of questions, requiring minute details about the sleeping accommodation on board, the cooking arrangements, the number of plates, cups, and forks with which the boat was supplied. Major Kent was delighted with himself and her. He felt that he was really educating Marjorie on lines likely to be approved by her mother. He drew plans of the *Spindrift's* cabin, explained the nature of lockers, folding cots, swinging lamps, and other matters pertaining to the arrangement of a ten-ton yacht. Marjorie's attention never flagged. It was only when the Major had exhausted the cabins and went on to deliver a lecture on the sails and ropes that her shower of questions ceased. The rigging did not interest her. She yawned, and finally proposed of her own accord to go to bed.

Mrs. O'Halloran had reached a critical stage in the cooking of the Major's dinner, so it was Mary Garry who attended Marjorie. Undressing in a leisurely and desultory way, Marjorie wandered about her bedroom and plied the maid with questions.

"Were you ever in a yacht, Mary Garry?"

Mary Garry had not been in a yacht, and did not

want to go in one. She understood that people who went in yachts were violently ill.

"What do people have to eat in yachts?"

Mary Garry, who had watched Mrs. O'Halloran pack provisions for various cruises, was of opinion that people — the people who were not ill — ate the same things on yachts as they did on dry land; but much more of them. Where one loaf would be sufficient in a house two would be a meagre supply in a yacht.

"Has Paudeen ever been on a yacht?"

Mary Garry thought not. It was, she said, unlikely that anyone who knew Paudeen Canavan, even slightly, would take him on a yacht. A boy of Paudeen's incurably vicious disposition was difficult enough to manage in an ordinary yard. He would be quite impossible on a yacht, where occasions for wrongdoing might be supposed to be numerous.

"Would you go on a yacht if anybody invited you?"

"I would not then. Is it me? Sure, what would the like of me do on a yacht? It's lost I'd be, let alone drownded."

Marjorie sighed. There had risen in her mind a great idea while she was looking at the Major's photographs. She conceived a plan of camping out on board the *Spindrift*. She had no wish whatever to

sail off in any direction. She was quite content that the yacht should lie at anchor, but she wanted to live in the little cabin which her uncle described. She wanted to sleep under a grey blanket, in one of the funny little cots, which were folded back and got out of the way in the morning. She wanted to cook food at the galley stove and to eat it off enamelled metal plates on a swinging table. Her plan was to take Mary Garry and Paudeen with her. Instinct warned her that there would be little use in inviting either her uncle or Mrs. O'Halloran. They would take a foolishly sensible view of the scheme, would urge the superiority of ordinary beds furnished with sheets, the greater comfort of meals at home on fixed tables, and the folly of cooking on an inconvenient stove when there was a kitchen-range available. Of Mary Garry she had hopes, and would gladly have included her in the party, but it appeared that Mary Garry would not go. She fell back upon Paudeen. For nearly an hour she lay awake planning the details of the expedition. Next morning, after breakfast, she found Paudeen, led him to a remote corner of the hayloft, and propounded the dazzling scheme. Paudeen, unpunished for the misdeeds of the day before, had grown bold. He foresaw difficulties, but he was not averse from making an effort to overcome them. He feared that he would not be able

to get to the *Spindrift* in the punt without oars, and the oars were kept in the coach-house. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to abstract them without attracting the attention of Jamesy Deveril. Marjorie suggested that they should be carried off by Paudeen after dark and concealed near the punt. She proposed that a depot of food should be established on the beach. A shelter of stones should be built. Loaves of bread, joints of meat, and other necessities should be stored in it. She undertook to carry off little by little from Mrs. O'Halloran's stores a quantity of food sufficient to last for several days. She would bury her loot under the hay in the corner of the loft in which they sat, and Paudeen could carry it down to the beach after dark.

Paudeen Canavan, though he suffered himself to be occasionally cowed by Jamesy Deveril, had in him the makings of an adventurer. He could never have been a leader of men, for he lacked initiative; but, born at an earlier period, he might have developed into a subordinate buccaneer, and ranged the Spanish Main, a terror to the captains of treasure fleets. As a seventeenth-century Englishman he would have adventured for land in Ireland, ridden among the Invincible Ironsides, or helped to harry the fleets of the Dutch. A century later, with the luck of being born a Scottish Highlander, he might have charged among

kilted clansmen against the artillery of General Cope; or, placed in different circumstances, plundered rajahs in the service of the East India Company. He had his share of daring and resource when under the direction of a master mind. The fear of stripes, of the wrath of Jamesy Deveril, might make him hesitate over some trifling peccadillo, some calf-coursing or childish expedition to the seashore. The thought of a great adventure nerved him. He brought to the aid of Marjorie's imagination a knowledge of what was practicable. Between them plans were laid, details thought out, and the whole scheme perfected.

Under the pretext of more bicycle-riding, Paudeen was rescued for the morning from his duties in the stable. He and Marjorie made their way to the shore and, labouring delightfully, built the depot for the food. It was not rainproof, but that mattered little. The sun was shining, and Paudeen had heard Jamesy Deveril say in the morning that the weather was settled for a couple of days at least. They returned to Portsmouth Lodge and put the bicycle into the coach-house. With nervous joy they handled the punt's oars and discovered the hiding-place of the rowlocks. Then Paudeen submitted himself to Jamesy Deveril, and remained during the day so obedient, hard-working, and preternaturally good that

Jamesy threatened him at last with a dose of castor-oil, believing that the boy must be unwell.

Marjorie hung round Mrs. O'Halloran in the kitchen. She, too, was extraordinarily peaceable.

"There she'd be," said Mrs. O'Halloran afterwards, describing the day, "running in and out on me the same as if she was playing herself without a tint of mischief in her head. A better nor a nicer girleen you wouldn't ask to see. Nobody'd ever have thought it was divilment she was divising in the inside of her head."

On every possible occasion Marjorie seized something. The turning of Mrs. O'Halloran's back for an instant was sufficient for her. She secured the remains of the box of sardines which Paudeen had brought out from Ballymoy for her dinner the day before. She got half a box of water biscuits, a piece of raw bacon which hung on a hook in the larder, one of the cakes which had come from the stores, and at last, greatly daring, a whole loaf of soda-bread, which had just been taken from the oven.

This last capture very nearly led to serious trouble. When Marjorie returned to the kitchen after concealing the loaf in the hayloft she found that a search was being made for it. Mrs. O'Halloran sharply accused Mary Garry of having taken it up, carried it

away, left it somewhere "out of her hand," and then forgotten the whole transaction.

"I wasn't next nor nigh your loaf," said Mary Garry. "What call would there be for me to be taking the like?"

"If you didn't take it," said Mrs. O'Halloran, "who did? It was there sitting on the dresser this minute, and I didn't do more than just run out for a sup of water to wash the cabbages for the dinner, and when I came back it was gone. Take care now that you didn't take it up with you to the Major's room, and you making the bed."

"I did not. Why would I, when I have the bed made since ten o'clock this morning? Was there e'er a dog about the place that might have ate it?"

"There was not; barring that white devil that Meldon brings out with him, there's no dogs here, and that one wasn't out these two days."

"It might be," said Mary Garry, "that the black polly calf strolled in unknown to you and whisked it off with her. I always did say that that calf was terrible wise."

"Arrah, talk sense. When did ever ye hear of a calf eating a loaf of bread?"

"My mother had a turkey hen one time," said Mary Garry, "that would drink tea the same as if it

was a Christian. You'd have wondered to see it. So you would."

"Will you find the loaf, wherever you have it put away, and stop your talk about turkey hens."

Marjorie listened and watched. There was an air of determination about Mrs. O'Halloran, which made her fear that the search would be prosecuted with the utmost vigour — might even extend to places less likely than the hayloft. The discovery of the loaf would mean the loss of the sardines, the biscuits, the cake, and the bacon. It would involve further investigations and the wrecking of her whole plan. She determined to restore the loaf. Mrs. O'Halloran, clinging, against all probability, to her original hypothesis, dragged Mary Garry, now weeping copiously, up to the Major's room. She stripped the blankets from the bed in her determination to find the spot where Mary Garry had laid the loaf down. Marjorie seized her opportunity. She brought the loaf from the hayloft and put it on the ground beside the pump in the yard. Then she went into the house and shouted. Mrs. O'Halloran, followed by Mary Garry, whose reputation had been vindicated by the condition of the Major's bed, came downstairs at once.

"I've found the loaf," said Marjorie; "it's out in the yard beside the pump."

Mary Garry giggled. Mrs. O'Halloran cast a glance at her which stopped the giggle on the spot. She walked out to the yard, picked up the loaf, and brought it in.

" It could be," she said in a subdued tone, " that I took it with me when I went to get the water for the cabbage, and laid it down unknown to myself. It's what I don't mind ever doing before; nor I wouldn't have believed it, not if the priest had it give out off the altar that I done it. But where's the use of talking? I have the loaf safe now, anyway, and you'd better be getting on with your work, Mary Garry. You have the Major's bed to make over again. The way you make beds, it'll do the blankets no harm to get a bit of an air. If I did right, I'd go up every day of my life and spread them out on the floor and turn the mattresses just to teach you."

There must have been words on the tip of Mary Garry's tongue which it would have been pleasant to speak. She did not utter them. It is impossible that she refrained from a magnanimous dislike of striking a fallen foe. It is more likely that she feared being worsted in an encounter with Mrs. O'Halloran even when she had all the advantage of a vastly superior position.

Marjorie became very cautious. During the remainder of the morning she only succeeded in secur-

ing a package of kitchen salt, a small quantity of tea, and three eggs, one of which she unfortunately broke.

That night Paudeen crept cautiously from his bed in the room above the coach-house at eleven o'clock. It was very dark, and in his efforts to find the oars he upset Marjorie's bicycle. It fell with a horrid clang on the flagged floor, and Paudeen immediately tripped over it and fell too. He lay quite still, expecting every moment to hear Major Kent's voice. Jamesy Deveril, most fortunately, slept in the gate lodge, so there was no fear of interruption from him. The Major was either sound asleep or inattentive. He made no move. Paudeen picked himself up and stole forward very warily, feeling his way along the wall. He came upon the oars at last, and carried them off. The labour of his undertaking was very great. Not caring to venture along the drive, which would have taken him past Jamesy Deveril's bedroom window, he crossed the paddock, and had to climb a wire fence and a wall. He stumbled and fell several times in the rough fields beyond the road. Samson, with the gates of Gaza on his shoulders, must have encountered similar difficulties on his way to the top of Hebron at midnight. But, supposing the greater weight of the gates to be compensated by the judge's superior strength, Paudeen had the harder task.

Samson, the gates once placed in the appointed place, could lie down and sleep. Paudeen had to go back for Marjorie's store of provisions. He had to go back twice, making the double journey three times altogether, because the items collected by Marjorie were of such unadaptable kinds, and of such awkward shapes, that he could not carry them all at once. An open sardine-tin cannot be carried, without serious risk, in the same hand with a cake while climbing a fence; and there was no room for the bacon inside the biscuit-tin. It was greatly to Paudeen's credit, considering the difficulties he had to deal with, that he only spilled a little of the salt and broke one of the remaining eggs.

CHAPTER XIII

AMONG the letters on the Major's breakfast table next morning was one addressed in a pretty, feminine hand to "Mrs. Kent, Portsmouth Lodge, Ballymoy." The Major looked at it doubtfully. The address was his. The surname was quite plainly written. After some hesitation he opened the envelope. The letter inside began "Dear Madam." The Major hesitated again, turned over the sheet of paper, and looked at the end. It was signed "Olivia Garnett," and enclosed in brackets after the name were the letters "B.A." He took another look at the beginning of the letter. "Your telegram," he read, "was handed to me yesterday afternoon in the office of the *Irish Times*." He was sure of his correspondent at last. Olivia Garnett, B.A., was, without doubt, the lady whom he had engaged to take charge of Marjorie. He read the letter through.

Miss Garnett, it appeared, was quite ready to spend her holiday in looking after Mrs. Kent's children, and had no objection to schoolboys. She assumed that there was some special reason for haste, and proposed to leave Dublin by an early train on the morning after she wrote. The Major glanced at the date

of the letter, and came to the conclusion that Miss Garnett might be expected to arrive in Donard at one o'clock. The prospect caused him acute uneasiness. He had not yet told Mrs. O'Halloran that he was engaging a governess. Now it would be necessary to have a bedroom got ready at once. He expected that Mrs. O'Halloran would be very much displeased, and he recognised that she would have a legitimate grievance. She ought in all fairness to have had at least a day's warning of the coming of Miss Garnett. He turned to the letter again with a sigh. Miss Garnett, evidently with the schoolboys in her mind, declared that she was able to teach Latin and elementary Greek. Her other accomplishments included French, German, music, freehand and geometrical drawing, Swedish drill, lawn-tennis, and what she described as the usual English subjects. The Major regretted that he had not spent an extra five shillings, or even half a sovereign, on his telegram and made his position clearer. He was not at all sure what view Miss Garnett might take of an engagement in a bachelor's house; and it seemed almost insulting to offer no more than one small girl to a lady equipped with such a mass of miscellaneous learning. Then it occurred to him, to the great increase of his uneasiness, that he had not yet told Marjorie about her governess. It was impossible to

foretell with any certainty how she would take the news, but there was a horrible possibility that she might form a defensive alliance with Mrs. O'Halloran.

Marjorie entered the room fresh from an interview with Paudeen Canavan. She was in high spirits, for she had learned that the transport of the oars and provisions had been safely accomplished. Major Kent, deceived by her smiles, felt that it might be easy to reconcile her to the coming of Miss Garnett. He gave her a bowl of porridge-and-milk, and then, after the manner of heralds of bad news, made an oblique advance towards his subject.

"How would you like," he said, "to have a lady to play with instead of Paudeen?"

Marjorie swallowed a large mouthful of porridge without chewing it at all, and looked steadily at her uncle.

"I should not like it at all."

She spoke quite decidedly. Her mind was full of her elopement to the yacht with Paudeen Canavan. The coming of a strange lady would be very likely to interfere with her plan.

"She's a very nice lady," said the Major persuasively. "She plays lawn-tennis, and she's fond of Swedish drill."

"*I* don't want any lady."

Marjorie's emphasis on the pronoun allowed the Major to infer that the entertainment of any lady who might arrive would be left entirely on his hands.

"Her name," he said, "is Olivia Garnett."

There was nothing in the name to alter Marjorie's opinion of the desirability of the lady's presence; but she was a kind-hearted child, and, having made her own position plain, she did not want to interfere with her uncle's pleasures.

"All right, Uncle John," she said. "When she comes she can play at lawn-tennis and Swedish drill with you and J. J. I'll go on learning to ride the bicycle with Paudeen."

Major Kent did not feel equal to any further effort at explanation. There seemed to him only one thing to do. He made up his mind to get Meldon out to Portsmouth Lodge, and to hand over to him the task of introducing the new governess to Marjorie and Mrs. O'Halloran. When breakfast was over he went out into the yard and gave his orders to Jamesy Deveril.

"You'll put the brown cob into the trap at once," he said, "for I'm going to drive into Ballymoy. Then you can take the car yourself and go over to Donard. There's a lady arriving by the one o'clock train — a Miss Garnett — and you're to bring her back here."

He spoke in a casual, careless tone, as if the arrival of lady visitors at Portsmouth Lodge were an every-day matter. Then, without giving Jamesy Deveril any opportunity for asking questions, he went back into the house. When the trap stood ready for him at the door he called Mary Garry.

"Mary," he said, "I forgot to mention that I am expecting a lady here this afternoon at about four o'clock. She will probably be staying for some time. Will you kindly tell Mrs. O'Halloran to have a room ready for her? I can't wait to settle about it myself, for I have an important engagement."

Then, lest Mrs. O'Halloran should sally swiftly from the kitchen and speak to him, he drove off. Afterwards, no doubt, there would be trouble with Mrs. O'Halloran, but he intended to have Meldon by his side when that time came.

He drove into Ballymoy and put up his cob, as usual, in the stable behind Doyle's hotel. As he went out of the yard gate he was met by Meldon, who appeared to be in an exceptionally cheerful humour. He had just learned from Doyle that Father McCormack and the reverend Mother had taken kindly to the idea of the troop of fairies, and that the dressmaker was already engaged on the costumes. There were to be eight, ten, or twelve attendant leprechauns,

according to the number of dresses that could be got ready in time.

"I saw you," said Meldon, "out of the back window of the hotel as you were putting up the cob. I was just having a chat with Doyle about the presentation of the address to the Lord Lieutenant and Lady Chesterton."

"J. J.," said the Major, "she's coming to-day."

"Nonsense! Father McCormack had another letter this morning. She won't be here till Tuesday."

"No," said the Major. "To-day."

"Who are you talking about? Lady Chesterton?"

"No. Olivia Garnett — Miss Garnett, or Mrs. Garnett. I don't know which she is. The governess."

"Oh, the governess! I wasn't thinking of her. I hope she'll turn out all right. What does Marjorie say?"

"I'd like to talk the whole thing over with you, J. J. Are you busy?"

"My business," said Meldon, "consists very largely of helping people who are in any kind of difficulty. Just come into my rooms and tell me what's wrong. If you're not satisfied about the lady's character it will be better to turn her back at once. You can't afford to run risks."

Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz was expelled from the armchair in Meldon's room, but the Major preferred, he said, to sit at the table while dealing with serious business. He handed Miss Garnett's letter to Meldon, who read it carefully.

"There seems," he said, "to be some slight misunderstanding. Olivia evidently thinks she's coming into a large family with a Mrs. Kent at the head of it. What did you say in your telegram?"

"I don't remember."

"You must have stated, or at all events implied," said Meldon, "that you had a wife and six children, two of them at least schoolboys home for the holidays."

"I couldn't possibly have said that. I only spent eightpence on the telegram, and, in any case, I wouldn't have said it. Where would have been the point of telling the woman a pack of lies?"

"It will be something of a surprise to Olivia," said Meldon, "when she arrives and finds out the true state of the case."

"Do you suppose she'll go back again at once?"

"No. I don't. In my opinion she'll be delighted. But it will be time enough to consider her attitude when we've made up our minds whether she's the proper sort of person to take charge of Marjorie. Does she thoroughly understand the Parents' Union

system of education? That's the first question."

"I don't know. I didn't mention that in my telegram."

"You ought to have mentioned it. The sixpence you saved there, Major, will cost you dear before you're through with this business. You'll very likely have to pay her way back to Dublin. The first thing you'd better do when she arrives is to explain the system to her, and ask her whether she's prepared to work along those lines."

"I'll give her Margaret's pamphlets to read," said the Major. "But that's not the real difficulty. What I want to talk to you about is ——"

"Let's get rid of one thing at a time," said Meldon. "You can't give her those pamphlets to read, because you haven't got them. I lent them to Doyle this morning, and told him to pass them on to Father McCormack."

"What on earth did you do that for? They've neither of them got any children to educate."

"You'll find," said Meldon —"in fact, I expect you've observed already — that it's the people who haven't got any children who take the keenest interest in education. All the authorities on the subject — those who invent the new theories — are either unmarried women or confirmed old bachelors. John Stuart Mill, who wrote one of the best books there

is on education, is a case in point. The moment people, men or women, get even one child of their own, their interest in education begins to flag. When they get two or three children it requires the utmost exertions of the Parents' Union and other similar societies to keep them up to the mark. Those who have really large families know what utter rot the whole thing is, and nothing short of the Compulsory Education Act will induce them to send the poor little things to school. That explains to you why I gave all your sister Margaret's literature to Doyle and Father McCormack. They're the only two people, except myself, in the town of Ballymoy, who haven't got any children. Consequently, they're the only two who care enough about education to toil through all that printed matter. As a matter of fact, I had another reason as well. They are both going to make speeches at Lady Chesterton's meeting for the amelioration of the Irish child. Now I want the thing to be a success. I want Ballymoy to show up well. If I leave Father McCormack and Doyle to themselves they'll just talk the usual platitudes. You know the kind of thing."

"No," said the Major, "I don't. And what's more, I don't care. I didn't come here to talk about your meeting. I'm in a fix about this governess."

"We'll get back to the governess in a minute.

Just at present I am explaining why it was necessary to give those pamphlets to Father McCormack and Doyle. The priest, if left to himself, would have got up at the meeting and said that the future of the nation depends on the efficiency of the school — which, of course, isn't true. The most successful nations, the ancient Romans and a little later on the Goths, had practically no schools at all, efficient or otherwise. Father McCormack knows that perfectly well; but he'd say the other thing, and go on saying it in different words for at least ten minutes. It wouldn't be his fault. He'd have to, for he wouldn't know what else to say. Then the Marchioness would get up and say that the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world. That's another of those things which everybody agrees to consider true, but which is really a horrid lie. The women who have taken a real share in ruling the world took jolly good care never to rock cradles. Look at Queen Elizabeth. Look at Katherine the Great of Russia. Did she rock the cradle of the infant Paul? Not she. She bundled him off to his grandmother, and left him with the old lady till he was grown up. After the marchioness has finished, Doyle will get on his legs, and he, if not carefully instructed beforehand, will make us all sick by repeating that emigration is the curse of this country — which may be true, but is disgustingly stale.

But if he and Father McCormack take a couple of those pamphlets and magazines of yours and work them up they'll make speeches which will be reported in every paper in Ireland. Some of the ideas are absolutely new in this country."

"Anyway," said the Major, "it doesn't matter about the pamphlets. I don't want them. I don't care if I never see them again. I want to know what I'm to do about Miss Garnett. What will she do when she finds out there's only one little girl for her to teach, and that I'm a bachelor? She's expecting to find a Mrs. Kent. You saw her letter."

"If she's made up her mind to face a pack of howling children and a couple of schoolboys, it will be an immense relief to her to find only one little girl. You may make your mind quite easy about that."

"But what about there being no Mrs. Kent? Will she object to my being a bachelor?"

"Not at all. She'll be pleased. As I told you when you first thought of engaging her, she'll occupy her spare time in trying to marry you. Whether she succeeds or not — and I expect she will succeed — she'll have a very pleasant and exciting holiday."

"J. J., there's one other spare bedroom in Portsmouth Lodge. Will you come out and spend the next month with me?"

"I will not. I know what's in your mind. You're

thinking that if I were there Olivia would prefer me, and you'd get off. That is, of course, quite true. But there are limits to what you ought to expect of a friend. I have my reputation to consider. I'm a clergyman, and I'm engaged to be married. I can't spend my time gadding up and down the country and flirting outrageously with every pretty governess you choose to engage. It wouldn't be right, and I won't do it, even to oblige you."

"I don't want you to flirt with her. I only want you to be there."

"Oh, to act as a sort of chaperon. Well, I won't do that either. There's nothing so unpleasant as watching other people love-making. And my presence wouldn't be the slightest check on her. If she makes up her mind to marry you, she will marry you, whether I'm there or not."

The Major sat silent, no doubt contemplating his awful fate.

"I suppose," said Meldon, "that you've made out a programme for her guidance."

"A programme?"

"Yes. That's absolutely essential. You can't have a governess without giving her a programme. It ought to be done in French; but if you can't manage that, do it in English and I'll translate it for you. The sort of thing I mean is this: '8 a.m., get up and

see that Marjorie washes her teeth.' You can put that job on Olivia anyhow. '8.45, breakfast.' Here you might add a footnote on Mrs. Purvis's wishes about the chewing of food. '9.30 to 10.30, walk.' *Promenade* is the French for walk, in case you think of doing the thing in that language yourself. 'Subjects for conversation during walk. Monday: Common objects of the kitchen garden — e.g. green caterpillars, young tomatoes, the wire-worm, and so forth. Tuesday: Common objects on the high road, the domestic ass ——"

"I'll keep the domestic ass till you come out," said the Major.

Meldon ignored the insult. It was blunt, obvious, an imitation of the repartee of the schoolboy — altogether beneath his notice.

"In that way," he said, "you'll be able to regulate Olivia's work without having to keep dodging in and out of the school-room all day long."

"When I've told her that she has to get up at eight," said the Major, "and when I've forced her to go out for a walk at ten, whether she wants to or not, it won't make things any worse if I go spying on her movements. I shall certainly consult her before I make any such arrangement of her time."

"Marjorie is the person to consult," said Meldon, "if you consult anyone."

"The fact is, J. J.," said the Major, "I haven't told Marjorie yet that Miss Garnett is coming."

"You haven't told Marjorie! Good gracious, Major! There'll be a horrible row when you do. Marjorie ought to have been in your confidence from the very start. No self-respecting child would stand being ignored in that way. Have you told Mrs. O'Halloran?"

"No; I haven't. At least, I sent her a sort of message by Mary Garry."

"Then there'll be another row. On the whole, Major, I don't think you're going to have a particularly pleasant time. If I were you, I'd tell Marjorie and Mrs. O'Halloran together. Make a kind of public announcement, and when you've done it retire at once to your bedroom and have out the doctor. I'll give him the tip and get him to wire to Dublin for a hospital nurse. She'll protect you from Mrs. O'Halloran, Olivia, and Marjorie; and if she marries you herself in the end, you'll be no worse off. For all you know to the contrary, the nurse may be the better-looking of the two."

"I thought, J. J., that perhaps you'd come out and break it to Mrs. O'Halloran and Marjorie. You always say that you like helping people out of difficulties. I'm sure you'll never get a better opportunity than this."

"Oh, that's what you want, is it? I suspected that that was what you were getting at when you first began. Why couldn't you have come to the point at once, instead of wasting time over side-issues? I can't go out this morning, but I will this afternoon. What time does Olivia arrive?"

"About four. Jamesy has gone over to Donard to meet her."

"Very well. I shall be with you shortly before four. I'll have the whole household assembled in the dining-room — Marjorie, Mrs. O'Halloran, Mary Garry, Jamesy Deveril, Paudeen Canavan, and Olivia. I'll make a speech to them urging them to adopt an attitude of mutual forbearance. I'll do my best to persuade them that the unpleasant position in which they find themselves is not due to any want of consideration for their feelings on your part; and I'll tell them that if any of them make themselves unpleasant to each other, you, acting on my advice, will simply go to bed and leave them to fight it out. That, I think, is the best line to take."

CHAPTER XIV

IT was a quarter to four o'clock when Meldon arrived at Portsmouth Lodge. Major Kent was waiting for him, impatient and nervous. Miss Garnett might arrive at any moment, and nothing had been done to propitiate the other members of the household. Mrs. O'Halloran had not spoken a single word on the subject, and her silence alarmed the Major very much. A voluble protest, even accompanied by the tears of Mary Garry, would have set his mind at ease, though it would have been very unpleasant. Her refusal to express any opinion about the message she had received in the morning left him in a state of dreadful uncertainty about the line she meant to take. He was equally uncomfortable about Marjorie. She had gone out early in the afternoon. He supposed that she was practising bicycle-riding with Paudeen Canavan. She had not returned, and it was quite possible that she might meet Miss Garnett on the road. The thought of what might occur if she learned the truth first from the lips of her governess filled the Major with acute anxiety. Marjorie was a child who never hesitated to speak out when she felt strongly, and it was likely that she

would feel very strongly indeed about Miss Garnett. It was with a sense of great relief that he greeted Meldon when he walked into the room, hot and dusty.

"I've cut it rather fine," said Meldon; "in fact, I'm only just in time. I passed the car a mile back on the road, and Olivia will be here in about ten minutes. It wasn't my fault. We met a new dog just outside the workhouse — a kind of brindled sheep-dog, and, of course, Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz had to stop to kill it. That delayed me ten minutes, for the sheep-dog put up a middling good fight. Then I punctured a couple of miles out of the town, and found I hadn't a repair outfit. I had to ride the rest of the way on my rim."

"You're here now anyway," said the Major, "and that's the great thing."

"Everything quite ready, I suppose? Afternoon tea spread out in the drawing-room? Mary Garry with her cap and apron on, a vase of roses on Olivia's dressing-table, and Marjorie's hair brushed?"

"I don't know. Mrs. O'Halloran has kept out of my way ever since I came home. I didn't like to precipitate things by making inquiries. I daresay it's all right about tea. Marjorie is out bicycling. I haven't seen Mary Garry since lunch. She hadn't her cap and apron on then; but she may have put them on since."

"Marjorie must be sent for at once," said Meldon. "Then we'll see about Mary Garry's toilet. Our plan of operations is as follows. I meet Olivia at the door ——"

"I wish you wouldn't call her 'Olivia,'" said the Major. "You'll do it to her face if you get into the habit of it; and then there'll be trouble."

"That'll be all right. You'll be calling her by her Christian name yourself in a day or two. I caught a glimpse of her as I passed the car. She's got fluffy yellow hair, and a nice round dimply sort of face. I should say that she's just the sort of girl who'll be engaged to be married to you in the inside of a week; and you'll like it tremendously. I daresay it'll be a relief to Marjorie, too, when the thing comes to a head and she isn't responsible any more for entertaining Olivia. But we haven't time to discuss your marriage now. I'll meet her at the door. You'll lie low until I bring her in and introduce her."

"I don't see why," said the Major. "I don't particularly want to meet her at the door, but the fact that she's good-looking — if she is — doesn't seem to me any reason why I shouldn't."

"If you think the matter out you'll see at once that you can't — not at least if you've any decency of feeling. The poor girl has been travelling since

seven o'clock this morning. Coming into a strange house she'll naturally like to look her very best. That means that she'll want to tidy her hair, put her hat on straight, and get out a clean pocket-handkerchief before she faces you. You're the man she'll want to make a good impression on. It doesn't matter about me; but she would hate you to see her for the first time with her hair all tousled and some horrid smut or other on the end of her nose."

"Very well, J. J. Settle it any way you like; but I don't suppose she'll care much about your washing her face for her. Nobody would."

"I don't propose to wash her face. I intend to hand her over to Mary Garry with the remark, made in a polite but conversational tone calculated to set her at her ease at once, that tea will be ready in the drawing-room in ten minutes, and that if she wants anything she has only to ring the bell in her room."

"I doubt if ringing the bell will be much good. I haven't, as I said, seen Mrs. O'Halloran; but I expect, from what I know of her character, that she'll be most unwilling to take any notice of that bell. She hates bells, and I'm nearly certain she broke the study one on purpose last week. If Miss Garnett rings hers ——"

"I shan't give Mrs. O'H. a chance of being dis-

agreeable. I shall collar Mary Garry and stand over her until Olivia comes down again. You can count on me, Major. If Olivia rings her bell, Mary Garry will go bounding upstairs like an antelope, and whatever is asked for will be brought at once, unless it's something entirely unreasonable. In the meanwhile you will go into the drawing-room, sit down on a chair, and pretend to read a book. You will have a paper-knife in your hand ——"

"Why?"

"My dear Major! This lady comes here bristling with knowledge and oozing all over with culture. She's a bachelor of arts. She didn't mention her university in the letter, but a degree of that sort means learning, wherever it's got. She will naturally expect to associate with people who are interested in literature and art. You're not; so the only thing to do is to try and give her the impression that you are. She'll find you out in the end, of course; but if, when she first sees you, you have a book in one hand and a paper-knife in the other she'll get a good general idea of your character. After all, it's not much to ask you to do, when she's taking all the trouble to wash her face and do her hair so as to make a favourable impression on you. As soon as she enters the room you will rise, smiling in a friendly and hospitable manner, extend your right hand ——"

"Thanks. I have shaken hands with people before. I shouldn't have offered her my left."

"And express a hope that she's had a pleasant journey —— Ah! I hear the car! That must be her. Now recollect what I said. The moment you hear Olivia go upstairs you slip quietly into the drawing-room with a book and a paper-knife."

The door of the study shut behind Meldon. The Major heard Mary Garry summoned loudly. The car drew up at the door. Meldon's voice was audible again. He was talking volubly, evidently to Miss Garnett. There were footsteps in the hall. A door upstairs was shut with a violent bang. The Major rose, slipped out of the study, and went into the drawing-room. He carried with him a volume of his Encyclopædia marked on the cover "Jab to Sli," and had a large silver-mounted Spanish clasp-knife as a paper-cutter. Meldon entered the room a few minutes later.

"It's all right," he said. "She hasn't rung the bell yet, and she hardly will now. Anyhow, I think Mary Garry will go to her if she does. But I was obliged to speak very strongly to her. Mrs. O'Halloran has evidently been working her up. I can tell you, Major, that old woman is in a fine temper. I never saw anything to equal her. It seems that she and Mary Garry between them have lost or mislaid

a couple of pounds of bacon, a box of water-biscuits, half a tin of sardines, a package of kitchen salt, three eggs, and some other provisions of a miscellaneous kind. I couldn't go into the matter fully, but I rather fancy that Mrs. O'Halloran regards Olivia as in some way responsible for their disappearance. There will be a worse row than I counted on. No governess, especially if she's entirely innocent, will put up with being called a thief before she's half an hour in the house. Did you hear the way Mary Garry banged the door of the bedroom after she got Olivia inside? That just shows the sort of feelings Mrs. O'Halloran is giving way to. However, I think the tea will be all right. I hate threatening people, especially girls; but the matter was urgent, so I told Mary Garry that if tea wasn't brought into this room in the inside of ten minutes I'd give Paudeen Canavan half a crown to put live rats in her bed every night for a fortnight. I rather fancy that'll make her mind herself for a bit. By the way, I was quite right about Olivia. She's an extremely attractive-looking girl and very nicely dressed. I don't pity you a bit for having to marry her, though I suspect that when you do Mrs. O'Halloran will leave at once."

Miss Garnett entered the room. The Major rose hurriedly, dropping the Encyclopædia and the dagger

on the hearthrug. Meldon performed the ceremony of introduction.

"This is Major Kent," he said. "Major, Miss Garnett. I'm sure you'll be glad of a cup of tea, Miss Garnett. If you'll excuse me for a moment, I'll just go and make Mary Garry bring it in at once."

"I hope," said the Major, "that you had a pleasant journey."

"Oh, yes, thanks; and the drive from the station was beautiful!"

Before the Major had hit on a suitable remark to make about the scenery, Meldon's voice reached them through the open door. He was speaking loudly, and every word he said was plainly audible.

"Very well; I'm not going to drag you into the drawing-room by the scruff of your neck. I have some regard for appearances, if you haven't. But remember what I say. Two rats every night — piebald rats, with long, scaly tails; rats of a particularly loathsome breed. I'll get them out specially from Doyle's oat-loft, where there are thousands of them. At the end of a week you'll be sorry that you wouldn't bring in that tea."

Miss Garnett started slightly, and looked inquiringly at the Major.

A moment later Meldon entered the room carrying the tea-tray.

"I hope," he said genially, "that you won't mind our rough-and-ready ways, Miss Garnett. The Major's parlourmaid has gone out to fetch Miss Marjorie, your future pupil. We thought you'd like to see her at once. The cook doesn't care about coming into the drawing-room. She's not accustomed to ladies, and — but I expect you understand the way of cooks thoroughly. Mrs. O'Halloran is excellent at savouries, but she requires a little humouring. I thought the best thing to do was to bring in the tea myself."

"How old is Marjorie?" asked Miss Garnett, addressing Major Kent.

"Ten," said Meldon — "ten or eleven. Neither the Major nor I are quite sure which, but no doubt you'll be able to find out. She has been brought up in Australia, and she may be a little backward in Latin and geometrical drawing; but I expect you'll find her up to the mark in everything else. Are you going to pour out tea, Major, or shall I? Or what do you say if we ask Miss Garnett to do it?"

"Won't Mrs. Kent be here?" asked Miss Garnett.

"No," said Meldon; "she won't. The fact is that Marjorie's mother — she's Mrs. Purvis, by the way, not Mrs. Kent — is at present touring round the chief cities of Europe, enjoying herself, I have no doubt, doing picture-galleries and cathedrals. That's the

reason we asked you to come down and look after Marjorie. We thought that the dear child's knowledge of geography would be greatly improved if she followed her mother's tour on the map every day, under the guidance of some one who really understands the European capitals. The Major doesn't, and I haven't time to come out here to look after Marjorie's education."

Miss Garnett seemed a little puzzled.

"Did you say that Marjorie was your daughter or your niece?" she said to the Major.

"Niece," said Meldon; "but that makes no difference. The Major is just as fond of her as if she was his daughter. He hasn't got a daughter of his own, but I expect she'd be just like Marjorie if he had; so that needn't make any difference to you."

"I'm not married," said the Major.

Miss Garnett, the teapot in her hand, looked first at one and then at the other of the two men in front of her. There flashed across her mind recollections of the appalling stories occasionally composed by writers of detective fiction about lonely ladies decoyed into remote places by savage men, and there abominably murdered; but it was impossible to suspect the Major of any such design, and Meldon's face was engagingly ingenuous. She smiled feebly, and began

to pour out the tea. The door of the room was flung open, and Mrs. O'Halloran walked in.

"Mary Garry is just after coming into the kitchen," she said, "and telling me that Miss Marjorie is not to be found, high nor low. I thought it only right for the Major to be told that the child has got lost on us."

"Keep cool," said Meldon, "and avoid excitement of any kind. Let Mary Garry go out and search again."

"It would suit you better to go out and search for her yourself, Mr. Meldon, than to be sitting there drinking tea and the poor little girleen maybe carried off by tinkers or the like. As for sending Mary Garry out again, it would fail you to do that. She's lying on the kitchen floor this minute in some kind of a fit, but whether it's the loss of the child that's preying on her, or the way you did be talking to her about them rats that has her demented, I can't say."

"J. J.," said the Major, "we must go at once and search for the child."

"Not at all," said Meldon. "She's all right. Send Paudeen. He'll find her."

"You'll not send Paudeen," said Mrs. O'Halloran.

"I will if I like," said Meldon; "and I do like. Paudeen will know where to look for her. Just you despatch him at once, Mrs. O'Halloran; and then go

and drag Mary Garry out into the yard and pump cold water over her head until the fit leaves her."

"You'll not send Paudeen," said Mrs. O'Halloran, "for he's lost, the same as Miss Marjorie. Jamesy Deveril has been stamping up and down the yard, and raising all sorts and cursing like the devil himself this last half-hour, and sorra the sign of Paudeen Canavan there is to be found about the place. Him and Miss Marjorie took out the bicycle after the dinner, and they're lost, the two of them."

"We must have the country searched," said the Major. "I'll get the police. I'll send Jamesy in to Gregg this minute, and tell him to bring all his men out here at once. I'll telegraph for a detective. I'll ——"

"You may," said Mrs. O'Halloran, "but you'll not find them. It's my belief they're gone for good; and small blame to them. You have the life frightened out of Miss Marjorie, the same as you have Mary Garry druv' into a fit."

She looked sternly at Meldon as she spoke. The Major hurried from the room to despatch Jamesy at full gallop for the police. Mrs. O'Halloran took no notice of his departure. It was Meldon, and not the Major, whom she regarded as the cause of all the misfortunes which had befallen her. It was with him she meant to reckon.

"You had Paudeen Canavan beat by the police till he couldn't walk, let alone leap, with the bruises there was on him, and him an orphan. You said you'd have rats out from Doyle's store and set them on to ate Mary Garry, who's an innocent poor girl that isn't accustomed to the like nor can't be expected to put up with it. And you've fetched the like of her" — she indicated Miss Garnett with her thumb — "down to Miss Marjorie, to be beating her, I suppose, or maybe to be putting rats in the poor girleen's bed. Is it any wonder they're gone, she and Paudeen? No; but the wonder is that Mary Garry isn't off along with them. If it's the tinkers has them — and the tinkers'll get them at the latter end — they'd be better off than living in the house with the like of you."

"If you don't go back to the kitchen," said Meldon, "and attend to Mary Garry, she'll have all the crockery smashed to bits and herself cut into ribbons before the fit leaves her. I can hear her this minute kicking plates and dishes off the dresser."

"They've took a lump of bacon off the hook in the larder," said Mrs. O'Halloran, "and they've took them biscuits that the Major does be eating after his dinner, and they've took the sardine fishes that the little lady did have the fancy for. And Mary Garry said to me no later than this morning that she couldn't

put her hand on Miss Marjorie's comb nor her tooth-brush, high nor low — so they've took them too."

"I'm glad she took the tooth-brush," said Meldon. "It shows that she's a real respect for her mother's wishes. That was one of the things Mrs. Purvis was most particular about. I hope, now, that she'll remember to chew the bacon properly."

The Major returned breathless. His face was white, and he was evidently in a state of considerable excitement.

"I've sent off Jamesy," he said. "The police will be here in an hour. In the meantime what shall we do, J. J.? The child's gone."

"Sit down, Major, and give Miss Garnett her tea. If it will ease your mind I'll take a stroll round the place myself. It's ten to one they're up in the hay-loft or away off among the bracken at the far end of the paddock, eating sardines and raw bacon and water-biscuits. I'll take Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz with me. He's not precisely a blood-hound, so I don't suppose it would be any use giving him one of Marjorie's shoes to smell before we start. But he has the greatest possible dislike for Paudeen Canavan. Every time he sees that boy he wants to bite him. You take my word for it, Major, if they're hid in any kind of hole, the dog will hunt them out of it."

"I'll come with you," said the Major. "I can't stay here and drink tea."

Miss Garnett also volunteered to join the search.

"Very well," said Meldon. "It seems to me a pity to waste the tea, for I'm perfectly certain that Mrs. O'Halloran won't make any more for us. But if you both insist on coming with me, we can do the thing systematically. First we'll turn the key in the kitchen door to keep Mrs. O'Halloran and Mary Garry from getting out and tormenting us with foolish talk about tinkers. Then I'll show you the way to the yard, Miss Garnett. Search the hayloft carefully. I'll give you a pitchfork, and if you find them don't hesitate to give Paudeen a jab in the leg. It'll do him good and he'll respect you all the more afterwards. Major, you'll do the kitchen garden. Look into all the cucumber and melon frames, and turn out the potting-shed. If they aren't there, walk slowly along the drive and look up into every tree that it's possible to climb. Get Marjorie down, if they're up a tree, and then give a shout for me, and we'll all throw stones at Paudeen. I'll go off across the paddock and let Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz rout about among the bracken. He won't bite Marjorie, but I'll be sorry for Paudeen Canavan if he happens to be lurking anywhere there."

CHAPTER XV

IT was Miss Garnett who made the first discovery. She satisfied herself that the fugitives were not in the hayloft or in any other part of the stable buildings, and emerged from the yard, still carrying the pitchfork which Meldon had given her, just as the Major completed his search in the garden. In his nervous anxiety he had smashed the glass of two cucumber-frames and about twenty flower-pots which were piled together in the potting-shed, behind which he supposed that Marjorie might possibly be lurking. He proposed that he and Miss Garnett should each take one side of the drive and thoroughly examine every tree. They were near the gate, and almost hopeless, when Miss Garnett made her discovery. Marjorie's bicycle was lying on its side on the grass. The Major crossed the drive and looked at it. There is something in the way a bicycle lies upon the ground which is eloquent of disaster. Its handlebars twist upwards in a manner very suggestive of broken limbs. Its front wheel is half off the ground, and the top part of its rim sticks up in the air with a curious look of forlorn despair.

The Major's heart sank within him.

"Do you think she's dead?" he asked.

Miss Garnett looked round her apprehensively. She was of a sympathetic disposition. The Major's despondency conveyed itself to her. She half-expected to see a horribly mangled corpse — perhaps two corpses — lying somewhere in the grass. There was, in fact, a shapeless mound half-covered by brambles in the shadow of the wall which separated the grounds of Portsmouth Lodge from the road. Miss Garnett caught sight of it, clutched the Major's arm with one hand and pointed with the other at the object of her fear.

At that moment Meldon, with Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz at his heels, appeared at the far end of the drive. He hailed the Major:

"Found anything? I didn't get a trace of them in the paddock."

The Major pointed to the bicycle. Meldon walked up to it and looked it over carefully. He picked it up, twisted it to and fro, and felt the tyre with his finger.

"It's all right," he said. "Not even punctured. Now what do you infer from the discovery of the bicycle, Major?"

"I suppose there's been an accident."

"Quite wrong," said Meldon. "In fact, the proper inference is the exact reverse of that. I should say

that we are now practically certain that there hasn't been an accident — at all events, not a bicycle accident. I've had seventeen bicycle accidents in my time, and my experience is that the machine is always far more injured than the rider. Now there's nothing wrong with this machine at all. Therefore, I think we may safely say that it has simply been laid down in the place where we found it. It follows that Marjorie can't have gone off on it. Therefore — observe the simple way in which these things work themselves out if you only treat them logically — therefore, she's either taken one of the Major's horses or else she has gone on foot, and therefore can't be far off. Now, has she taken a horse? That ought to be an easy matter to settle."

"There were two in the stable," said Miss Garnett, "and three cows."

"I saw the chestnut filly and the foal in the paddock. I think that pretty well completes your stud, Major, counting in the mare that Jamesy took when he went galloping off for the police. Therefore Marjorie hasn't taken a horse, and so must be somewhere close at hand. You're sure she's not in the garden, or up any of the trees, or in the hayloft?"

Miss Garnett and the Major were perfectly certain that she could not have escaped their search.

"Very well," said Meldon. "The next thing to

do is to make a systematic search of every field within a radius of one mile of this house. That will take some time; but we may shorten the business by reasoning carefully before we start. Where would Marjorie be likely to go? It is a well-known fact that every child likes playing with water or fire better than anything else. It can't be fire in this case, for if she and Paudeen had lit one we should see the smoke. That reduces us to water. It isn't absolutely certain; but I should say it's highly probable that Marjorie has gone where there is water. Now there is the sea on the other side of the road, and there's the stream which runs through Flanagan's farm half a mile on beyond this gate. We'll begin with the seashore, as it's the easiest to examine. If we stand on top of the wall we can see it for miles in every direction. It's perfectly flat, and there isn't a rock big enough to hide a top-hat the whole way along it. If they're on the shore we'll spot them at once."

They were not on the shore. Miss Garnett — who put on pince-nez to aid her vision — the Major, and Meldon stood in a row on top of the wall and peered up and down along the beach. There was neither man, woman, nor child on it. The *Spindrift* lay peaceably at her anchor.

" Now," said Meldon, " we'll go off and trace that

stream of Flanagan's to its source, if it takes us a week to do it. Hullo! Who's this? Oh, it's Gregg in his trap, with a body of cavalry after him."

Mr. Gregg, the district inspector of police, drove up at full speed. Behind him clattered two mounted constables, armed with swords and spurs, and Jamesy Deveril on a mare which had evidently been ridden hard.

"I happened to be in the barrack," said Gregg, "when your man told me that your niece had been kidnapped by tinkers. I started at once with the two mounted men. The sergeant and three more men are coming after us on a car. I told them to bring their carbines. I left word for Ford to come out as soon as he could so as to be ready to take depositions and make out a warrant for the arrest."

"That's all right," said Meldon. "If you don't actually bag a tinker you can at all events carry off Paudeen Canavan under a strong escort. I should say that the proper charge to make against him would be one of forcible abduction of a ward in Chancery. But, of course, we can't be sure of the circumstances till we catch them. It's quite on the cards that Marjorie has abducted him."

"We don't know what has happened to the child," said the Major. "She has run away, and we can't find her."

Mr. Gregg and his two troopers seemed a little disappointed.

A pitched battle with a determined band of military tinkers would have broken the monotony of their lives. A search for a stray child was scarcely dignified, and might be very laborious. It was not the kind of work which the police were accustomed to undertake. But Major Kent was a popular man in the neighbourhood, and everyone was anxious to help him find his niece.

"I've just arrived at the conclusion," said Meldon, "that Marjorie and Paudeen have gone to the banks of the stream which runs through Flanagan's farm with a view to camping out for the night. I'll reason it all out for you again if you like; but the Major is rather impatient, so perhaps we had better get to work at once. My idea, now that you have come, would be to let the mounted men patrol the two banks of the stream, with a view to preventing the fugitives breaking cover and escaping across country. They can ride down Paudeen Canavan if any attempt of the sort is made; but, of course, they must be careful not to hurt Marjorie. Then let the sergeant and the infantry force walk up the stream — it's quite shallow — and examine every nook and corner. You and I, Gregg, will go up to the top of the hill with the Major's telescope and direct operations. We'll

take two flags with us. I suppose your men understand flag-signalling thoroughly."

The car with the sergeant and the three constables on it, drew up at the gate. The men were in full marching kit. They carried their carbines. Their grey capes were rolled up into bulky sausages and strapped like bandoliers across their chests. They stood rigidly at attention while Mr. Gregg gave them their orders.

"Now, Major," said Meldon. "You'd better help Miss Garnett down off that wall and take her in to finish her tea. We sha'n't want you any more. If Miss Garnett will get Marjorie's bed ready for her, I think we'll put her straight into it as soon as we catch her. She won't want anything more to eat this evening. She'll have had raw bacon, sardines, and water-biscuits. I'm sorry to give you so much trouble, Miss Garnett. Mrs. O'Halloran and Mary Garry ought to do that work; but I'd be afraid to let them out of the kitchen. There'd very likely be a riot if they got loose. I expect by this time Mary Garry's fits will have turned to lunacy, and Mrs. O'Halloran will be foaming at the mouth with impotent rage. Now, Major, hop down."

"I'll go with the police up the stream," said the Major. "I'd like to know the worst as soon as possible."

"Yes, do," said Miss Garnett. "I don't want any tea, really. I'll have everything ready for the poor child when you bring her home."

"Her room," said Meldon, "is next yours. It's the only other room on that side of the passage, so you can't make a mistake about it."

Major Kent's telescope was a heavy instrument, mounted on a tripod stand. It took Meldon and Gregg some time to get it up the hill. The search-party had already commenced operations when they reached the top. Meldon, who took the first look at the scene, was just in time to see Flanagan, the farmer, bolt into his cabin and shut the door, when the police marched into his field.

"I expect," said Meldon, "that he thinks you're going to evict him. What a relief it will be to his mind when he ventures out after a while and finds that you're not. I daresay he and his wife are piling up all their furniture against the door at the present moment, intending to resist you to their last gasp. That's the worst of being a policeman in this country. Nobody will believe that your intentions are benevolent, even when you don't want to do any harm to anybody."

Gregg put his eye to the telescope and, after watching his men for a while, swept the instrument round and took a comprehensive survey of the whole neigh-

bourhood. With the telescope pointed at the sea, he suddenly paused.

"Look here, Meldon," he said. "What's that a couple of miles out in the bay?"

Gregg's tone was serious. He gripped Meldon tightly by the arm and bade him look through the telescope.

"There's a small boat — a punt — out there," said Meldon, "and, as far as I can make out, there's nobody in her. The wind's off shore, and she's drifting out to sea."

"Good God!" said Gregg. "It must be Kent's punt, and the child has fallen out of her and been drowned."

"Don't get excited," said Meldon. "And don't leap at conclusions in that way. We're not certain yet that that's the Major's punt; and if it is we've no reason to suppose that the child went out in her. Even if she did, she may be in her still. She may be lying asleep at the bottom, and we couldn't see her."

"Come down at once," said Gregg, "and let's see if the punt is on the shore."

"All right. We may as well go down as stay here on the top of this hill. But let's go quietly. The great thing, on these occasions, is to avoid all unnecessary fuss. What a blessing it is that the Major

is quietly paddling up Flanagan's stream! If he'd seen that boat he'd be a raging lunatic."

On the way down the hill Meldon gave his reasons for not feeling any anxiety about Marjorie.

"That young scamp, Paudeen Canavan, has gone with her," he said, "and wherever the one of them is the other will be. It's ridiculous to suppose that Paudeen could possibly be drowned. Boys of that sort never are. They're like fleas. You might hold one under water for five minutes and it would come up smiling afterwards. If Paudeen's safe, we may assume that Marjorie is too. After all, the punt may be in its place on the shore."

It was not. The marks of its keel were visible for several yards in the sand. On the stones beside the place where the punt usually lay was a half-empty package of kitchen salt. Meldon stared at it.

"They've been here," he said, "and they've gone off in the punt. What's more, they've left some of their provisions behind them. That package is one of the things Mrs. O'Halloran mentioned as being lost. If ever I get hold of Paudeen Canavan I'll skin him and rub that salt in afterwards."

"Where's the nearest boat?" said Gregg. "We must go after the punt at once."

"I don't believe there's a boat between this and Ballymoy," said Meldon.

"I'll send one of the mounted men off to the coastguard station," said Gregg. "That will be the quickest."

"That will take hours," said Meldon. "And, besides, any attempt to communicate with the police will bring the Major down on us. The thing for us to do is to swim off to the *Spindrift* and go after them in her. Could you swim that far in your trousers and shirt?"

"I could, of course."

"Very well. Come on. We'll get the mainsail on her, and we'll have that punt in half an hour. It's far quicker than sending to the coastguards, and it'll make less fuss. I wouldn't ask you to do the swim in your clothes, only that we've both of us got more or less of a position to keep up, and it wouldn't suit us to go sailing a yacht about the bay stark naked. We'd look rather fools coming ashore afterwards; particularly if Marjorie is in Flanagan's fields after all. Of course, there may be a suit of oilskins on board, but it wouldn't do to count on that for certain; and I don't fancy myself making a public appearance draped in a spinnaker."

Gregg had his coat and boots off before Meldon had finished speaking, and was up to his knees in water.

"Wait a minute," said Meldon. "I'm not quite

ready yet. I won't keep you long; but I see Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz coming across the field, and I must throw a few stones at him to drive him off. He's not a water dog, and he'd only make a nuisance of himself trying to swim after us to the yacht. Anyhow, you can't do anything without me; so there's no use going off by yourself. It's not at all easy to get into a ten-ton boat from the water when there's nobody on board to help you. The only chance is over the anchor-chain. You'd better let me have the first try at it. If I get in I'll drop a bight of rope overboard for you."

They swam out together. Meldon gripped the anchor-chain with both hands and twined his legs round it under water. Then he attempted to swarm up it. The yacht was dragged forward by his weight and her curved bow hung over him. He sank, pulled down by the slackened chain; but he came to the surface again and gripped the chain higher up. A puff of wind swung the yacht back from her moorings, tightening the chain and lifting his head and shoulders clear of the water. Again the *Spindrift* surged forward, and again Meldon was plunged under water. Three times the manœuvre was repeated, and each time Meldon got a grip higher on the chain. At length he grabbed the gunwale with one hand and scrambled on board over the bow. He seized the

throat halyard, which lay in a coil beside the mast, and flung a bight of it overboard to Gregg. A couple of minutes afterwards the two men stood dripping and breathless on the deck.

"Now," said Meldon, "get the cover off the mainsail."

Gregg ran aft, and began to loose the lashing of the sail-cover. Suddenly he stood still.

"By Jove!" he said. "There's somebody on board. It must be the children. I hear one of them crying in the cabin."

As he spoke Marjorie put her head up through the fore-hatch and confronted Meldon.

"Oh, J. J.," she said. "It's you. I knew it wasn't anyone who'd do us any harm. But Paudeen said it was the police come to take us to prison, and he began to cry."

"Paudeen was perfectly right," said Meldon. "That damp gentleman standing near the stern of the boat is a policeman, though he doesn't look like one at present. He'll take Paudeen straight to prison and feed him on bread and water and the cat-o'-nine tails. What on earth are you doing here, Marjorie?"

"Just living," said Marjorie calmly. "We thought it would be nice to come out here to live. We brought plenty of food with us, and we're going to sleep with all our clothes on in the two funny little

beds which fold up. We've got them unfolded. Uncle John told me how to do it one evening."

"As soon as ever I get you ashore," said Meldon, "you'll go straight to your ordinary bed in a nice white nightdress. We got a governess for you to-day, and she's waiting for you now. I shall advise her to tie a rope round your waist and fasten the other end of it to the leg of the dining-room table. Your unfortunate uncle is at this moment up to his knees in a cold stream, tearing out the remainder of his hair in handfuls. Mary Garry has got a fit and is lying on the kitchen floor. Mrs. O'Halloran is to be taken to the lunatic asylum this evening, and the Royal Irish Constabulary are quartering Flanagan's fields like red setter dogs on August 12. What have you to say for yourself?"

"I thought you'd be sensible, J. J.," said Marjorie—"even if all the rest were silly."

CHAPTER XVI

"J. J.," said Gregg, who stood dripping at the stern of the yacht, "what do you mean to do about going ashore?"

"We'll row ashore in the punt as soon as we've picked her up. Get the cover off the mainsail."

"Oh, rot! We can't go sailing about the bay soaked to the skin when there's no need."

"There is need. The Major's valuable punt is adrift. Besides, Marjorie would like a sail. Wouldn't you, Marjorie?"

"I'm not sure," said Marjorie. "Would Uncle John be vexed?"

"As a matter of fact," said Meldon, "I expect he would. But I'm surprised at your thinking of that. You haven't shown much consideration for his feelings so far."

"I see a trap coming along the road from Ballymoy," said Gregg. "I expect it's Ford. When he gets near enough we'll shout and tell him to send for a boat to take us ashore."

"All right," said Meldon, "we'll howl, howl for all we're worth. I'll say one, two, three, go, and we'll all three howl together as much as possible on

the same note. Or, wait a minute, why should we make ourselves hoarse when we needn't? We'll have up Paudeen Canavan and make him howl. I'll lash him to the starboard runner with his face towards the shore and you shall wallop him, Gregg, with the end of the mainsheet, carefully knotted. In that way we'll kill two birds — in fact three birds — with one stone. Paudeen will get what he richly deserves; Ford's attention will be attracted without our giving ourselves sore throats; and the exercise will keep you from catching cold. Go down and fetch up the prisoner, Gregg. If he doesn't come at once, we'll have it in for him to-morrow for resisting arrest."

"Please, J. J.," said Marjorie, "don't beat poor Paudeen."

"I will beat him," said Meldon. "At least, I'll set on Mr. Gregg to beat him, and if he tires I'll take a turn myself."

"If you hit Paudeen," said Marjorie, "I'll jump straight into the sea and be drowned."

Meldon looked at her. There were tears — tears of passion, not of sorrow — in her eyes. He realised that Marjorie had a temper, and was quite capable of desperate deeds when it was roused.

"Do you mean to say, Marjorie, that it wouldn't be a pleasure to you to see Paudeen walloped, and to listen to his yells?"

Marjorie clenched her fists and rushed at Meldon. She succeeded in striking him three or four times and then glared at him ferociously.

"All right, Marjorie. If you'll stop beating me I'll let Paudeen off. There, I promise he sha'n't be touched. Honour bright."

Marjorie's rage vanished as quickly as it had been aroused. She took Meldon's hand again. Gregg, dragging the extremely unwilling Paudeen by the collar of the coat, came on deck.

"Prisoner at the bar," said Meldon, "you have been recommended to mercy by the jury — you are the jury, Marjorie. You deserve to be beaten, but you won't be beaten if you howl in a satisfactory manner. If you simply whimper or shriek in any way that isn't distinctly audible on shore — I suppose if he won't howl, Marjorie, you've no objection to my giving him a whack or two just to start him off."

"Please, Paudeen, howl," said Marjorie; "I'll help you."

Paudeen stood, a picture of blind terror, in front of Gregg. His eyes, red from his weeping in the cabin, were fixed apprehensively on Meldon. He evidently did not in the least understand what was said to him.

"Now, then," said Meldon, "it's your only chance. Yell, shriek, shout, scream, bellow, sing if you pre-

fer it; it will come to much the same thing. Make any kind of noise you like that will be heard on shore."

Paudeen stood sulkily silent.

"It's no use," said Meldon. "The boy's gone stupid. Marjorie, I believe you've been ill-treating him in some perfectly frightful manner; you've bullied the sense out of him. We'll have to do the shouting ourselves after all. Now then — one, two, three — yell!"

A loud cry, discordant, terrifying, swept across the water. Mr. Ford's horse shied violently. A distant mounted policeman turned in his saddle, stared at the yacht, and began to gallop across the field in which he was stationed. Flanagan, the fear of immediate eviction forgotten in amazement, emerged from the door of his cabin followed by his wife. Major Kent, the sergeant, and three constables climbed out of the river-bed and ran towards the shore. Down the drive from Portsmouth Lodge came Miss Garnett, Mrs. O'Halloran, and Mary Garry. They ran as if they were engaged in a race for some immensely desirable prize. They kept together for about thirty yards, then Mrs. O'Halloran dropped behind.

"I'll back Mary Garry," said Meldon. "When they get to the wall she'll take the lead. There! didn't I say so?"

Mary Garry climbed the obstacle with marvellous agility, and with a flying leap cleared the ditch and landed on the road. Miss Garnett mismanaged her petticoats, and remained tangled and helpless till Jamesy Deveril, rushing from the gate lodge, rescued her.

"That's your new governess, Marjorie," said Meldon. "She doesn't show up very well in an obstacle race. You'll have a hold over her from this on. Whenever she turns nasty over an irregular French verb or anything of that sort, all you've got to do is to offer her any odds she doesn't beat Mary Garry over wire fences and stone walls."

The runners gathered in a group on the shore. The mounted police, in the excitement of the moment, even forced their horses into the water.

"Get a boat!" shouted Meldon.

A babel of cries answered him. Everyone on shore wanted to understand the position of affairs.

"Get a boat!" shouted Meldon again. "I can't and won't explain things at the top of my voice when I haven't a dry stitch on me."

There was a hurried consultation on the beach. Then the two mounted police went galloping, one eastwards towards Ballymoy, the other westwards to see if a boat could be found more quickly in that direction.

"That's all right," said Meldon. "Now we've nothing to do but sit down and be as comfortable as we can for the next hour. I vote we go below, light the galley stove, and fry Marjorie's bacon. I suppose you haven't finished the bacon, have you, Marjorie?"

"No. We didn't eat any bacon. We only ate the sardines and some of the biscuits and the cake. We'll have the bacon now, and I'll cook it when you have lit the fire."

"I say, Gregg," said Meldon, as he poured paraffin oil over the coals, "it's just as well I insisted on your keeping on your shirt and trousers for the swim, wasn't it? There's rather a large audience on shore. You wouldn't have cared to face Mary Garry and the new governess with any less on you than you have at present."

Even Paudeen was admitted to the feast which followed. There were two slices of bacon and four water-biscuits for each member of the party. Marjorie's happiness was complete when Meldon lit the swinging lamp.

"I suppose," he said, "you didn't bring any tobacco with you, Marjorie, or a few of your Uncle John's cigars? No! Well, it can't be helped. But if ever you go off on a yachting cruise again bring some tobacco. Even if you and Paudeen don't smoke

yourselves, you ought to have some on board. You never know who may drop in on you unexpectedly. Now, Gregg, an evening of this sort is not complete without music. Marjorie would like to hear you sing. As an officer in one of the armed forces of the Empire the most appropriate thing you could give would be 'Rule, Britannia.' After that, Paudeen, who is a strong Nationalist, will give us 'God save Ireland.' Then, as neither I nor Marjorie sing, we'll talk politics. We'll have a regular debate. 'Will tariff reform be beneficial to the cause of the Irish language in the new University?' and 'Ought the advocates of women's suffrage to support the German Emperor?' The affirmative in each case will be moved by Mr. Gregg, D.I., R.I.C.; the negative by Mr. Paudeen Canavan. The chair will be taken by Miss Marjorie Purvis. Hullo! They're shouting at us from the shore. I expect the coastguard boat has turned up. Now, Marjorie, when you step ashore carry yourself with dignity. Recollect that you are the heroine of a most exciting adventure — a thing which will be talked of in Ballymoy when the hair of our children's children is turning grey. Paudeen, you will sit in the bow of the boat and whistle a funeral march of some sort — Chopin's for choice — to give an air of solemnity to the proceedings. Here's the boat! Hold your head up, Gregg, and try

to look as if you had all your clothes on and weren't catching your death of cold. Marjorie, the Lord Lieutenant's wife won't have half the chance of showing herself off next Tuesday that you are going to have now; so make the most of it."

A loud cheer from the shore greeted the party as they stepped into the boat. Meldon took one of the *Spindrift's* flags in his hand, stood in the stern, and waved it. The coastguards, inspired by the moving scene, pulled briskly. Meldon's advice to Marjorie was unfortunately wasted. She had no opportunity of behaving with dignity. As the boat grounded, Mrs. O'Halloran and Mary Garry rushed into the water and seized the child. Between them they carried her ashore. They, Miss Garnett, Jamesy Deveril's wife, Flanagan's wife, and nine strange children, who had gathered to the scene as mysteriously as vultures to a battlefield, formed a group round Marjorie, repelling the Major, who wanted to satisfy himself that his niece was really safe. Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz yelped with frenzied delight at the return of his master. He also succeeded in biting the heel of a policeman's boot and tearing a long hole in the leg of Paudeen Canavan's trousers. Major Kent, driven from the neighbourhood of Marjorie, wrung the hands of Meldon and Gregg, and then tipped everybody who could be tipped, includ-

ing Flanagan the farmer, with the utmost liberality.

"I'm glad to see," said Meldon, "that you've got over that fit you had, Mary Garry. Perhaps next time I tell you to bring tea into the drawing-room you'll bring it without arguing."

"Let the girl be," said Mrs. O'Halloran. "Haven't you had your 'nough of mischief-making for one day? Or do you want to drive her off into hysterics again?"

"Miss Garnett," said Meldon, "I suppose it was you who let Mrs. O'Halloran out of the kitchen, where I had her locked up safe. I don't blame you, for I'm sure you meant kindly; but when you know her better you'll wish you hadn't been so foolish."

Mrs. O'Halloran and Miss Garnett had evidently become fast friends. Neither of them took any notice of what Meldon said. They took Marjorie by her hands, each holding one of them, and led her up towards the house. Mary Garry and the other two women followed, all of them weeping with excitement and joy. The nine children, their curiosity about Marjorie more or less satisfied, remained on the shore to watch Meldon and Gregg put on their clothes.

Major Kent hospitably asked Meldon, Gregg, and Ford to dinner. Meldon alone accepted the invitation. Gregg pleaded a desire for dry clothes, and

declined to accept the Major's offer of a suit. Ford said that his own dinner was waiting for him at home. Both of them wanted to have the satisfaction of being the first to tell the news of the adventure to their wives.

Meldon, dressed in the suit of the Major's clothes which had been offered to Gregg, complained of hunger. There seemed to be little chance of getting anything to eat. Mrs. O'Halloran had not so much as boiled a potato during the afternoon, and flatly declined to attempt any kind of cookery. She and Miss Garnett sat in Marjorie's room. They discussed the day's proceedings till the child went to sleep, and then continued to discuss them in whispers. Mary Garry flitted rapidly in and out of the room until Mrs. O'Halloran sternly forbade her to venture upstairs again. She then retired into the yard and fed Paudeen Canavan on cold beef and soda-bread. Meldon, driven to desperation by want of food, caught her in the act. He rescued the beef, and succeeded, after raiding the larder and the store-room, in gathering other materials for a meal.

With satisfied appetite he and Major Kent retired to the study and shut the door.

"I shall telegraph to-morrow morning for Margaret," said the Major. "I can't stand the responsibility of taking charge of that child any longer."

"I daresay you're sorry now," said Meldon, "that you didn't invite my little girl when I suggested it. She'd have looked after Marjorie, and all this wouldn't have happened."

"I shall telegraph for Margaret to-morrow," said the Major stubbornly.

"You may telegraph if you like; but if you do, you'll simply infuriate your sister, who won't a bit like being dragged away from the European capitals, and you won't be any nearer getting out of the very awkward position you're in now. I don't know, Major, whether you quite realise what you've done, but you and Marjorie will figure in every paper in the United Kingdom in the course of the next three days."

"Nonsense."

"It's not nonsense. Here you've had the entire police force of this part of the county turned out in full uniform, with their officer at their head. You've had a Resident Magistrate ready to administer any Act of Parliament you chose to ask for. You've had four coastguards, commanded by their officer with brass buttons on his coat, rowing long distances in a large black boat — a boat that belongs to the British Navy. You couldn't have made more fuss if the Germans and the Russians together had attacked Portsmouth Lodge in fire-balloons. You can't do

that kind of thing and expect to keep it quiet afterwards."

"Nonsense," said the Major. "Who'd write to the papers? I sha'n't. Ford won't. Nor will Gregg. I don't suppose you will."

"I'll tell you who'll write. Doyle's nephew. He's already done a long account of the Lord Lieutenant's visit for the Dublin papers. He expects to make at least thirty shillings out of it. Now if a function of that kind — a thing which occurs practically every week during the first year any Lord Lieutenant is in Ireland — if it's worth thirty bob, what do you suppose the papers will pay for a really exciting thing like this? I don't know, of course; but I should say not less than five pounds. Do you suppose that Doyle's nephew will let an opportunity of the kind slip? Not he. He wouldn't be Doyle's nephew if he did. He's round at the police barrack this minute, I expect, interviewing the sergeant and picking up picturesque details from the men. When he's got all he can out of them he'll go on to the coastguard station. He's sure to do a paragraph about you as a grief-stricken uncle, overwhelmed by a sudden and totally unexpected calamity. He'll work in Mary Garry and Mrs. O'Halloran. He'll trace out Olivia's antecedents and describe her personal appearance. He'll telegraph the whole thing to-night at about nine

o'clock, so as to have it in good time for the Dublin papers to-morrow morning. The English press will copy it the next day."

"I don't believe," said the Major, "that the newspapers will print a rigmarole of that sort. What on earth interest would the public take in a little girl going for a picnic to a yacht?"

"That won't be the point at all," said Meldon. "If there was nothing more than that the papers wouldn't so much as say 'Thank you' to Doyle's nephew. The real value of the story lies in your ridiculous behaviour; in the summoning of a small army of police and coastguards to rescue a child who was perfectly safe all the time."

"Let them print what they like," said the Major desperately. "It won't matter to me if they choose to make fools of themselves. But, of course, they won't. Even if the Dublin papers mention the matter, they'll say very little about it; and no other paper will copy them."

"Won't they? Just you wait and see. This is the month of August, and Parliament isn't sitting. There's hardly a single politician in the whole country making a speech, even on a Sunday. They're all playing golf. The wretched reporters are wandering about with notebooks in their hands, driven to desperation for the want of something to write about.

They have motor-car accidents and 'Sad fatalities while bathing' stuck into the most prominent places in their papers. They'll be down on you in swarms. The first one will arrive in all probability the day after to-morrow, and from that on you won't have a quiet hour. If I were you I'd get Paudeen and Marjorie and yourself photographed in a group. Leave a couple of hundred copies of the picture at the gate lodge, and tell Jamesy Deveril to give one to each man who comes to see you. You might stave off the worst of them that way."

"I shall telegraph to Margaret," said the Major. "She's in Vienna now. She might be here on Monday or Tuesday if she started at once."

CHAPTER XVII

MAJOR KENT spent an uneasy night. He slept fitfully, and awoke more than once with a violent start. At five o'clock in the morning sleep departed from him altogether. He lay wide awake and stared at the ceiling, while the most annoying thoughts fastened on his brain and gnawed at it. He did not really believe that Marjorie's adventure would become a newspaper sensation, but every word that Meldon had said came back to him in the early morning decked in an appalling garment of plausibility. He already saw the leaded headlines and his own name figuring in enormous type. He reasoned with himself, but at five o'clock in the morning the most hard-headed man reasons with himself in vain. Bankruptcy, at that hour, seems to most of us inevitable; public disgrace of the most abominable kind hangs by a frayed thread over our heads; our wives and children have ceased to love us; our home is desolate; our future hopeless. From the hideous prospect of newspaper publicity the Major's thoughts turned to other worries. He felt himself entirely incapable of dealing with Marjorie. He did not believe that Miss Garnett or anyone else could control

her. She had escaped two perils — the peril of wild horses and the peril of the sea. The next thing, no doubt, would be fire. Portsmouth Lodge would blaze suddenly, unaccountably. Marjorie's charred remains, with those of Miss Garnett, Mrs. O'Halloran, Mary Garry, and Paudeen would be discovered among the ruins. The Major himself would escape unwillingly and go through life afterwards a stricken man, receiving by every post the intolerable reproaches of his sister Margaret.

The devils who manipulate the tortures of the wakeful man at dawn are swift and versatile. They pack into an hour such mental suffering that their victim believes himself to have been upon the rack for months. They scorn consistency. After showing the Major the hideous vision of his homestead in ashes and putting him through the ceremony of burying five scorched corpses, they changed the scene. He saw himself engaged to be married to Miss Garnett. He did not want to marry her, he had not proposed to marry her; but in some mysterious manner he was in honour bound to her. At the altar of his parish church stood Meldon, grinning abominably. There was an end of peaceful days. He saw plainly that in the future he would be dragged up to Dublin five or six times a year, made to stay in large and noisy hotels, taken to concerts, and compelled to buy

things he did not want. His polo ponies would be taken away from him and sold; his paddock laid out in rose-gardens and herbaceous borders. Women would swarm into his house, drinking tea there every afternoon. There would be small bits of white calico left on his study floor to offend his eye. Balls of wool would lie about in dark places ready to entangle his feet. The rattle of a sewing-machine would make his evening hours unbearable. He saw himself a tame man of the drawing-room, effervescing with mild jokes and degradingly absorbed in minor gossip. The *Spindrift* would rot uncared-for at her anchorage.

He heard the clock in the hall strike six, and felt that it was impossible for him to bear his torments any longer. He rose and dressed. Strung to the extremest pitch of resolve, he went down to the gate lodge and roused Jamesy Deveril. He bade him saddle a horse and ride at once to the post-office in Ballymoy. Jamesy pointed out that the office would not be open until eight o'clock, and that nothing would be gained by starting before half-past seven. The Major went into the house and composed a telegram to his sister Margaret.

"Come here at once," he wrote. "The position of affairs is critical. Marjorie, though not ill, is in constant danger."

Jamesy departed with this message at half-past seven. Only after he had gone did the Major recollect that it was Sunday. The chances were against the telegram getting all the way to Vienna on a Sunday; but it would at all events start. The alarming nature of the message might move a Dublin clerk to get it through as far as London. Then there would be every hope of its reaching Margaret Purvis early on Monday. If she started at once — and surely no mother in receipt of such a telegram would fail to start at once — she might reach Ballymoy on Tuesday afternoon.

At breakfast the Major began to feel that he had perhaps worded the telegram too strongly. Marjorie and Miss Garnett appeared together. They sat together at one side of the table. Nobody looking at Majorie would have supposed her capable of causing the smallest annoyance or anxiety. She was dressed in her blue frock, and the tear in it was carefully mended. Her hair was sleek, and tied neatly with a blue ribbon. Her face shone with much washing, and expressed a gentle submissiveness which came near to being prim. She said, "Yes, Uncle John," "No, Uncle John," when he addressed her. She smiled with meek good-humour when he spoke. Only once did she show the smallest sign of animation, and that was when she heard that she was to go to church.

"Will J. J. preach?" she asked.

Miss Garnett did not look as if she wanted to marry anyone. She was most demure and entirely devoted to Marjorie. She scarcely ever raised her eyes from her plate, and said little more than "Thank you" and "No, thank you," when the Major spoke to her. He felt that the sending of the telegram might have been postponed until Monday morning. Nevertheless, he nerved himself after breakfast to the point of delivering a solemn and, he hoped, impressive lecture to his niece.

"Marjorie," he said, "now that Miss Garnett is here, I shall expect you to settle down and behave with propriety. There must be no more playing in the yard with Paudeen Canavan."

"No, Uncle John, no more playing at all."

"I didn't say there was to be no more playing. I hope you will play with Miss Garnett. You will play lawn-tennis and croquet, and — and — other suitable games at proper times. Every morning you will do two hours' lessons before luncheon."

"Yes, Uncle John."

Marjorie's tone was dutiful, but there was a slight break in her voice.

"Not very difficult lessons," said the Major, who felt that he must not push his severity too far — "just a little history without dates, and some French.

Perhaps, Miss Garnett, the irregular verbs might be omitted for the present. Get on as far as you can without them. There need be no arithmetic."

"If you like, Uncle John, I'll do arithmetic. I've got as far as long division of money."

"The lessons need not be very difficult. You understand, Miss Garnett? But they must be absolutely regular. Nothing must be allowed to break in upon the two hours before luncheon. In the afternoon you will go for a walk, taking with you either a botany book or materials for sketching. This will be the — er — the curriculum every day."

"But, Uncle John ——"

"Yes, Marjorie?"

"Not next Tuesday."

"Certainly," said the Major. "The routine on next Tuesday will be precisely the same as on all the other days. I see no reason whatever for making an exception of next Tuesday."

"But J. J. promised that I was to see the Lord Lieutenant, and I was to be a fairy. Oh, Uncle John, please say I may go with J. J. on Tuesday and wear my fairy dress."

"Certainly not," said the Major sternly. "I never cared for that Lord Lieutenant business, and I won't have you mixed up in it."

Marjorie began to cry. She wept bitterly, and

choking sobs succeeded each other in quick succession.

"Come, Marjorie, dear," said Miss Garnett. "When your uncle says you are not to go to see the Lord Lieutenant you must think no more about it. If you will leave her to me, please, Major Kent, I will explain it to her."

The Major turned to leave the room. He was pursued by a heartbroken cry from Marjorie.

"Oh, Uncle John! I want to present an address and to be a fairy. I can't bear not to. Do let me, and I'll promise, always, always to be good. I'll never go on the yacht again or take things out of the kitchen."

If Miss Garnett had not been there the Major would have given way at once. He had not understood when he forbade it that Marjorie's heart was set upon the presentation of the address to the Lord Lieutenant. It was only the fear of appearing weak and vacillating before Miss Garnett which enabled him to harden his heart. He left the room and went into his study. He tried to persuade himself as he smoked that he was acting a noble part, sacrificing his own inclination to his niece's higher interests. But Marjorie's wail disturbed him.

The car came to the door at eleven o'clock. Miss Garnett and Marjorie appeared hatted and gloved for

church. Major Kent looked at his niece apprehensively. He was relieved to find that she was quite cheerful again, and was apparently thinking no more about the Lord Lieutenant. Her behaviour while they drove into Ballymoy was excellent. During the service in church she was saintly. Her eyes were seldom lifted from her book. She stood, sat, knelt, sang, and repeated the responses with marked devotion. The rector, who was feeling his bronchitis acutely, was not in church. Meldon preached. His text was taken from the Book of Proverbs: "He that spareth his rod, spoileth his son." The sermon dealt with the proper mingling of kindness with severity in the treatment of children. The Major, who felt himself compelled much against his will to listen attentively, gathered the impression that Solomon approved strongly of severity towards boys of twelve years old and upwards — Meldon's illustrations showed plainly that he had Paudeen Canavan in his mind — but was in favour of unlimited indulgence towards small girls. The text, if Meldon's exposition of it was to be trusted, did not apply to girls, because the word used in the original Hebrew was masculine — son, and not daughter.

"If," said Meldon triumphantly, "Solomon had meant daughter he would have said daughter; for he was a man who was careful about his words."

After the sermon came the collection. It was then that Marjorie lapsed for the first and only time from the strict propriety of her behaviour. Her offence was not very grave. She wrapped her contribution up in a sheet of notepaper, which she took out of her pocket, and dropped it in the form of a small parcel on to the plate. Meldon, counting the money afterwards, came upon it. He unwrapped it carefully, and discovered that a note, plainly meant for him, was written on the paper.

"Dearest J. J.," he read, "Uncle John says I am not to be a fairy or to give the address to the lady. I cannot spell her, but you know who I mean. Please tell Uncle John I am to. I do want to so much, and you know you promised.

"Your sad and affectioned, Marjorie Purvis."

Leaving the rest of the coins, like the ninety-and-nine sheep in the wilderness of the vestry-table, Meldon darted through the church and was just in time to catch Major Kent as he got on his car. Marjorie was already seated with Miss Garnett on the other side. She did not so much as turn her head when Meldon shouted to the Major. She called Miss Garnett's attention to the beauty of a glass case, containing a black-edged card and some artificial flowers, which lay on the grave nearest to her.

" Major," said Meldon, " come into the vestry for a minute; I want to speak to you."

The Major went reluctantly. His conscience was uneasy. He remembered Marjorie's tears in the morning. The sermon had hit him hard. He knew that a conflict with Meldon on the subject of the address to the Lord Lieutenant was inevitable, but he did not want to enter on it at once. He tried to cheer himself with the thought that Meldon could not yet know what happened after breakfast in Portsmouth Lodge.

" Major," said Meldon, " do you know how I spent my time last night after I left you? "

" No. I suppose you went home to bed."

" Well, I didn't. Much as I should have liked to go straight to bed after the exertions of the day, I didn't do it. I went into Doyle's hotel. At great personal inconvenience I got hold of Doyle. I made him send for that nephew of his who writes reports for newspapers. I had him dragged into Doyle's private room, and I spent the best part of an hour persuading him not to send an account of your ridiculous behaviour yesterday afternoon to the press. Doyle backed me up for all he was worth. He said he'd get Father McCormack to speak off the altar about it if anything was done to annoy you. Nothing could have been nicer than Doyle was, and the

nephew behaved well. Considering that he was sacrificing a five-pound-note, he behaved uncommonly well. He promised to tear up what he had written. Now, what do you say to that?"

"I'm very much obliged to you, J. J., and I'm really grateful to Doyle and his nephew."

"That's what you say," said Meldon. "But it's not, I'm sorry to say, what you mean. Words are cheap, Major, and anyone can say he's grateful for a kindness that's been done to him. But what does your gratitude amount to? No sooner is my back turned than you forbid your niece to present an address to the Lord Lieutenant's wife. I say nothing about the way you are treating the child herself, though for cold-blooded, calculated, deliberate cruelty, your conduct would be hard to beat. You allow her to suppose up to the last moment that she's going to enjoy one of the greatest pleasures a little girl could possibly have. You allow her to plan it, dream of it, look forward to it, find innocent delight in anticipation, to have her dress tried on and her fairy wings, with gold spangles on them, actually fitted to her shoulders. Then out of an absolutely fiendish desire to see her suffer, you dash the cup from her lips."

"I didn't think ——"

"No, you didn't. And that's the reason I'm not dwelling on that side of the subject. If you were

capable of thinking about anybody except yourself, if you were a man of any good feeling or tenderness of heart, I'd say more about the pain you are giving to that child. But there's no good talking that way to you. I don't suppose, either, that it's any use appealing to your sense of common decency and gratitude. Most men would hesitate, after accepting a sacrifice of five pounds from Doyle's nephew, to ruin the account that young fellow has written of the proceedings next Tuesday. I suppose you understand that if your niece does not come up to the scratch his whole report will be spoiled, and he'll lose another thirty shillings over it. You don't think about that, and you wouldn't care if you did think. You might, if you were a different kind of man, remember that I rescued your niece twice — once from the back of a horse that might very well have killed her, and once from a watery grave. I don't expect gratitude, of course. But I think that you might refrain from deliberately putting me into an extremely awkward position. Here I am. I've promised the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and the Marchioness of Chesterton that your niece will present an address to them. They're coming here expressly, or, at all events, mainly, to get that address. If it isn't presented in the proper way, as they've been led to expect that it will be presented, they'll naturally blame me. My

prospects in life will suffer. And all because you won't lend me your niece for a perfectly innocent purpose, for a single half-hour next Tuesday. You ought to consider, Major, that only for me you would very likely now be mourning for Marjorie instead of driving her home to a comfortable dinner on a car."

"If you put it that way——"

"I'm not putting it that way. Don't suppose for a moment that I'd waste my breath putting it in that way to you. I know you too well. The way I'm putting it is this: I don't believe you are altogether a bad man, Major. You are devilishly cruel to children. You are appallingly selfish. You are utterly ungrateful to those who make sacrifices for you. You don't know the meaning of the word 'friendship'; but you have certain good qualities. I'll say this for you: You're a consistently loyal man. I don't believe you'd murder a Chief Secretary even if he happened to be a Liberal. I'll give you credit for a desire to stand by the King and the Lord Lieutenant and the Local Government Board even when they happen to be doing things you dislike. You probably don't fully realise that in refusing to allow your niece to present that address of welcome you are acting in the most flagrantly disloyal manner that it is possible to conceive. It wouldn't be nearly so bad if you came out into the open and played 'God save Ire-

land' on a concertina up and down the street while the Lord Lieutenant was at lunch. That would be a manly act, however misguided; but to refuse to allow your niece ——"

"I've said twice already that I will allow her."

"I didn't hear you. I'm glad you've decided to do what's right at last. If I've spoken too strongly, Major — though I don't think I have — you'll understand that it was for your own good. Now if you'll just count the rest of that collection for me, I'll run out and tell Marjorie. She'll be very happy when she hears the news, and you'll enjoy the luxury of a quiet conscience. Some day you'll thank me for saving you from committing a deed which would have hung round your neck all the rest of your life like an albatross."

"Like a what?"

"An albatross," said Meldon, as he sped down the aisle of the church. "I can't stop to explain it now. Read the 'Ancient Mariner' when you go home, and you'll find out all about it. If you haven't got a copy, ask Miss Garnett to recite the passage I refer to. She'll know it."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE day of the Lord Lieutenant's visit to Ballymoy broke miserably. A strong wind blew from the south-east and brought with it torrents of rain. No one in Connacht allows rain to interfere with pleasure-parties, even picnics, and so far as the people of the district were responsible for it, the success of the reception was not likely to be marred. It was true that the triumphal arch did not look its best. It was a long strip of white cotton, on which were printed in vivid green the words "Céad Mile Fáilte," of which it was supposed that the Lord Lieutenant might possibly know the meaning. The ends of this banner were wound round two short sticks, which were intended to keep the whole extent of the cotton stretched tightly up and down, so that the inscription could be read. These sticks were attached by cords to the windows of houses at the opposite sides of the street; thus forming an arch of the kind known as triumphal. Unfortunately the storm and rain played havoc with the thing. First the rain damped the cotton so that the letters of the inscription ran into each other and became a totally illegible smudge of watery green. Then the wind, sport-

ing with the thin fabric, twisted it round and round itself until it looked like a white garment of monstrous length in process of being wrung out after a washing in dirty water. But nobody was much depressed by the fate of the triumphal arch. Mr. Doyle had all along been opposed to its erection. He regarded a welcome of this kind to the representative of a foreign Government as likely to compromise the reputation of the town for stern Nationalism. He argued plausibly that an illuminated address to be handed to Lady Chesterton was one thing; a triumphal arch, with an inscription which might be understood to apply to the Lord Lieutenant, was quite another matter. The address, as he had maintained all along, was simply an expression of the traditional courtesy of the Irish people. The arch, which had been devised and erected by a rival publican, was described by Mr. Doyle as a piece of "outrageous flunkeyism." He succeeded in persuading his nephew to delete, on account of its reference to the arch, a striking passage which occurred at the beginning of the report of the day's proceedings.

"The town," so this document originally ran, "was brilliantly decorated for the occasion, perhaps the most striking feature in the display being a magnificent triumphal arch, which spanned the main street, and bore, in the ancient and mellifluous tongue

of the Gael, an expression of welcome to the kindly lady and her noble consort whose presence was that day to grace Ballymoy."

When this passage was omitted, the report as actually supplied to the newspapers, began:

"From an early hour of the morning the country-people flocked into the town. They were evidently in humour for high holiday. Laughter resounded on every side. Gay dresses, varying in hue from the brilliant crimson of the women's petticoats to the more serious grey of the men's frieze coats, added a scarcely needed note of cheerfulness to the scene. The number of those who arrived on horseback was so great as to suggest the formation of an escort of mounted cavalry, who should accompany their Excellencies on their tour through the streets."

This suggestion was originally Meldon's. It was adopted by Mr. Doyle's nephew in his report as a picturesque touch; but was not actually carried out because the horses of the district were not accustomed to motor-cars, and could not be trusted to behave properly.

"The weather," the report went on, "though broken by occasional light showers, was not of a kind to interfere with the heartiness of the welcome accorded to their Excellencies. Connacht, indeed, on this occasion, may be said to have justified the words

of the poet who wrote of 'the tear and the smile in her eye.'"

"It's my belief," said Father McCormack, when he came on this passage of the report, "that the welcome will be wasted altogether, for the Lord Lieutenant will never face that occasional light shower which has been coming down in bucketfuls since six o'clock this morning."

Doyle, who was assisting at the final revision of the report, sighed heavily, and said he agreed with the priest. Then Meldon burst into the room.

"Doyle," he said, "have you sent the covered carriage out for the Major's niece, and told the driver to call for Mrs. Gregg on his way in?"

"I have not," said Doyle. "Sure there's time enough."

"There's not time enough. She's got to have the fairy dress put on her; and what with the spangles and the wings and the gold star in her hair, that will take some time."

"Any way, where's the use?" said Doyle. "Father McCormack, here, says they'll never face the weather."

"Is it the Lord Lieutenant not face the weather?"

"Him and his lady."

"My dear Father McCormack, what makes you

say such a thing? You don't — you really don't understand the English people."

"I ought to, then," said the priest. "I was on a mission in Lancashire for the first five years after I left Maynooth, and I saw plenty of the English people, more than ever I want to see again."

"Well, then, you've forgotten what they're like. I tell you straight they're a wonderful people. Their great outstanding characteristic is their devotion to duty. No Englishman ever neglects his duty. You'll find that in any history-book. There was Nelson, for instance. You recollect the way he looked at the signal the Admiral was trying to get him to attend to out of his blind eye, and then said: 'England expects every man to do his duty.' That's the sort of people the English are. The more totally useless the duty may be when it's done the more determined they are to do it. Look at the way they whiten their doorsteps. You must have noticed that if you lived in Lancashire."

"I did," said the priest. "Many's the time I'd be ashamed to walk on them."

"Well, now, is there anything in the world except a devotion to duty that would make a person whiten a doorstep? It's just the same with the Lord Lieutenant. He's not a fool. His wife's not a fool. We're not fools. Nobody supposes for a moment

that any child in Connacht is going to be any the better of their coming here and making speeches in the rain."

"Of course not," said the priest. "What use are speeches?"

"The Lord Lieutenant knows, and his wife knows, just as well as you do that there isn't a child in the place wants to be ameliorated, nor a man or woman that would step across the road to ameliorate one if it did. What brings them here, then? It's not pleasure. You can't suppose it's any pleasure to them to come to Ballymoy and eat the lunch Doyle has waiting for them."

"The lunch is good enough," said Doyle.

"It may be. But it isn't to eat it they're coming; and if it's not that, what is it brings them here?"

"I've wondered many a time," said Father McCormack, "what does bring them. I'm here, parish priest of Ballymoy, getting on for twenty years, and what between Lord Lieutenants and Vice-Presidents and Members of Parliament, I could reckon close on thirty that have been to Ballymoy; and I never made out yet the rights of why they came."

"Well, I'll tell you. It's the instinct of duty that drives them. You can't understand it. No more can I. No more can Mr. Doyle. We're not English. We can't explain it any more than we can explain

what it is that makes your red setter stand still when he gets the smell of a game bird, or what it is that makes a hen sit for four weeks on a lot of duck eggs. You wouldn't sit on eggs. I wouldn't sit on eggs. We haven't got the instinct. It's just the same with an Englishman and his duty. He doesn't do it because he wants to. He doesn't do it because he expects any good to come of it. He just does it because it's his nature."

"That's true," said Doyle. "I've seen them coastguards taking it in turns to stand on the top of the hill with a long telescope tucked under their arms, and then looking at the sea out of it, maybe once in every quarter of an hour, the same as if there might be something coming in or going out along with the tide."

"Just so," said Meldon. "Now it's the duty of the Lord Lieutenant to visit places like Ballymoy. Nobody knows why. It's simply a fixed idea in the English mind that a Lord Lieutenant ought to visit them, the same way that it's a fixed idea in the hen's mind that she ought to sit on the eggs till something, be the same chickens or ducks or turkeys, comes out of them. Now is it likely that a shower of rain would stop a Lord Lieutenant from doing his duty, especially when he has a motor-car with very likely some kind of a lid on it to keep him dry?"

"Maybe now," said Doyle, "if we were to telegraph to the hotel at Cuslough where he and his lady were stopping last night, they'd tell us whether or not they'd started."

"You can telegraph if you like," said Meldon, "but if you do you'll only waste your sixpence. You may take my word for it, they've started. You'd far better send that carriage out for the Major's niece, as I told you."

Doyle departed. In a few minutes a large carriage of great antiquity and most curious shape was driven down the street by Paddy Clancy. Shortly afterwards Doyle returned to the commercial-room with a telegram in his hand.

"You're right, Mr. Meldon," he said, "you're right. They started off at half after ten, and we may be expecting them at or about one o'clock."

"It's eleven o'clock now," said Meldon. "I'll just run round to your dressmaker, Mr. Doyle, and speak a few words of encouragement to her. I expect she's horribly nervous, and it won't do to have her breaking down at the last moment. Father McCormack, you're coming up to the convent, I suppose? You might as well hunt down the attendant leprechauns. If you can raise enough umbrellas to keep them dry on the way it'll be so much the better. If not, wrap them up in shawls and things,

but for goodness' sake don't let their clothes get spoiled."

In the workroom above Mr. Doyle's shop the dressmaker and her four apprentices were gathered round Marjorie's robes. The milliner and her assistant, a young lady who described herself as an "improver," finding business slack in their own department, had come to criticise and admire. One of the girls out of the shop, "the young lady from behind the counter," Mr. Doyle called her, had also wandered up into the workroom.

"I hope," said Meldon, "that the dress for the Major's niece is ready to slip on the moment she arrives, and I sincerely hope it will fit."

The dressmaker seemed a little hurt at there being any doubt about its fitting. Everybody else giggled feebly.

"It isn't every day," said Meldon, "that you get the chance of making a dress for a regular fairy queen. If you've done this job well"— he addressed himself specially to the dressmaker —"it may mean a great deal for you. The Lord Lieutenant's wife is a lady with a very keen eye for a smart frock. You have, I'm sure, often seen her picture in the illustrated papers, and you will have noticed that she's always exquisitely turned out. Now if she sees that this fairy dress is up to the mark in every respect,

she'll very likely give you a job in Dublin Castle, and that might lead on to almost anything."

The dressmaker bridled. The prospect was a most alluring one. The four apprentices stared at her in open-mouthed amazement. Greatness seemed almost within her reach.

"I hope," said Meldon to the young lady from behind the counter, "that you have the illuminated address safe. It was up in your window for some days, and I suppose it's in your keeping now. You have? Very well, then, bring it to me. I'll take it round to the hotel and leave it somewhere handy so that we won't be searching high and low for it when the time comes. After that, I'll go home and get my own clothes changed. If I'd thought of it in time I'd have got a court suit with a sword attached to it. As it is, I shall wear a top hat and a frock coat, and you can all come round to the hotel as soon as you've finished off the Major's niece and take a look at me."

Having encouraged and cheered the staff of the drapery store, Meldon went into the room where the Viceregal party was to lunch. He recommended the waiter to refold the table-napkins in a manner which he said was fashionable. He discovered that no menu cards had been provided, and sent the waiter to obtain from the cook a list of the food. This he trans-

lated into French, and wrote out carefully three times on the backs of visiting cards of his own. He propped these up opposite the seats arranged for the Lord Lieutenant, Lady Chesterton, and the private secretary. Not having another visiting card he was obliged to write the fourth copy on half a sheet of notepaper. This he left opposite the remaining seat. It was prepared for Father McCormack, who, it was expected, would be invited to share the Viceregal meal.

"You'll notice, John," he said to the waiter, "that I've left out the second of the two puddings. The reason of that is that I can't at this moment recollect the French for stewed figs. But I have a dictionary at home and I'll look it up. I'm just going back there now to change my clothes. I'll drop in before the ceremony begins and fill up the gap. It will be your business to see that Father McCormack is the one who sits opposite the sheet of notepaper. I'll give him a hint to that effect myself. But if by any chance he gets hustled into one of the other places you must slip round quietly and change the notepaper and the card. The great thing is to do this banquet decently, and not leave the impression that we're all utter savages down in Ballymoy."

At the door of the hotel he met Doyle.

"I think," he said, "that I've settled everything

for you now except the wine. You have champagne, of course?"

"I have," said Doyle.

"Three bottles will be enough," said Meldon. "Lady Chesterton won't drink a whole one, and the private secretary will hardly expect to get more than what she leaves. You won't, of course, have brandy handed round along with the champagne?"

"Will I not?"

"No, you won't. That mixture is only drunk, so far as I know, in Connacht, and I don't expect that Lord Lieutenant will be used to it yet. He hasn't been here long enough. Next year or the year after, if he's round again, you can have it ready for him. But, of course, you'll give it to him to-day if he asks for it. What about the hock?"

"There's only one bottle in the town. It's what there's little call for down here, and it's no more than a chance that there's that one bottle itself."

"You ought to have ordered a dozen down from Dublin. However, it's too late to talk about that now. The best thing you can do is to tell John not to press the hock on them unnecessarily; and you can give Father McCormack a hint not to take it. You've whisky and soda, of course?"

"I have — plenty. Why wouldn't I?"

"I think that's all. I see you're not giving them

coffee. You're right there. Any concoction your cook would be likely to make under that name would be poisonous. And now I must be off to change my clothes. I'll be back with you in the inside of half an hour to marshal the leprechauns in good order and put any finishing touches on the arrangements which may be required."

CHAPTER XIX

THE great hour arrived. At any moment the Viceregal motor-car might be expected to announce itself with a hoot. The minutes passed in nervous excitement for the two waiting companies. In the hall of the convent Father McCormack and the reverend Mother stood together trying to pretend to each other that they were entirely at their ease. Grouped behind them, under the charge of nuns who fidgeted restlessly, were the Industrial School girls, such of them as were not serving as leprechauns in Marjorie's train. Half a mile up the road, at a convenient corner, a cyclist scout was posted. It was his duty to ride at full speed to the convent to announce the first appearance of the visitors. At the convent gate stood another cyclist who was to carry the news of the arrival down to the hotel.

There Meldon was waiting, in the coffee-room, surrounded by leprechauns, holding Marjorie by the hand. The dressmaker, the milliner, and the dressmaker's four apprentices flitted to and fro among the leprechauns, giving final touches to the dresses and swift pats to the children's hair. Mrs. Gregg and Miss Garnett, having done all they could for Mar-

jorie, stood together and admired their handiwork. Marjorie balanced herself first on one leg and then on the other, swinging Meldon's hand up and down in delighted excitement. Doyle was at the door of the hotel watching for the coming of the cyclist from the convent.

He appeared, riding desperately down the street. Doyle rushed into the coffee-room.

"They've come!" he said. "They've come!"

Meldon's voice stilled the tumultuous excitement which followed.

"Let everyone," he said, "keep absolutely cool. Miss Garnett, Marjorie's wings must be left as they are. If they are crooked, it cannot be helped now. The leprechauns will please stand still. Any rushing about is liable to injure their costumes. Doyle, kindly use your influence with your dressmaker and her assistants to prevent their agitating the leprechauns. There is still plenty of time before us. The Lord Lieutenant and Lady Chesterton cannot be here for at least a quarter of an hour. They have a good deal to do at the convent. They must congratulate the reverend Mother on the plump condition of the girls under her care. They must ask for a holiday for the school. They must inspect whichever of the dormitories happens to have been got ready for them to see. They have to present five pounds to the nuns

to be spent on cakes and sweets for the girls. All that will take time, and not until it's done can they take Father McCormack into the motor-car and come on here."

This speech produced a soothing effect upon the audience, and Meldon looked round him with a smile of satisfaction.

"At the same time," he went on, "everybody ought to begin to buck up. Marjorie, take the illuminated address in your two hands and stand near the door, ready to proceed to the hall when I give the word. One of your wings *is* crooked, I notice. Mrs. Gregg, will you and Miss Garnett straighten it as quickly and quietly as possible, and then retire. The leprechauns will arrange themselves two and two behind the Major's niece, sorting themselves out into pairs according to size. They will all stop grinning at once. The presentation of an illuminated address is not a matter to grin about. Mrs. Gregg, you can't stand beside Marjorie. It will spoil the whole effect if you do. Mr. Doyle and I, as representatives of the reception committee, must be immediately behind the last couple of leprechauns. Everyone else will stand on chairs and other convenient eminences in the background, and watch the proceedings over our heads. Is Paudeen Canavan outside? I think I saw him among the crowd. Doyle, will you be so good

as to fetch him in? I want to speak to him for a minute."

Paudeen, a damp figure, was led through the lines of waiting fairies.

"Are you listening to me, Paudeen?" said Meldon. "Very well. Let you get yourself and a few more boys, and when the motor stops at the hotel door slip round the back of it so as you'll be able to see what's going on. The very minute the lady kisses Miss Marjorie you're to cheer like mad. Do you understand? The rest of the crowd won't be able to see what's happening on account of the motor-car being in the way, but if you cheer they'll cheer too. Mind me, now. If that cheer isn't what I call a proper cheer, if it doesn't set the window-panes rattling all over the hotel, you'll hear more about it afterwards. You've got about ten minutes, from that to a quarter of an hour, to organise the demonstration. You'd better be smart about it. You can get Paddy Clancy, Mr. Doyle's man, to help you if you like. Be off now, and stop gaping at Miss Marjorie."

A fitful wavering cheer broke from the people in the street while Paudeen was pushed from the room.

"It's themselves," said Doyle.

"It is not," said Meldon. "It can't be yet."

He pushed his way through the fairies and looked out.

"Well," he said; "this beats all. It's the Major."

Major Kent, clad in a suit of yachting oilskins, with a yellow sou'wester on his head, drove rapidly down the street and pulled up with a jerk at the door of the hotel. He leaped from his trap, and Jamesy Deveril, who had evidently received his orders, drove on at once to the hotel yard.

"We didn't expect you, Major," said Meldon. "But we're delighted to see you. Be careful now as you come in. If you drip over Marjorie and the leprechauns you'll ruin the whole show. I thought you said that nothing would induce you to put in an appearance?"

"After all your talk about loyalty on Sunday," said the Major, with a grin, "I thought I'd better come. Let me in somewhere till I get off these oilskins. Jamesy Deveril has my hat-box in the trap. I'll be ready in two minutes."

"Go into the bar, Major," said Doyle, "and leave your oilskins there. I'll have the hat-box brought in to you in a minute."

"When ready," said Meldon, "you will take your place in the procession between me and Mr. Doyle, immediately behind the leprechauns. You will hold your hat in your hand as you see me do. When the Marchioness kisses Marjorie you will wave your hat round your head. At the same moment Paudeen

Canavan will raise a cheer outside. All the ladies who are standing on chairs in the background"— Meldon here addressed himself to Mrs. Gregg, Miss Garnett, the dressmaker, the milliner, the young lady from behind the counter, the improver, the four apprentices, and a housemaid who had just stolen into the room —" all of you will then wave your pocket-handkerchiefs in the air, and express delight by making cooing and gurgling sounds in your throats. The leprechauns in all probability have no pocket-handkerchiefs, so they will clap their hands together and smile. Now does everybody quite understand what they have to do?"

"Please, J. J.," said Marjorie, "am I to kneel down when I present the address?"

"Certainly not. In the first place, the floor in the hall, where the presentation takes place, is very wet, and you'd spoil the front of your dress. In the next place, you must recollect that you're a fairy queen. The other lady is only a vicereine, if she's that — and I'm not quite sure that she is. I never could see myself that the mere fact of being married to a viceroy makes anybody a vicereine; though I notice that all the newspapers give her the title. You needn't attempt to walk backwards, either, Marjorie, though I believe it's correct to walk backwards at these court ceremonies. But you'd better not do it. That dress

of yours is far longer than the one you're accustomed to, and you'd probably trip over it. In fact, Marjorie, the less you walk in any direction the better. It would be a frightful catastrophe if you fell."

Another burst of cheering from the crowd outside turned Meldon's attention from Marjorie.

"Doyle," he said, "go and see what that is. Or, wait a moment. Perhaps I'd better go myself. That sounded to me rather a derisive kind of cheer, as if Paudeen Canavan, or whoever started it, had hit on some kind of joke. If by any possibility Mrs. O'Halloran and Mary Garry have arrived, it will be better for me to deal with them."

A car stood at the hotel door. On the near side of it sat the driver in a black oilskin coat and a sou'-wester. On the far side was a woman wrapped up in rugs and shawls. A battered leather travelling-trunk was tied on the well with ropes. A single glance satisfied Meldon that the woman was not Mrs. O'Halloran, but a stranger. He returned to the coffee-room and told Doyle what he had seen.

"It's a Donard car," he said. "I've often seen the driver standing about outside the station and waiting for the train to come in. I know the look of him well. I expect he's got a tourist who has come to spend a week in your hotel. If so, you'd better tell them to drive round to the yard. She must come in

through the back door. We can't possibly have her pushing through this crowd, and dragging that wet trunk after her. And we can't have the car standing at the door. The Lord Lieutenant's motor may be here at any moment. Hurry up, now, Doyle."

Doyle made his way rapidly through the leprechauns. He held a short conversation with the driver of the car. The crowd cheered lustily, hoping for some amusing hitch in the day's proceedings.

"It's a lady," said Doyle to Meldon, a few minutes later. "She wants the Major. The driver says he saw Jamesy Deveril standing beside the yard gate, and so he thought the Major must be here."

"Tell him to go round to the yard," said Meldon. "There's no time to spare. They may be getting into the motor up at the convent this minute."

Doyle went out again, and this time talked to the lady herself. He spoke with great earnestness, but without effect.

"She won't go," he said to Meldon. "I tried all I know to persuade her; but she says she must see the Major. I told her that if it was anything she had against the railway company I was a magistrate myself and I'd attend on her as soon as ever I'd finished giving the Lord Lieutenant his lunch. 'It's not a magistrate I want,' she says, 'but Major Kent. It's

a matter of life and death,' she says, 'and I've a right to see him, for I'm his sister.'"

"Good heavens!" said Meldon, "it's Margaret. Doyle, go and take that horse by the head and lead him into the yard, and don't let the lady get off the car under any pretext whatever. Listen to no excuses. Use force if necessary. Do anything you like, but get her out of that. There are two police outside, and if the worst comes to the worst have her arrested. If she makes her way in here now she'll utterly ruin the whole performance. If she catches sight of the Major's niece we're done. Where's the Major?"

Doyle, impressed by the tremendous energy of Meldon's manner, ran out and seized the horse. Amid a tremendous outburst of cheering, led by Paudeen Canavan, he dragged horse, car, driver, and Mrs. Purvis into the yard, and shut the gate behind them. Meldon rushed to the hotel bar and found the Major polishing his silk hat with a pocket-handkerchief.

"Major," he said, with fierce intensity, "your sister Margaret has arrived, and she's looking for you. If she sees Marjorie it's all over with us. She'll never allow her to present that address to the Marchioness. It would be utterly contrary to the most fundamental principles of the Parents' Union. You must go out to the yard at once and capture her."

"My dear J. J., you don't know my sister Margaret. If she has arrived and wants to come into the hotel, I can't stop her. Nobody living could stop her. It wouldn't be the least use my trying."

"I'll stop her," said Meldon. "If I have to lock her up in the stable till the affair is over, I'll stop her. But you'll have to manage the fairies and the reception generally. You're sure to make a muddle of it, but that can't be helped. Doyle's out after your sister already. Now I have to go too, and from what you say I expect it will take both of us all we can do to keep her out."

Meldon ran through the back premises of the hotel and out of the scullery door into the yard. He saw the car standing near the stable. Mrs. Purvis was disentangling herself from rugs and shawls, talking angrily. Doyle stood, cowed and helpless, beside her.

"Mrs. Purvis, I believe," said Meldon. "Allow me to help you with that rug. What a terrible morning you've had for your drive. I'm delighted to meet you, and I feel it a privilege to be the first to bid you welcome on your return to your old home after so many years' absence in Australia. You have the advantage over us in the way of climate out there. Your great enemy, as I understand, is not rain, but drought. Here, of course, owing chiefly to the Gulf Stream, there is an extraordinary humidity. But I

needn't tell you what our weather is like. You were brought up to it."

"I don't know who you are," said Mrs. Purvis, "but I should feel obliged if you would tell me whether my brother, Major Kent, is in the hotel. That man," she pointed to Doyle, "seems incapable of speech."

"Allow me to introduce myself. I'm the Rev. J. J. Meldon, at present curate of this parish. Your brother, my respected friend, Major Kent, asked me to step outside and say how very pleased he is to hear of your arrival. Just at this precise moment he happens to be engaged in a rather important matter. He's receiving the Lord Lieutenant, and I need scarcely remind you that a Lord Lieutenant isn't the sort of bird you meet hopping about on every bush. He's rather an important person in his way, and he might get touchy if he thought your brother was not showing him proper respect. That's the reason I'm here to welcome you; and if you'll be good enough to step into the stable out of the rain the Major will be with you in ten minutes."

"I shall certainly not do anything of the sort. Why should I wait in the stable? I shall go straight into the hotel."

She climbed off the car as she spoke, and splashed heavily into a large pool.

"Your brother thought," said Meldon, "that you'd be interested in seeing his cob. It's in the stable at this moment. It's a remarkable animal and has won two first prizes. He felt sure you'd like to see it. That's the reason he suggested your going into the stable. He felt sure that the cob would keep you interested and amused while you were waiting for him."

"I've no reason at present," said Mrs. Purvis, "to suppose that my brother has gone mad; but unless he has he didn't send me that message. I don't want to see his cob. I want to see my daughter."

She set out determinedly towards the scullery door as she spoke.

"Your daughter is perfectly well," said Meldon — "well and happy. She's a charming child."

"If she's well," said Mrs. Purvis, "I should like to know why John sent me a telegram which brought me across the Continent of Europe on what appears to be a fool's errand."

Meldon might have argued about the telegram, and would have given quite a plausible explanation of it if he had had time; but Mrs. Purvis was within a few yards of the scullery door. He realised that in her present temper she would be capable of snatching Marjorie out of the very arms of Lady Chesterton. There was only one thing to do. He darted past Mrs. Purvis, reached the door first, passed through it,

slammed it in the lady's face, and turned the key in the lock. A moment later he appeared at the scullery-window.

"Doyle!" he shouted, "run and lock the yard gate. Put the key into your pocket, and get up into the hayloft as quick as you can. Pull the ladder after you, and you'll be safe."

Mrs. Purvis stood irresolute for a moment. Then she walked over to the scullery window and tried to open it. Meldon held fast to the sash. He stood on a sink which was just inside, and addressed Mrs. Purvis through a broken pane of glass.

"I may seem to you," he said politely, "to be acting in a somewhat arbitrary manner, but I haven't the least doubt that you'll thank me afterwards. You'll come to see that what I am doing is for your own good. You will ——"

"I'll have you sent to gaol for this. You have assaulted me. You will be prosecuted for it if there's law to be had anywhere."

"If you'll allow me to explain," said Meldon, "you will realise that I am acting in by far the best possible way under the circumstances. Your daughter ——"

Mrs. Purvis broke a pane of glass with the handle of her umbrella.

"Don't give way to excitement," said Meldon. "It's not the slightest use, and, besides, you'll have

to pay for all you break afterwards. You won't be able to put the blame on me, because Doyle is watching you out of the hayloft. In any case, you couldn't get in, even if you smashed all the glass. The panes are too small. As I was just saying, your daughter ——"

Mrs. Purvis turned her back on Meldon and walked away from him to the middle of the yard.

"Your daughter," said Meldon, raising his voice so as to be sure of being heard, "is at this moment under the protection of her uncle, of a lady of high position and excellent character, Mrs. Gregg, and of Miss Garnett, whom I engaged last week as a governess for her. She is surrounded by a troop of leprechauns, all dressed in white, with green sashes, and green ribbons tying up their hair. She is about to present an address of welcome to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and the lady whom Mr. Doyle's nephew calls 'his amiable consort.'"

This announcement so far affected Mrs. Purvis that she turned round and stared at Meldon. Taking this as an encouraging sign, he proceeded blandly:

"You will understand that your sudden appearance might unnerve the child, especially as you are not exactly what I'd call calm even now, in spite of the wet. Marjorie's not expecting to see you in the least. Her emotion on catching sight of you, the natural out-

burst of her deeply affectionate nature, would be too much for her. She'd very likely drop the illuminated address and entirely disorganise the other fairies. Now I feel sure that you'd like Marjorie to appear at her very best on an occasion of this kind. As a member of the Parents' Union, you naturally want your child to do credit to the excellent education you've given her. Therefore you won't mind waiting a few minutes until this function is over."

Mrs. Purvis glared at him in silent rage.

"I'm sorry," said Meldon, "that you're getting so wet. But that's not my fault. I wanted you to go into the stable, but you wouldn't. Why don't you put up your umbrella? It would be a great deal better to use it in the regular and natural way for keeping off rain, than to be breaking panes of glass with its handle."

A loud cheer rose from the street in front of the hotel. Meldon was almost certain that he caught Paudeen Canavan's voice at the beginning of it.

"The Marchioness of Chesterton has kissed Marjorie," he said. "Now aren't you pleased?"

There was another and a still louder cheer.

"I think," said Meldon, "that the Lord Lieutenant must be kissing her too. That will be as good to her as being presented at court. You ought to be proud of your daughter, Mrs. Purvis. I don't sup-

pose there's another girl in the whole of Australia who's been kissed by a Lord Lieutenant!"

A third cheer followed, and then a fourth. Meldon was a little puzzled.

"Either," he said, "the Lord Lieutenant is kissing the whole eight leprechauns — which is hardly likely — or else the private secretary and Father McCormack are kissing Marjorie. Perhaps, Mrs. Purvis, you and I had better be going in. I don't want the thing overdone. There's a large crowd outside, as you can judge by the cheering. It wouldn't do if they all took to kissing Marjorie. I'll just unlock the scullery door and show you the way through the hotel, and then we'll be able to see for ourselves what is actually happening."

CHAPTER XX

MELDON opened the scullery door, and Mrs. Purvis walked across the yard towards it. Her gait was dignified and stately; but the impressiveness of her approach was spoiled by the appearance of her clothes. They were wet to the point of being draggled. Meldon bowed as she passed him. She took absolutely no notice of his salutation.

"Allow me to show you the way," he said. "This hotel is old, and bits have been added on to it from time to time. The back passages are most complicated and liable to be confusing to anyone who doesn't know them intimately."

Mrs. Purvis still ignored him. She passed through the kitchen without so much as a glance at the cook, who was intent on the chops she was dishing for the Lord Lieutenant. Outside the kitchen-door Mrs. Purvis turned to the right.

"I don't wish to interfere with your freedom of action in any way," said Meldon, "but that passage leads to nothing except Mr. Doyle's bedroom. If you want to tidy your hair or put your hat straight, wouldn't it be better for you to see the housemaid? I don't mean to suggest that Mr. Doyle will grudge

you the use of his bedroom; but —— well, you can guess that his comb isn't very often washed. I shouldn't like to run it through my hair. Besides, I'm sure he won't have hairpins; and you'll want them, won't you?"

Mrs. Purvis turned without a word. She set off in a fresh direction. Meldon followed her. At the end of the passage she tried next there was a swing-door of green baize.

"That door," said Meldon, "leads into the millinery department of the shop. I'm not offering you any advice. I'm merely mentioning the fact. Perhaps you want to buy a new hat, and if so you're going to quite the right place. But I wouldn't run into that sort of extravagance if I were you. I'll explain to the Lord Lieutenant that you've had a long drive, and can't be expected to be in regular court dress. He'll understand at once."

Mrs. Purvis went back again to the kitchen. Still ignoring Meldon, she addressed the cook.

"Will you kindly show me the way into the hotel?" she said.

But the cook was in no mood for guiding strangers. The responsibility of preparing a feast for a Lord Lieutenant was weighing heavily on her. It was not a thing she had ever done before, and she had received a good deal of advice and instruction from

Meldon in the course of the morning. Her temper was seriously affected.

"Let them that brought you here bring you away again," she said.

"I assure you," said Meldon, apologetically, to the cook, "I'm most anxious to show the lady the way into the hotel, and I'm in no way responsible for her coming in here. By the way, I hope you remembered what I said to you about the egg and breadcrumbs for the chops. That's what makes them into cutlets, and it's most important. No Lord Lieutenant can be expected to sit down to an ordinary chop — not so long as he is a Lord Lieutenant. At home, of course, he often has to, like the rest of us."

"Unless the two of you is out of this by the time I have the peas dished," said the cook, "I'll fling the water they were boiled in over you. Is there nothing else you can find to do, the pair of you, only to come tormenting me this day of all days in the year?"

"I really think, Mrs. Purvis," said Meldon, "that we'd better go. I don't say that the water the cook mentions would make you any wetter than you are. It couldn't. But it would be rather humiliating to have it thrown at you. Try the steps just outside the kitchen-door. They don't look as if they led into the hotel, but they do."

Mrs. Purvis descended three stone steps and found herself in a very dark passage, floored with damp flags. She paused. She suspected that Meldon was leading her into some underground cellar, and she had no desire to find herself locked into an oubliette from which it might be very difficult to escape.

"I assure you," said Meldon, "that you're on the right track now. If you give me your word of honour not to hit me on the head with your umbrella as I pass, I'll go first and lead the way."

Mrs. Purvis declined to give the required assurance, but she ventured a little farther along the passage. At the end of it was a steep flight of narrow wooden stairs leading to another baize door. She opened this and found herself in the coffee-room of the hotel. It was littered with the cloaks, hats, and umbrellas of Marjorie's leprechauns. Mrs. Purvis, after a glance round her, opened the door and went into the hall. The Viceregal party, accompanied by Father McCormack, had gone upstairs to luncheon. The leprechauns, the dressmaker, the apprentice, and a few members of the outside public, were discussing the proceedings with great animation, The Major, his oilskins over his arm, was looking on while Mrs. Gregg and Miss Garnett unpinned Marjorie's wings and draped her in shawls.

"John!" said Mrs. Purvis.

The Major started violently at the sound of her voice.

"This is your sister, Major," said Meldon. "I told you she was here, didn't I?"

"How do you do, Margaret?" said the Major. "I'm very glad to see you. I hardly expected you'd have been here so soon."

"John, we will go home at once and take Marjorie with us. There are several things I should like to have explained to me."

"Certainly," said the Major—"certainly, Margaret. Doyle has provided a covered carriage for Marjorie's accommodation. I ordered it to come round. I think it's at the door now. You've nothing to do but get into it."

Mrs. Purvis took Marjorie sternly by the hand and led the way to the door. She was followed by Miss Garnett, who, like Agag the Amalekite in the presence of the prophet Samuel, "walked delicately," not knowing precisely what would happen next. Meldon stood grinning at the door of the coffee-room. The Major grabbed him by the lappet of his coat.

"J. J.," he said, "what have you done to Margaret?"

"I've been most polite," he said—"politer than I've been to anyone for years and years. I recollected that she was your sister, and I felt that you

weren't treating her very well. She naturally expected that you'd have gone down to the yard to shake hands with her, especially as you hadn't seen her for more than twenty years."

"I don't know exactly what form your politeness took; but it has evidently put Margaret into a pretty bad — I mean to say it has got me into an infernal mess. The least you can do now is to go back to Portsmouth Lodge with her and see the thing through."

"Certainly," said Meldon. "I accept your invitation with pleasure, unless the Lord Lieutenant has specially requested my presence at lunch. If he has, of course I must go to him. You'll understand, Major, that these Viceregal invitations are really what are called commands. The most horrible consequences might ensue if I ——"

The Major, still holding Meldon fast by the coat, towed him through the hall and out of the door. Mrs. Purvis, Miss Garnett, and Marjorie were already seated in the carriage.

"Get in, J. J.," said the Major.

Meldon obeyed him at once, and took his seat beside Miss Garnett with his back to the horses.

"Come along, Major," he said, "there's plenty of room. Marjorie will sit on her mother's knee."

The Major slammed the door of the carriage emphatically.

"Portsmouth Lodge," he said to the driver.

Mrs. Purvis put her head out of the window.

"John," she said, "I insist on your coming back with us. I shall not ——"

"Drive on," said the Major. "It's all right," he added as the carriage started. "I have my trap here. I'll be after you."

Meldon stood up and winked at the Major over Mrs. Purvis's shoulder.

"Don't wait lunch for me," said the Major. "I may find it necessary to attend the meeting in the afternoon."

Paudeen Canavan, who appeared to be enjoying himself, persuaded the damp remainder of the crowd to raise another cheer as the carriage passed along the street. Mrs. Purvis sat back in her corner.

"If we see the Major before night," said Meldon cheerfully, "I shall be surprised. Once a man acquires a taste for Lord Lieutenants, he simply can't get enough of them. That meeting he speaks of is the merest excuse. He doesn't really care whether the children of this town are ameliorated or not. What he wants is to hang about all afternoon with the Lord Lieutenant, and if possible to get Doyle or Father McCormack to introduce him to the private

secretary. The Major always was extraordinarily loyal."

Nobody took any notice of this explanation. Meldon addressed himself particularly to Miss Garnett when he next spoke.

"How did the presentation go off? I hope everything was done exactly as I arranged."

"Yes," said Miss Garnett.

"Did you all wave your pocket-handkerchiefs? Did the whole eight leprechauns clap their hands and smile at the right moment?"

"Oh, J. J., it was lovely!" said Marjorie.

"The Marchioness kissed you all right, I suppose?" said Meldon.

"Yes!" said Marjorie, "and the gentleman too."

"Please be silent, Marjorie," said Mrs. Purvis.

"Obey your mother, Marjorie," said Meldon. "You ought to do so even if it is unpleasant for you. I'm sorry you have to, for there are several things I want to ask you; but I won't ask them. I shouldn't like to lead you into temptation. I'll get Miss Garnett to tell me the rest of what I want to know some other time. I hope, Miss Garnett, that you'll be able to recollect whether anybody else kissed Marjorie. I have a strong suspicion that both Father McCormack and the private secretary did; though I don't think they had any right to. I also want to know whether

Doyle and I were missed, and whether any inquiries were made after us. As a matter of fact, Doyle was up in the hayloft, and had to stay there. He couldn't help himself. I was trying to make myself agreeable to Mrs. Purvis. I hope Doyle will explain the circumstances to his Excellency. I shouldn't like to be thought wanting in proper respect."

Miss Garnett smiled, and then turned her head hastily and looked out of the window.

"I can't tell you," said Meldon, addressing Mrs. Purvis again, "what a pleasant time we've had since Marjorie came here. She has wakened us all up. We have quite a long list of festivities ahead of us — boating parties, picnics, dances, and a paper chase. This presentation to her Excellency is only the beginning of what I may call the Ballymoy season. I hope you intend to make some stay with us. I assure you you will enjoy yourself if only the weather takes up."

The carriage reached Portsmouth Lodge at last. Meldon helped Miss Garnett to alight and lifted Marjorie out. Then he offered his hand to Mrs. Purvis.

"Please stand aside," she said.

She stepped with great dignity from the carriage and, ignoring Meldon, turned to the driver.

"You will wait," she said, "for half an hour, and then take me back to Donard. I shall catch the night mail to Dublin."

"But you must have something to eat first," said Meldon. "I'll tell Mrs. O'Halloran to get up luncheon at once. I daresay you'll see things in a rosier sort of light when you've had a slice of cold beef. I don't blame you in the least for thinking now that the only thing to do is to take Marjorie away. We're all pessimistic when we're hungry. After luncheon — I'll get as decent a one as I can out of Mrs. O'Halloran — you'll be much more inclined to stay on a bit."

"Kindly send a maid," said Mrs. Purvis to Miss Garnett, "to show me my daughter's room, and to help me in packing her clothes."

Miss Garnett, who seemed glad of an excuse for escaping from Mrs. Purvis, went to the kitchen to find Mary Garry.

"By the way," said Meldon, "if you are packing Marjorie's clothes — I wish you wouldn't; but if you insist on doing it — don't blame the Major too severely about the tear in her blue dress. It was his fault, of course; but he fully intended, acting on my advice, to get her a new one exactly the same in every respect. And another thing I ought to mention before Mary Garry comes. If you take Marjorie you'll have to take Miss Garnett too. You can see yourself that it would never do to leave the poor girl here with the Major. It would be a most equivocal position for her."

Mrs. Purvis crossed the room and rang the bell with some violence.

"I wouldn't do that, if I were you," said Meldon. "Nothing irritates Mrs. O'Halloran more. And if once you get her back up —— Ah! there you are, Mary Garry. I'm glad you've come. I was half afraid we were going to have a repetition of the scene there was over Miss Garnett's tea."

"Show me Miss Marjorie's room at once," said Mrs. Purvis.

"One moment," said Meldon. "Was the toothbrush brought in from the yacht on Saturday? If not, I'd better go and fetch it at once."

Mrs. Purvis, without waiting for Mary Garry's guidance, walked upstairs. Meldon followed her slowly. She entered the first room she came to, and slammed the door in Meldon's face.

"That's your brother's room," he said. "You can see that at a glance by the razors. But it's all right. If you like to stop there I'll give Mary Garry directions about the packing."

Mrs. Purvis came out again and stalked down the passage to the door at which Mary Garry was standing. She entered it, and again shut the door.

"You won't forget what I said about Miss Garnett," said Meldon. "I don't like to be shouting things of the sort out loud for Mary Garry to listen

to; but if you don't mind putting your ear to the keyhole for one moment I'll whisper what I want to say."

He stooped down as he spoke.

"If you don't take Miss Garnett with you," he whispered, "she'll very likely —— You know what I mean. You can see for yourself that she's very attractive. You may want that, of course. I don't say it would be a bad thing for the Major. But you ought to make up your mind to it, if you leave her here. There's no use your thinking that I'm the person. I'm not. As a matter of fact, I'm engaged already. I don't press the consideration on you, but for Marjorie's sake I can't help reminding you that there is the little property. I don't know that you can afford to neglect that. But, of course, if there was to be a Mrs. Kent — I needn't go into other possibilities. You'll think it all out for yourself while you're packing. I'll just run off now and put a dab of vaseline on Marjorie's bicycle to keep the rain from rusting it. I'll tie it on the top of the carriage for you — if you're really bent on going. Good-bye."

An hour later Marjorie bade a sorrowful and affectionate farewell to Meldon. The carriage, with Miss Garnett in it as well as Mrs. Purvis and Marjorie, drove off. Mrs. O'Halloran and Mary Garry stood weeping on the doorstep of Portsmouth Lodge.

CHAPTER XXI

AT five o'clock Major Kent returned home. He found Meldon seated before a good fire in the study, smoking quietly.

"They're gone," he said, as the Major entered. "Your sister, Marjorie, and Miss Garnett. Gone, with all their belongings."

"I saw them," said the Major. "Margaret stopped at the hotel to pick up her trunk."

"I hope you're pleased now."

"She left me to pay the car that brought her out from Donard. She'll probably expect me to pay the carriage that takes her back."

"You'll also," said Meldon, "have to pay Miss Garnett's salary and travelling expenses, and an allowance for maintenance for the six weeks she ought to have been here. But, on the whole, you're getting off cheap. You've got what you wanted, and it's always worth while paying for that. And Miss Garnett's gone without marrying you, which is more than you had any real right to expect. I had rather a job to get Mrs. Purvis to take Miss Garnett. She didn't want to a bit, and only for the way I put it to her she wouldn't have done it."

"I wish," said the Major, "that she hadn't taken Marjorie with her."

"What?"

"I'd rather she'd left Marjorie a little longer."

"Well, of all the unreasonable men I ever met, Major, you're the worst. You wouldn't rest content until you sent your sister that ridiculous telegram. You practically drive your poor little niece out of the house, just as everyone except yourself had learned to love her, and then you say you wish she was here still."

"That telegram was a mistake. I see that now. There was no real necessity for sending it."

"Why couldn't you have owned up sooner, then? If you'd told me even as late as this morning that you didn't want Marjorie to go, I'd have arranged for her to stay. I enjoyed having the child. I'd have been delighted to keep her here and to amuse her. I let her go simply because I thought you wanted to be rid of her."

"You couldn't have kept her, J. J.—you couldn't, really. Once I sent the telegram it was too late to do anything. You don't know my sister Margaret."

"I do know her. I've spent the greater part of

the day making her acquaintance, and I know her thoroughly. I could have kept the child, and I would have kept her if I hadn't thought you were dead set on getting rid of her."

"No, you couldn't," said the Major. "You'd have tried, I'm sure; but once Margaret ——"

"My dear Major, you mustn't think that every man in Ireland is afraid of your sister just because you are. Have I shown any signs of funk in dealing with her? When you hid yourself in the bar of Doyle's hotel to-day, who went out and tackled her? I did. And I kept her at bay in the yard by moral suasion and without the use of violence, until the presentation was safely over. Did I sneak out of driving home in the carriage with her? You did; but I sat opposite to her and chatted pleasantly the whole way out. It was I who induced her to take Olivia away with her, very much against her will. Your sister's not an unreasonable woman at all, Major. She's quite easy to get on with if you take her the right way. She saw my point at once, directly I drew attention to the fluffy nature of Olivia's hair. Just you give me the word, and I'll go off this minute and fetch the child back from Donard. I'll be in plenty of time. The night mail doesn't start till ten."

"Better not," said the Major. "There'd only be a row."

"There might — in fact there would be a row; but I'd get the child in the end."

"Better not. I daresay you could do it, but it's better not. Margaret would be almost certain to come back with her."

"Very well. If you don't want the child there's no more to be said. I daresay she'll have a pleasant enough time seeing the European capitals, once her mother gets over this little outburst of temper. I shouldn't be surprised if Purvis himself is quite fond of the child, and will be kind to her. Anyhow, it's a pleasant thing to reflect now that, thanks to me, she had one really happy day while she was here. There's not the least doubt that she really enjoyed presenting that address to Lady Chesterton."

"I daresay she enjoyed riding the filly, too," said the Major, "and going off to the *Spindrift* with Paudeen Canavan; but I didn't."

"She would have enjoyed those and several other things," said Meldon, "if you'd given her time. But you fussed her out of her life with police and coast-guards and governesses."

"The fact is, J. J., that I'm not the sort of man who ought to have charge of a small girl."

"You are not," said Meldon. "But there's one thing you may congratulate yourself on. You'd have made a much worse mess of it than you have if she'd been the sort of grown-up professional beauty that you led us all to expect."

THE END

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