THE REAL CHARLOTTE

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CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE kitchen at Tally Ho generally looked its best at ten o'clock in the morning. Its best is, in this case, a relative term, implying the temporary concealment of the plates, loaves of bread, dirty rubbers, and jam-pots full of congealed dripping that usually adorned the tables, and the sweeping of out-lying potato-skins and cinders into a chasm beneath the disused hot hearth. When these things had been done, and Bid Sal and her bare feet had been effaced into some outer purlieu, Norry felt that she was ready to receive the Queen of England if necessary, and awaited the ordering of dinner with her dress let down to its full length, a passably clean apron, and an expression of severe and exalted resignation. On the morning

now in question Charlotte was standing in her usual position, with her back to the fire and her hands spread behind her to the warmth, scanning with a general's eye the routed remnants of yesterday's dinner, and debating with herself as to the banner under which they should next be rallied.

"A curry I think, Norry," she called out; "plenty of onions and apples in it, and that's all ye want."

"Oh, musha! God knows ye have her sickened with yer curries," replied Norry's voice from the larder, "'twas ere yestherday ye had the remains of th' Irish stew in curry, an' she didn't ate what'd blind your eye of it. Wasn't Louisa tellin' me!"

"And so I'm to order me dinners to please Miss Francie!" said Charlotte, in tones of surprising toleration; "well, ye can make a haricot of it if ye like. Perhaps her ladyship will eat that."

"Faith 'tis aiqual to me what she ates—" here came a clatter of crockery, and a cat shot like a comet from the larder door, followed by Norry's foot and Norry's blasphemy—"or if she never ate another bit. And where's the carrots to make a haricot? Bid Sal's afther tellin' me there's ne'er a one in the garden; but sure, if ye sent Bid Sal to look for salt wather in the say she wouldn't find it!"

Miss Mullen laughed approvingly. "There's carrots in plenty; and see here, Norry, you might give her a jam dumpling—use the gooseberry jam that's going bad. I've noticed meself that the child isn't eating, and it won't do to have the people saying we're starving her."

"Whoever'll say that, he wasn't looking at me yestherday, and I makin' the cake for herself and Misther Dysart! Eight eggs, an' a cupful of sugar and a cupful of butther, and God knows what more went in it, an' the half of me day gone bating it, and afther all they left it afther thim!"

"And whose fault was that but your own for not sending it up in time?" rejoined Charlotte, her voice sharpening at once to vociferative argument; "Miss Francie told me that Mr. Dysart was forced to go without his tea."

"Late or early I'm thinkin' thim didn't ax it nor want it," replied Norry, issuing from the larder with a basketful of crumpled linen in her arms, and a visage of the utmost sourness; "there's your clothes for ye now, that was waitin' on me yestherday to iron them, in place of makin' cakes."

She got a bowl of water and began to sprinkle the clothes and roll them up tightly, preparatory to iron-

ing them, her ill-temper imparting to the process the air of whipping a legion of children and putting them to bed. Charlotte came over to the table and, resting her hands on it, watched Norry for a few seconds in silence.

"What makes you say they didn't want anything to eat?" she asked; "was Miss Francie ill, or was anything the matter with her?"

"How do I know what ailed her?" replied Norry, pounding a pillow-case with her fist before putting it away; "I have somethin' to do besides follyin' her or mindin' her."

"Then what are ye talking about?"

"Ye'd betther ax thim that knows. 'Twas Louisa seen her within in the dhrawn'-room, an' whatever was on her she was cryin'; but, sure, Louisa tells lies as fast as a pig'd gallop."

"What did she say?" Charlotte darted the question at Norry as a dog snaps at a piece of meat.

"Then she said plinty, an' 'tis she that's able. If ye told that one a thing and locked the doore on her the way she couldn't tell it agin, she'd bawl it up the chimbley."

"Where's Louisa?" interrupted Charlotte impatiently.

"Meself can tell ye as good as Louisa," said Norry instantly taking offence; "she landed into the dhrawn-room with the tay, and there was Miss Francie sittin' on the sofa and her handkerchief in her eyes, and Misther Dysart beyond in the windy and not a word nor a stir out of him, only with his eyes shtuck out in the garden, an' she cryin' always."

"Psha! Louisa's a fool! How does she know Miss Francie was cryin'? I'll bet a shillin' 'twas only blowing her nose she was."

Norry had by this time spread a ragged blanket on the table, and, snatching up the tongs, she picked out of the heart of the fire a red-hot heater and thrust it into a box-iron with unnecessary violence.

"An' why wouldn't she cry? Wasn't I listenin' to her cryin' in her room lasht night an' I goin' up to bed?" She banged the iron down on the table and began to rub it to and fro on the blanket. "But what use is it to cry, even if ye dhragged the hair out of yer head? Ye might as well be singin' an' dancin'."

She flung up her head, and stared across the kitchen under the wisps of hair that hung over her unseeing eyes with such an expression as Deborah the Prophetess might have worn. Charlotte gave a grunt of contempt, and picking Susan up from the bar of the

table, she put him on her shoulder and walked out of the kitchen.

Francie had been since breakfast sitting by the window of the dining-room, engaged in the cheerless task of darning a stocking on a soda-water bottle. Mending stockings was not an art that she excelled in; she could trim a hat or cut out a dress, but the dark, unremunerative toil of mending stockings was as distasteful to her as stone-breaking to a tramp, and the simile might easily be carried out by comparing the results of the process to macadamising. It was a still, foggy morning; the boughs of the scarlet-blossomed fuchsia were greyed with moisture, and shining drops studded the sash of the open window like sea-anemones. It was a day that was both close and chilly, and intolerable as the atmosphere of the Tally Ho dining-room would have been with the window shut, the breakfast things still on the table, and the all-pervading aroma of cats, the damp, lifeless air seemed only a shade better to Francie as she raised her tired eyes from time to time and looked out upon the discouraging prospect. Everything stood in the same trance of stillness in which it had been when she had got up at five o'clock and looked out at the sluggish dawn broadening in blank silence upon the fields.

She had leaned out of her window till she had become cold through and through, and after that had unlocked her trunk, taken out Hawkins' letters, and going back to bed had read and re-read them there. The old glamour was about them ; the convincing sincerity and assurance that was as certain of her devotion as of his own, and the unfettered lavishness of expression that made her turn hot and cold as she read them. She had time to go through many phases of feeling before the chapel-bell began to ring for eight o'clock matins, and she stole down to the kitchen to see if the post had come in. The letters were lying on the table ; three or four for Charlotte, the local paper, a circular about peat litter addressed to the Stud-groom, Tally Ho, and, underneath all, the thick, rough envelope with the ugly boyish writing that had hardly changed since Mr. Hawkins had written his first letters home from Cheltenham College. Francie caught it up, and was back in her own room in the twinkling of an eye. It contained only a few words.

" Dearest Francie, only time for a line to-day to say that I am staying on here for another week, but I hope ten days will see me back at the old mill. I want you like a good girl to keep things as dark as possible. I don't see my way out of this game yet.

No more to-day. Just off to play golf, the girls here are nailers at it. Thine ever, Gerald."

This was the ration that had been served out to her hungry heart, the word that she had wearied for for a week; that once more he had contrived to postpone his return, and that the promise he had made to her under the tree in the garden was as far from being fulfilled as ever. Christopher Dysart would not have treated her this way, she thought to herself as she stooped over her darning and bit her lip to keep it from quivering, but then she would not have minded much whether he wrote to her or not—that was the worst of it. Francie had always confidently announced to her Dublin circle of friends her intention of marrying a rich man, good-looking, and a lord if possible, but certainly rich. But here she was, on the morning after what had been a proposal, or what had amounted to one, from a rich young man who was also nice-looking, and almost the next thing to a lord, and instead of sitting down triumphantly to write the letter that should thrill the North Side down to its very grocers' shops, she was darning stockings, red-eyed and dejected, and pondering over how best to keep from her cousin any glimmering of what had happened. All her old self-posed and struck attitudes

before the well-imagined mirror of her friends' minds, and the vanity that was flattered by success cried out petulantly against the newer soul that enforced silence upon it. She felt quite impartially how unfortunate it was that she should have given her heart to Gerald in this irrecoverable way, and then with a headlong charge of ideas she said to herself that there was no one like him, and she would always, *always* care for him and nobody else.

This point having been emphasised by a tug at her needle that snapped the darning cotton, Miss Fitzpatrick was embarking upon a more pleasurable train of possibilities when she heard Charlotte's foot in the hall, and fell all of a sudden down to the level of the present. Charlotte came in and shut the door with her usual decisive slam; she went over to the sideboard and locked up the sugar and jam with a sharp glance to see if Louisa had tampered with either, and then sat down at her davenport near Francie and began to look over her account books.

"Well, I declare," she said after a minute or two, "it's a funny thing that I have to buy eggs, with my yard full of hens! This is a state of things unheard of till you came into the house, my young lady!"

Francie looked up and saw that this was meant as a pleasantry.

"Is it me? I wouldn't touch an egg to save my life!"

"Maybe you wouldn't," replied Charlotte with the same excessive jocularity, "but you can give tea-parties, and treat your friends to sponge-cakes that are made with nothing but eggs!"

Francie scented danger in the air, and having laughed nervously to show appreciation of the jest, tried to change the conversation.

"How do you feel to-day, Charlotte?" she asked, working away at her stocking with righteous industry; "is your headache gone? I forgot to ask after it at breakfast."

"Headache? I'd forgotten I'd ever had one. Three tabloids of antipyrin and a good night's rest; that was all *I* wanted to put me on my pegs again. But if it comes to that, me dear child, I'd trouble you to tell me what makes you the colour of blay calico last night and this morning? It certainly wasn't all the cake you had at afternoon tea. I declare I was quite vexed when I saw that lovely cake in the larder, and not a bit gone from it."

Francie coloured. "I was up very early yesterday making that cross, and I daresay that tired me.

Tell me, did Mr. Lambert say anything about it? Did he like it?"

Charlotte looked at her, but could discern no special expression in the piquant profile that was silhouetted against the light.

"He had other things to think of besides your wreath," she said coarsely; "when a man's wife isn't cold in her coffin, he has something to think of besides young ladies' wreaths!"

There was silence after this, and Francie wondered what had made Charlotte suddenly get so cross for nothing; she had been so good-natured for the last week. The thought passed through her mind that possibly Mr. Lambert had taken as little notice of Charlotte as of the wreath; she was just sufficiently aware of the state of affairs to know that such a cause might have such an effect, and she wished she had tried any other topic of conversation. Darning is, however, an occupation that does not tend to unloose the strings of the tongue, and even when carried out according to the unexacting methods of Macadam, it demands a certain degree of concentration, and Francie left to Charlotte the task of finding a more congenial subject. It was chosen with unexpected directness.

"What was the matter with you yesterday afternoon when Louisa brought in the tea?"

Francie felt as though a pistol had been let off at her ear; the blood surged in a great wave from her heart to her head, her heart gave a shattering thump against her side, and then went on beating again in a way that made her hands shake.

"Yesterday afternoon, Charlotte?" she said, while her brain sought madly for a means of escape and found none; "there—there was nothing the matter with me."

"Look here now, Francie;" Charlotte turned away from her davenport, and faced her cousin with her fists clenched on her knees; "I'm in *loco parentis* to you for the time being—your guardian, if you understand that better—and there's no good in your beating about the bush with me. What happened between you and Christopher Dysart yesterday afternoon?"

"Nothing happened at all," said Francie in a voice that gave the lie to her words.

"You're telling me a falsehood! How have you the face to tell me there was nothing happened when even that fool Louisa could see that something had been going on to make you cry, and to send him

packing out of the house not a quarter of an hour after he came into it!"

"I told you before he couldn't wait," said Francie, trying to keep the tremble out of her voice. She held the conventional belief that Charlotte was queer, but very kind and jolly, but she had a fear of her that she could hardly have given a reason for. It must have been by that measuring and crossing of weapons that takes place unwittingly and yet surely in the consciousness of everyone who lives in intimate connection with another, that she had learned, like her great-aunt before her, the weight of the real Charlotte's will, and the terror of her personality.

"Stuff and nonsense!" broke out Miss Mullen, her eyes beginning to sparkle ominously; "thank God I'm not such an ass as the people you've taken in before now, ye'll not find it so easy to make a fool of me as ye think! Did he make ye an offer or did he not?" She leaned forward with her mouth half open, and Francie felt her breath strike on her face, and shrank back.

"He—he did not."

Charlotte dragged her chair a pace nearer so that her knees touched Francie.

"Ye needn't tell me any lies, miss; if he didn't pro-

pose he said something that was equivalent to a proposal. Isn't that the case?"

Francie had withdrawn herself as far into the corner of the window as was possible, and the dark folds of the maroon rep curtain made a not unworthy background for her fairness. Her head was turned childishly over her shoulder in the attempt to get as far as she could from her tormentor, and her eyes travelled desperately and yet unconsciously over the dingy lines of the curtain.

"I told you already, Charlotte, that he didn't propose to me," she answered; "he just paid a visit here like anyone else, and then he had to go away early."

"Don't talk such baldherdash to me! I know what he comes here for as well as you do, and as well as every soul in Lismoyle knows it, and I'll trouble ye to answer one question—do ye mean to marry him?" She paused, and gave the slight and shapely arm a compelling squeeze.

Francie wrenched her arm away. "No, I don't!" she said, sitting up and facing Charlotte with eyes that had a dawning light of battle in them.

Charlotte pushed back her chair, and with the same action was on her feet.

"Oh, my God!" she bawled, flinging up both her

arms with the fists clenched ; " d'ye hear that? She dares to tell me that to me face after all I've done for her ! " Her hands dropped down, and she stared at Francie with her thick lips working in a dumb transport of rage. " And who are ye waiting for? Will ye tell me that ! You, that aren't fit to lick the dirt off Christopher Dysart's boots ! " she went on, with the uncontrolled sound in her voice that told that rage was bringing her to the verge of tears ; " for the Prince of Wales' son, I suppose ? Or are ye cherishing hopes that your friend Mr. Hawkins would condescend to take a fancy to you again ? " She laughed repulsively, waiting with a heaving chest for the reply, and Francie felt as if the knife had been turned in the wound.

" Leave me alone ! What is it to you who I marry ? " she cried passionately ; " I'll marry who I like, and no thanks to you ! "

" Oh, indeed," said Charlotte, breathing hard and loud between the words ; " it's nothing to me, I suppose, that I've kept the roof over your head and put the bit into your mouth, while ye're carrying on with every man that ye can get to look at ye ! "

" I'm not asking you to keep me," said Francie, start-

ing up in her turn and standing in the window facing her cousin; "I'm able to keep myself, and to wait as long as I choose till I get married; *I*'m not afraid of being an old maid!"

They glared at each other, the fire of anger smiting on both their faces, lighting Francie's cheek with a malign brilliance, and burning in ugly purple-red on Charlotte's leathery skin. The girl's aggressive beauty was to Charlotte a keener taunt than the rudimentary insult of her words; it brought with it a swarm of thoughts that buzzed and stung in her soul like poisonous flies.

"And might one be permitted to ask how long you're going to wait?" she said, with quivering lips drawn back; "will six months be enough for you, or do you consider the orthodox widower's year too long to wait? I daresay you'll have found out what spending there is in twenty-five pounds before that, and ye'll go whimpering to Roddy Lambert, and asking him to make ye Number Two, and to pay your debts and patch up your character!"

"Roddy Lambert!" cried Francie, bursting out into shrill unpleasant laughter; "I think I'll try and do better than that, thank ye, though you're so kind in making him a present to me!" then,

firing a random shot; "I'll not deprive you of him, Charlotte, you may keep him all to yourself!"

It is quite within the bounds of possibility that Charlotte might at this juncture have struck Francie, and thereby have put herself for ever into a false position, but her guardian angel, in the shape of Susan, the grey tom-cat, intervened. He had jumped in at the window during the discussion, and having rubbed himself unnoticed against Charlotte's legs with stiff, twitching tail, and cold eyes fixed on her face, he, at this critical instant, sprang upwards at her, and clawed on to the bosom of her dress, hanging there in expectation of the hand that should help him to the accustomed perch on his mistress's shoulder. The blow that was so near being Francie's descended upon the cat's broad confident face and hurled him to the ground. He bolted out of the window again, and when he was safely on the gravel walk, turned and looked back with an expression of human anger and astonishment.

When Charlotte spoke her voice was caught away from her as Christopher Dysart's had been the day before. All the passions have but one instrument to play on when they wish to make themselves heard,

and it will yield but a broken sound when it is too hardly pressed.

"Dare to open your mouth to me again, and I'll throw you out of the window after the cat!" was what she said in that choking whisper. "Ye can go out of this house to-morrow and see which of your lovers will keep ye the longest, and by the time that they're tired of ye, maybe ye'll regret that your impudence got ye turned out of a respectable house!" She turned at the last word, and, like a madman who is just sane enough to fear his own madness, flung out of the room without another glance at her cousin.

Susan sat on the gravel path, and in the intervals of licking his paws in every crevice and cranny, surveyed his mistress's guest with a stony watchfulness as she leaned her head against the window-sash and shook in a paroxysm of sobs.

CHAPTER XXXV.

MORE than the half of September had gone by. A gale or two had browned the woods, and the sky was beginning to show through the trees a good deal. Miss Greely removed the sun-burned straw hats from her window, and people lighted their fires at afternoon tea-time, and daily said to each other, with sapient gloom, that the evenings were closing in very much. The summer visitors had gone, and the proprietors of lodgings had moved down from the attics to the front parlours, and were restoring to them their usual odour of old clothes, sour bread, and apples. All the Dysarts, with the exception of Sir Benjamin, were away; the Bakers had gone to drink the waters at Lisdoonvarna; the Beatties were having their yearly outing at the Sea Road in Galway; the Archdeacon had exchanged duties with an English cleric, who was married, middle-aged, and altogether unadvantageous, and Miss Mullen played the

organ, and screamed the highest and most ornate tunes, in company with the attenuated choir.

The barracks kept up an outward seeming of life and cheerfulness, imparted by the adventitious aid of red coats and bugle-blowing, but their gaiety was superficial, and even upon Cursiter, steam-launching to nowhere in particular and back again, had begun to pall. He looked forward to his subaltern's return with an eagerness quite out of proportion to Mr. Hawkins' gifts of conversation or companionship; solitude and steam-launching were all very well in moderation, but he could not get the steam-launch in after dinner to smoke a pipe, and solitude tended to unsettling reflections on the vanity of his present walk of life. Hawkins, when he came, was certainly a variant in the monotony, but Cursiter presently discovered that he would have to add to the task of amusing himself the still more arduous one of amusing his companion. Hawkins dawdled, moped, and grumbled, and either spent the evenings in moody silence, or in endless harangues on the stone-broken nature of his finances, and the contrariety of things in general. He admitted his engagement to Miss Coppard with about as ill a grace as was possible, and when rallied about it, became sulky and snappish,

but of Francie he never spoke, and Cursiter augured no good from these indications. Captain Cursiter knew as little as the rest of Lismoyle as to the reasons of Miss Fitzpatrick's abrupt disappearance from Tally Ho, but, unlike the generality of Francie's acquaintances, had accepted the fact unquestioningly, and with a simple gratitude to Providence for its interposition in the matter. If only partridge-shooting did not begin in Ireland three weeks later than in any civilised country, thought this much harassed child's guide, it would give them both something better to do than loafing about the lake in the *Serpolette.* Well, anyhow, the 20th was only three days off now, and Dysart had given them leave to shoot as much as they liked over Bruff, and, thank the Lord, Hawkins was fond of shooting, and there would be no more of this talk of running up to Dublin for two or three days to have his teeth overhauled, or to get a new saddle, or some nonsense of that kind. Neither Captain Cursiter nor Mr. Hawkins paid visits to anyone at this time; in fact, were never seen except when, attired in all his glory, one or the other took the soldiers to church, and marched them back again with as little delay as possible; so that the remnant of Lismoyle society pronounced them to

have become very stuck-up and unsociable, and mourned for the days of the Tipperary Foragers.

It was on the first day of the partridge shooting that Mr. Lambert came back to Rosemount. The far-away banging of the guns down on the farms by the lake was the first thing he heard as he drove up from the station; and the thought that occurred to him as he turned in at his own gate was that public opinion would scarcely allow him to shoot this season. He had gone away as soon after his wife's funeral as was practicable, and having honeymooned with his grief in the approved fashion (combining with this observance the settling of business matters with his wife's trustees in Limerick), the stress of his new position might be supposed to be relaxed. He was perfectly aware that the neighbourhood would demand no extravagance of sorrow from him; no one could expect him to be more than decently regretful for poor Lucy. He had always been a kind husband to her, he reflected, with excusable satisfaction; that is to say, he had praised her housekeeping, and generally bought her whatever she asked for, out of her own money. He was glad now that he had had the good sense to marry her; it had made her very happy, poor thing, and he was certainly now in a

better position than he could ever have hoped to be if he had not done so. All these soothing and comfortable facts, however, did not prevent his finding the dining-room very dreary and silent when he came downstairs next morning in his new black clothes. His tea tasted as if the water had not been boiled, and the urn got in his way when he tried to prop up the newspaper in his accustomed manner; the bacon dish had been so much more convenient, and the knowledge that his wife was there, ready to receive gratefully any crumb of news that he might feel disposed to let fall, had given a zest to the reading of his paper that was absent now. Even Muffy's basket was empty, for Muffy, since his mistress's death, had relinquished all pretence at gentility, and, after a day of miserable wandering about the house, had entered into a league with the cook and residence in the kitchen.

Lambert surveyed all his surroundings with a loneliness that surprised himself: the egg-cosy that his wife had crocheted for him, the half empty medicine bottle on the chimney-piece, the chair in which she used to sit, and felt that he did not look forward to the task before him of sorting her papers and going through her affairs generally. He got to

work at eleven o'clock, taking first the letters and papers that were locked up in a work-table, a walnut-topped and silken-fluted piece of furniture that had been given to Mrs. Lambert by a Limerick friend, and, having been considered too handsome for every-day use, had been consecrated by her to the conservation of letters and of certain valued designs for Berlin wool work and receipts for crochet stitches. Lambert lighted a fire in the drawing-room, and worked his way down through the contents of the green silk pouch, finding there every letter, every note, even, that he had ever written to his wife, and committing them to the flames with a curious sentimental regret. He had not remembered that he had written her so many letters, and he said to himself that he wished those old devils of women in Lismoyle, who, he knew, had always been so keen to pity Lucy, could know what a good husband he had been to her. Inside the envelope of one of his own letters was one from Francie Fitzpatrick, evidently accidentally thrust there ; a few crooked lines to say that she had got the lodgings for Mrs. Lambert in Charles St., but the landlady wouldn't be satisfied without she got two and sixpence extra for the kitchen fire. Lambert put the note into his pocket, where there was already another

document in the same handwriting, bearing the Bray postmark with the date of September 18, and when all was finished, and the grate full of flaky spectral black heaps, he went upstairs and unlocked the door of what had been his wife's room. The shutters were shut, and the air of the room had a fortnight's closeness in it. When he opened the shutters there was a furious buzzing of flies, and although he had the indifference about fresh air common to his class, he flung up the window, and drew a long breath of the brilliant morning before he went back to his dismal work of sorting and destroying. What was he to do with such things as the old photographs of her father and mother, her work-basket, her salts-bottle, the handbag that she used to carry into Lismoyle with her? He was not an imaginative man, but he was touched by the smallness, the familiarity of these only relics of a trivial life, and he stood and regarded the sheeted furniture, and the hundred odds and ends that lay about the room, with an acute awakening to her absence that, for the time, almost obliterated his own figure, posing to the world as an interesting young man, who, while anxious to observe the decencies of bereavement, could not be expected to be inconsolable for a woman so obviously beneath his level.

A voice downstairs called his name, a woman's voice, saying, "Roderick!" and for a moment a superstitious thrill ran through him. Then he heard a footstep in the passage, and the voice called him again, "Are you there, Roderick?"

This time he recognised Charlotte Mullen's voice, and went out on to the landing to meet her. The first thing that he noticed was that she was dressed in new clothes, black and glossy and well made. He took them in with the glance that had to be responsive as well as observant, as Charlotte advanced upon him, and, taking his hand in both hers, shook it long and silently.

"Well, Roderick," she said at length, "I'm glad to see you back again, though it's a sad home-coming for you and for us all."

Lambert pressed her large well-known hand, while his eyes rested solemnly upon her face. "Thank you, Charlotte, I'm very much obliged to you for coming over to see me this way, but it's no more than what I'd have expected of you."

He had an ancient confidence in Charlotte and an ease in her society—after all, there are very few men who will not find some saving grace in a woman whose affections they believe to be given to them—

and he was truly glad to see her at this juncture. She was exactly the person that he wanted to help him in the direful task that he had yet to perform; her capable hands should undertake all the necessary ransacking of boxes and wardrobes, while he sat and looked on at what was really much more a woman's work than a man's. These thoughts passed through his mind while he and Charlotte exchanged conventionalities suitable to the occasion, and spoke of Mrs. Lambert as "she," without mentioning her name.

"Would you like to come downstairs, Charlotte, and sit in the drawing-room?" he said, presently; "if it wasn't that I'm afraid you might be tired after your walk, I'd ask you to help me with a very painful bit of work that I was just at when you came."

They had been standing in the passage, and Charlotte's eyes darted towards the half-open door of Mrs. Lambert's room.

"You're settling her things, I suppose?" she said, her voice treading eagerly upon the heels of his; "is it *that* you want me to help you with?"

He led the way into the room without answering, and indicated its contents with a comprehensive sweep of his hand.

"I turned the key in this door myself when I came

back from the funeral, and not a thing in it has been touched since. Now I must set to work to try and get the things sorted, to see what I should give away, and what I should keep, and what should be destroyed," he said, his voice resuming its usual business tone, tinged with just enough gloom to mark his sense of the situation.

Charlotte peeled off her black gloves and stuffed them into her pocket. "Sit down, my poor fellow, sit down, and I'll do it all," she said, stripping an arm-chair of its sheet and dragging it to the window; "this is no fit work for you."

There was no need to press this view upon Lambert; he dropped easily into the chair provided for him, and in a couple of minutes the work was under weigh.

"Light your pipe now and be comfortable," said Charlotte, issuing from the wardrobe with an armful of clothes and laying them on the bed; "there's work here for the rest of the morning." She took up a black satin skirt and held it out in front of her; it had been Mrs. Lambert's "Sunday best," and it seemed to Lambert as though he could hear his wife's voice asking anxiously if he thought the day was fine enough for her to wear it. "Now what would you wish done with

this ?" said Charlotte, looking at it fondly, and holding the band against her own waist to see the length. "It's too good to give to a servant."

Lambert turned his head away. There was a crudeness about this way of dealing that was a little jarring at first.

"I don't know what's to be done with it," he said, with all a man's helpless dislike of such details.

"Well, there's this, and her sealskin, and a lot of other things that are too good to be given to servants," went on Charlotte, rapidly bringing forth more of the treasures of the poor turkey-hen's wardrobe, and proceeding to sort them into two heaps on the floor. "What would you think of making up the best of the things and sending them up to one of those dealers in Dublin? It's a sin to let them go to loss."

"Oh, damn it, Charlotte! I can't sell her clothes!" said Lambert hastily. He pretended to no sentiment about his wife, but some masculine instinct of chivalry gave him a shock at the thought of making money out of the conventional sanctities of a woman's apparel.

"Well, what else do you propose to do with them?" said Charlotte, who had already got out a pencil and paper and was making a list.

'Upon my soul, I don't know," said Lambert, beginning to realise that there was but one way out of the difficulty, and perceiving with irritated amusement that Charlotte had driven him towards it like a sheep, "unless you'd like them yourself?"

"And do you think I'd accept them from you?" demanded Charlotte, with an indignation so vivid that even the friend of her youth was momentarily deceived and almost frightened by it; "I, that was poor Lucy's oldest friend! Do you think I could bear—"

Lambert saw the opportunity that had been made for him.

"It's only because you were her oldest friend that I'd offer them to you," he struck in; "and if you won't have them yourself, I thought you might know of someone that would."

Charlotte swallowed her wrath with a magnanimous effort. "Well, Roddy, if you put it in that way, I don't like to refuse," she said, wiping a ready tear away with a black-edged pocket handkerchief; "it's quite true, I know plenty would be glad of a help. There's that unfortunate Letitia Fitzpatrick, that I'll be bound hasn't more than two gowns to her back, I might send her a bundle."

"Send them to who you like," said Lambert, ignoring the topic of the Fitzpatricks as intentionally as it had been introduced; "but I'd be glad if you could find some things for Julia Duffy; I suppose she'll be coming out of the Infirmary soon. What we're to do about that business I don't know," he continued, filling another pipe. "Dysart said he wouldn't have her put out if she could hold on there anyway at all—"

"Heavenly powers!" exclaimed Charlotte, letting fall a collection of rolled up kid gloves, "d'ye mean to say you didn't hear she's in the Ballinasloe Asylum? She was sent there three days ago."

"Great Scott! Is she gone mad? I was thinking all this time what I was to do with her!"

"Well, you needn't trouble your head about her any more. Her wits went as her body mended, and a board of J.P.'s and M.D.'s sat upon her, and as one of them was old Fatty Ffolliott, you won't be surprised to hear that that was the end of Julia Duffy."

Both laughed, and both felt suddenly the incongruity of laughter in that room. Charlotte went back to the chest of drawers whose contents she was ransacking, and continued:

"They say she sits all day counting her fingers and toes and calling them chickens and turkeys, and saying that she has the key of Gurthnamuckla in her pocket, and not a one can get into it without her leave."

"And are you still on for it?" said Lambert, half reluctantly, as it seemed to Charlotte's acute ear, "for if you are, now's your time. I might have put her out of it two years ago for non-payment of rent, and I'll just take possession and sell off what she has left behind her towards the arrears."

"On for it? Of course I am. You might know I'm not one to change my mind about a thing I'm set upon. But you'll have to let me down easy with the fine, Roddy. There isn't much left in the stocking these times, and one or two of my poor little dabblings in the money-market have rather 'gone agin me.'"

Lambert thought in a moment of those hundreds that had been lent to him, and stirred uneasily in his chair. "By the way Charlotte," he said, trying to speak like a man to whom such things were trifles, "about that money you lent me—I'm afraid I can't let you have it back for a couple of months or so. Of course, I needn't tell you, poor Lucy's money was

only settled on me for my life, and now there's some infernal delay before they can hand even the interest over to me; but, if you don't mind waiting a bit, I can make it all square for you about the farm I know."

He inwardly used a stronger word than infernal as he reflected that if Charlotte had not got that promise about the farm out of him when he was in a hole about money, he might have been able, somehow, to get it himself now.

"Don't mention that—don't mention that," said Charlotte, absolutely blushing a little, "it was a pleasure to me to lend it to you, Roddy; if I never saw it again I'd rather that than that you should put yourself out to pay me before it was convenient to you." She caught up a dress and shook its folds out with unnecessary vehemence. "I won't be done all night if I delay this way. Ah! how well I remember this dress! Poor dear Lucy got it for Fanny Waller's wedding. Who'd ever think she'd have kept it for all those years! Roddy, what stock would you put on Gurthnamuckla?"

"Dry stock," answered Lambert briefly.

"And how about the young horses? You don't forget the plan we had about them? You don't mean to give it up I hope?"

"Oh, that's as you please," replied Lambert. He was very much interested in the project, but he had no intention of letting Charlotte think so.

She looked at him, reading his thoughts more clearly than he would have liked, and they made her the more resolved upon her own line of action. She saw herself settled at Gurthnamuckla, with Roddy riding over three or four times a week to see his young horses, that should graze her grass and fill her renovated stables, while she, the bland lady of the manor, should show what a really intelligent woman could do at the head of affairs; and the three hundred pound debt should never be spoken of, but should remain, like a brake, in readiness to descend and grip at the discretion of the driver. There was no fear of his paying it of his own accord. He was not the man she took him for if he paid a debt without due provocation; he had a fine crop of them to be settled as it was, and that would take the edge off his punctilious scruples with regard to keeping her out of her money.

The different heaps on the floor increased materially while these reflections passed through Miss Mullen's brain. It was characteristic of her that a distinct section of it had never ceased from apprais-

ing and apportioning dresses, dolmans and bonnets, with a nice regard to the rival claims of herself, Eliza Hackett the cook, and the rest of the establishment, and still deeper in its busy convolutions—though this simile is probably unscientific—lurked and grew the consciousness that Francie's name had not yet been mentioned. The wardrobe was cleared at last, a scarlet flannel dressing-gown topping the heap that was destined for Tally Ho, and Charlotte had already settled the question as to whether she should bestow her old one upon Norry or make it into a bed for a cat. Lambert finished his second pipe, and stretching himself, yawned drearily, as though, which was indeed the case, the solemnity of the occasion had worn off and its tediousness had become pronounced. He looked at his watch.

"Half-past twelve, by Jove! Look here, Charlotte, let's come down and have a glass of sherry."

Charlotte got up from her knees with alacrity, though the tone in which she accepted the invitation was fittingly lugubrious. She was just as glad to leave something unfinished for the afternoon, and there was something very intimate and confidential about a friendly glass of sherry in the middle of a joint day's work. It was not until Lambert had

helped himself a second time from the decanter of brown sherry that Miss Mullen saw her opportunity to approach a subject that was becoming conspicuous by its absence. She had seated herself, not without consciousness, in what had been Mrs. Lambert's chair; she was feeling happier than she had been since the time when Lambert was a lanky young clerk in her father's office, with a precocious moustache and an affectionately free-and-easy manner, before Rosemount had been built, or Lucy Galvin thought of. She could think of Lucy now without resentment, even with equanimity, and that last interview, when her friend had died on the very spot where the sunlight was now resting at her feet, recurred to her without any unpleasantness. She had fought a losing battle against fate all her life, and she could not be expected to regret having accepted its first overture of friendship, any more than she need be expected to refuse another half glass of that excellent brown sherry that Lambert had just poured out for her. "Charlotte could take her whack," he was wont to say to their mutual friends in that tone of humorous appreciation that is used in connection with a gentlemanlike capacity for liquor.

"Well, how are you all getting on at Tally Ho?"

he said presently, and not all the self-confidence induced by the sherry could make his voice as easy as he wished it to be; "I hear you've lost your young lady?"

Charlotte was provoked to feel the blood mount slowly to her face and remain like a hot straddle across her cheeks and nose.

"Oh yes," she said carelessly, inwardly cursing the strength of Lambert's liquor, "she took herself off in a huff, and I only hope she's not repenting of it now."

"What was the row about? Did you smack her for pulling the cats' tails?" Lambert had risen from the table and was trimming his nails with a pocket-knife, but out of the tail of his eye he was observing his visitor very closely.

"I gave her some good advice, and I got the usual amount of gratitude for it," said Charlotte, in the voice of a person who has been deeply wounded, but is not going to make a fuss about it. She had no idea how much Lambert knew, but she had, at all events, one line of defence that was obvious and secure.

Lambert, as it happened, knew nothing except that there had been what the letter in his pocket described as "a real awful row," and his mordant

curiosity forced him to the question that he knew Charlotte was longing for him to ask.

"What did you give her advice about?"

"I may have been wrong," replied Miss Mullen, with the liberality that implies the certainty of having been right, "but when I found that she was carrying on with that good-for-nothing Hawkins, I thought it my duty to give her my opinion, and upon me word, as long as he's here she's well out of the place."

"How did you find out she was carrying on with Hawkins?" asked Lambert, with a hoarseness in his voice that belied its indifference.

"I knew that they were corresponding, and when I taxed her with carrying on with him she didn't attempt to deny it, and told me up to my face that she could mind her own affairs without my interference. 'Very well, miss,' says I, 'you'll march out of my house!' and off she took herself next morning, and has never had the decency to send me a line since."

"Is she in Dublin now?" asked Lambert with the carelessness that was so much more remarkable than an avowed interest.

"No; she's with those starving rats of Fitzpatricks; they were glad enough to get hold of her to squeeze

what they could out of her twenty-five pounds a year, and I wish them joy of their bargain!"

Charlotte pushed back her chair violently, and her hot face looked its ugliest as some of the hidden hatred showed itself. But Lambert felt that she did well to be angry. In the greater affairs of life he believed in Charlotte, and he admitted to himself that she had done especially well in sending Francie to Bray.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE house that the Fitzpatricks had taken in Bray for the winter was not situated in what is known as the fashionable part of the town. It commanded no view either of the Esplanade or of Bray Head; it had, in fact, little view of any kind except the backs of other people's houses, and an oblique glimpse of a railway bridge at the end of the road. It was just saved from the artisan level by a tiny bow window on either side of the hall door, and the name, Albatross Villa, painted on the gate posts; and its crowning claim to distinction was the fact that by standing just outside the gate it was possible to descry, under the railway bridge, a small square of esplanade and sea that was Mrs. Fitzpatrick's justification when she said gallantly to her Dublin friends that she'd never have come to Bray for the winter only for being able to look out at the waves all day long.

Poor Mrs. Fitzpatrick did not tell her friends that

she had, nowadays, things to occupy herself with that scarcely left her time for taking full advantage of this privilege. From the hour of the awakening of her brood to that midnight moment when, with fingers roughened and face flushed from the darning of stockings, she toiled up to bed, she was scarcely conscious that the sea existed, except when Dottie came in with her boots worn into holes by the pebbles of the beach, or Georgie's Sunday trousers were found to be smeared with tar from riding astride the upturned boats. There were no longer for her the afternoon naps that were so pleasantly composing after four o'clock dinner; it was now her part to clear away and wash the dishes and plates, so as to leave Bridget, the "general," free to affair herself with the clothes-lines in the back garden, whereon the family linen streamed and ballooned in the east wind that is the winter prerogative of Bray. She had grown perceptibly thinner under this discipline, and her eyes had dark swellings beneath them that seemed pathetically unbecoming to anyone who, like Francie, had last seen her when the rubicund prosperity of Mountjoy Square had not yet worn away. Probably an Englishwoman of her class would have kept her household in comparative comfort with less effort and

more success, but Aunt Tish was very far from being an Englishwoman ; her eyes were not formed to perceive dirt, nor her nose to apprehend smells, and her idea of domestic economy was to indulge in no extras of soap or scrubbing brushes, and to feed her family on strong tea and indifferent bread and butter, in order that Ida's and Mabel's hats might be no whit less ornate than those of their neighbours.

Francie had plunged into the heart of this squalor with characteristic recklessness ; and the effusion of welcome with which she had been received, and the comprehensive abuse lavished by Aunt Tish upon Charlotte, were at first sufficient to make her forget the frouziness of the dining-room, and the fact that she had to share a bedroom with her cousins, the two Misses Fitzpatrick. Francie had kept the particulars of her fight with Charlotte to herself. Perhaps she felt that it would not be easy to make the position clear to Aunt Tish's comprehension, which was of a rudimentary sort in such matters, and apt to jump to crude conclusions. Perhaps she had become aware that even the ordinary atmosphere of her three months at Lismoyle was as far beyond Aunt Tish's imagination as the air of Paradise, but she certainly was not inclined to enlarge on her sentimental experiences to

her aunt and cousins; all that they knew was, that she had "moved in high society," and that she had fought with Charlotte Mullen on general and laudable grounds. It was difficult at times to parry the direct questions of Ida, who, at sixteen, had already, with the horrible precocity prevalent in her grade of society, passed through several flirtations of an out-door and illicit kind; but if Ida's curiosity could not be parried it could be easily misled, and the family belief in Francie's power of breaking, impartially, the hearts of all the young men whom she met, was a shield to her when she was pressed too nearly about "young Mr. Dysart," or "th' officers." Loud, of course, and facetious were the lamentations that Francie had not returned "promised" to one or other of these heroes of romance, but not even Ida's cultured capacity could determine which had been the more probable victim. The family said to each other in private that Francie had "got very close"; even the boys were conscious of a certain strangeness about her, and did not feel inclined to show her, as of yore, the newest subtlety in catapults, or the latest holes in their coats.

She herself was far more conscious of strangeness and remoteness; though, when she had first arrived at Albatross Villa, the crowded, carpetless house, and

the hourly conflict of living were reviving and almost amusing after the thunderous gloom of her exit from Tally Ho. Almost the first thing she had done had been to write to Hawkins to tell him of what had happened ; a letter that her tears had dropped on, and that her pen had flown in the writing of, telling how she had been turned out because she had refused—or as good as refused—Mr. Dysart for his—Gerald's—sake, and how she hoped he hadn't written to Tally Ho, for it's little chance there'd be Charlotte would send on the letter. Francie had intended to break off at this point, and leave to Gerald's own conscience the application of the hint ; but an unused half sheet at the end of her letter tempted her on, and before she well knew what she was saying, all the jealousy and hurt tenderness and helpless craving of the past month were uttered without a thought of diplomacy or pride. Then a long time had gone by, and there had been no answer from Hawkins. The outflung emotion that had left her spent and humbled, came back in bitterness to her, as the tide gives back in a salt flood the fresh waters of a river, and her heart closed upon it, and bore the pain as best it might.

It was not till the middle of October that Hawkins answered her letter. She knew before she opened

the envelope that she was going to be disappointed ; how could anyone explain away a silence of two months on one sheet of small note-paper, one side of which, as she well knew, was mainly occupied by the regimental crest, much less reply in the smallest degree to that letter that had cost so much in the writing, and so much more in the repenting of its length and abandonment? Mr. Hawkins had wisely steered clear of both difficulties by saying no more than that he had been awfully glad to hear from her, and he would have written before if he could, but somehow he never could find a minute to do so. He would have given a good deal to have seen that row with Miss Mullen, and as far as Dysart was concerned, he thought Miss Mullen had the rights of it ; he was going away on first leave now, and wouldn't be back at Lismoyle till the end of the year, when he hoped he would find her and old Charlotte as good friends as ever. He, Mr. Hawkins, was really not worth fighting about; he was stonier broke than he had ever been, and, in conclusion, he was hers (with an illegible hieroglyphic to express the exact amount), Gerald Hawkins.

Like the last letter she had had from him, this had come early in the morning, but on this occasion she

could not go up to her room to read it in peace. The apartment that she shared with Ida and Mabel offered few facilities for repose, and none for seclusion, and, besides, there was too much to be done in the way of helping to lay the table and get the breakfast. She hurried about the kitchen in her shabby gown, putting the kettle on to a hotter corner of the range, pouring treacle into a jampot, and filling the sugar-basin from a paper bag with quick, trembling fingers; her breath came pantingly, and the letter that she had hidden inside the front of her dress crackled with the angry rise and fall of her breast. That he should advise her to go and make friends with Charlotte, and tell her she had made a mistake in refusing Mr. Dysart, and never say a word about all that she had said to him in her letter—!

"Francie's got a letter from her sweetheart!" said Mabel, skipping round the kitchen, and singing the words in a kind of chant. "Ask her for the lovely crest for your album, Bobby!"

Evidently the ubiquitous Mabel had studied the contents of the letter-box.

"Ah, it's well to be her," said Bridget, joining in the conversation with her accustomed ease; "it's long before *my* fella would write me a letter!"

"And it's little you want letters from him," remarked Bobby, in his slow, hideous, Dublin brogue, "when you're out in the lane talking to another fella every night."

"Ye lie!" said Bridget, with a flattered giggle, while Bobby ran up the kitchen stairs after Francie, and took advantage of her having the teapot in one hand and the milk-jug in the other to thrust his treacley fingers into her pocket in search of the letter.

"Ah, have done!" said Francie angrily; "look, you're after making me spill the milk!"

But Bobby, who had been joined by Mabel, continued his persecutions, till his cousin, freeing herself of her burdens, turned upon him and boxed his ears with a vigour that sent him howling upstairs to complain to his mother.

After this incident, Francie's life at Albatross Villa went on, as it seemed to her, in a squalid monotony of hopelessness. The days became darker and colder, and the food and firing more perceptibly insufficient, and strong tea a more prominent feature of each meal, and even Aunt Tish lifted her head from the round of unending, dingy cares, and saw some change in Francie. She said to Uncle Robert, with an excusable thought of Francie's ungrudging help in the

household, and her contribution to it of five shillings a week, that it would be a pity if the sea air didn't suit the girl; and Uncle Robert, arranging a greasy satin tie under his beard at the looking-glass, preparatory to catching the 8.30 train for Dublin, had replied that it wasn't his fault if it didn't, and if she chose to be fool enough to fight with Charlotte Mullen she'd have to put up with it. Uncle Robert was a saturnine little man of small abilities, whose reverses had not improved his temper, and he felt that things were coming to a pretty pass if his wife was going to make him responsible for the sea air, as well as the smoky kitchen chimney, and the scullery sink that Bobby had choked with a dead jelly fish, and everything else.

The only events that Francie felt to be at all noteworthy were her letters from Mr. Lambert. He was not a brilliant letter writer, having neither originality, nor the gift which is sometimes bestowed on unoriginal people, of conveying news in a simple and satisfying manner; but his awkward and sterile sentences were as cold waters to the thirsty soul that was always straining back towards its time of abundance. She could scarcely say the word Lismoyle now without a hesitation, it was so shrined in dear and miserable

remembrance, with all the fragrance of the summer embalming it in her mind, that, unselfconscious as she was, the word seemed sometimes too difficult to pronounce. Lambert himself had become a personage of a greater world, and had acquired an importance that he would have resented had he known how wholly impersonal it was. In some ways she did not like him quite as much as in the Dublin days, when he had had the advantage of being the nearest thing to a gentleman that she had met with; perhaps her glimpses of his home life and the fact of his friendship with Charlotte had been disillusioning, or perhaps the comparison of him with other and newer figures upon her horizon had not been to his advantage; certainly it was more by virtue of his position in that other world that he was great.

It was strange that in these comparisons it was to Christopher that she turned for a standard. For her there was no flaw in Hawkins; her angry heart could name no fault in him except that he had wounded it; but she illogically felt Christopher's superiority without being aware of deficiency in the other. She did not understand Christopher; she had hardly understood him at that moment to which she now looked back with a gratified vanity that was tempered by

uncertainty and not unmingled with awe; but she knew him just well enough, and had just enough perception to respect him. Fanny Hemphill and Delia Whitty would have regarded him with a terror that would have kept them dumb in his presence, but for which they would have compensated themselves at other times by explosive gigglings at his lack of all that they admired most in young men. Some errant streak of finer sense made her feel his difference from the men she knew, without wanting to laugh at it; as has already been said, she respected him, an emotion not hitherto awakened by a varied experience of "gentlemen friends."

There were times when the domestic affairs of Albatross Villa touched their highest possibility of discomfort, when Bridget had gone to the christening of a friend's child at Enniskerry, and returned next day only partially recovered from the potations that had celebrated the event; or when Dottie, unfailing purveyor of diseases to the family, had imported German measles from her school. At these times Francie, as she made fires, or beds, or hot drinks, would think of Bruff and its servants with a regret that was none the less burning for its ignobleness. Several times when she lay awake at night, staring at

the blank of her own future, while the stabs of misery were sharp and unescapable, she had thought that she would write to Christopher, and tell him what had happened, and where she was. In those hours when nothing is impossible and nothing is unnatural, his face and his words, when she saw him last, took on their fullest meaning, and she felt as if she had only to put her hand out to open that which she had closed. The diplomatic letter, about nothing in particular, that should make Christopher understand that she would like to see him again, was often half composed, had indeed often lulled her sore heart and hot eyes to sleep with visions of the divers luxuries and glories that this single stepping-stone should lead to. But in the morning, when the children had gone to school, and she had come in from marketing, it was not such an easy thing to sit down and write a letter about nothing in particular to Mr. Dysart. Her defeat at the hands of Hawkins had taken away her belief in herself. She could not even hint to Christopher the true version of her fight with Charlotte, sure though she was that an untrue one had already found its way to Bruff; she could not tell him that Bridget had got drunk, and that butter was so dear they had to do without it; such emergencies

did not somehow come within the scope of her promise to trust him, and, besides, there was the serious possibility of his volunteering to see her. She would have given a good deal to see him, but not at Albatross Villa. She pictured him to herself, seated in the midst of the Fitzpatrick family, with Ida making eyes at him from under her fringe, and Bridget scuffling audibly with Bobby outside the door. Tally Ho was a palace compared with this, and yet she remembered what she had felt when she came back to Tally Ho from Bruff. When she thought of it all, she wondered whether she could bring herself to write to Charlotte, and try to make friends with her again. It would be dreadful to do, but her life at Albatross Villa was dreadful, and the dream of another visit to Lismoyle, when she could revenge herself on Hawkins by showing him his unimportance to her, was almost too strong for her pride. How much of it was due to her thirst to see him again at any price, and how much to a pitiful hankering after the flesh pots of Egypt, it is hard to say ; but November and December dragged by, and she did not write to Christopher or Charlotte, and Lambert remained her only correspondent at Lismoyle.

It was a damp, dark December, with rain and wind

nearly every day. Bray Head was rarely without a cap of grey cloud, and a restless pack of waves mouthing and leaping at its foot. The Esplanade was a mile-long vista of soaked grass and glistening asphalte, whereon the foot of man apparently never trod; once or twice a storm had charged in from the south-east, and had hurled sheets of spray and big stones on to it, and pounded holes in the concrete of its sea-wall. There had been such a storm the week before Christmas. The breakers had rushed upon the long beach with "a broad-flung, shipwrecking roar," and the windows of the houses along the Esplanade were dimmed with salt and sand. The rain had come in under the hall door at Albatross Villa, the cowl was blown off the kitchen chimney, causing the smoke to make its exit through the house by various routes, and, worst of all, Dottie and the boys had not been out of the house for two days. Christmas morning was signalised by the heaviest downpour of the week. It was hopeless to think of going to church, least of all for a person whose most presentable boots were relics of the past summer, and bore the cuts of lake rocks on their dulled patent leather. The post came late, after its wont, but it did not bring the letter that Francie had not been

able to help expecting. There had been a few Christmas cards, and one letter which did indeed bear the Lismoyle post-mark, but was only a bill from the Misses Greely, forwarded by Charlotte, for the hat that she had bought to replace the one that was lost on the day of the capsize of the *Daphne.*

The Christmas mid-day feast of tough roast-beef and pallid plum-pudding was eaten, and then, unexpectedly, the day brightened, a thin sunlight began to fall on the wet roads and the dirty, tossing sea, and Francie and her younger cousins went forth to take the air on the Esplanade. They were the only human beings upon it when they first got there ; in any other weather Francie might have expected to meet a friend or two from Dublin there, as had occurred on previous Sundays, when the still enamoured Tommy Whitty had ridden down on his bicycle, or Fanny Hemphill and her two medical student brothers had asked her to join them in a walk round Bray Head. The society of the Hemphills and Mr. Whitty had lost, for her, much of its pristine charm, but it was better than nothing at all ; in fact, those who saw the glances that Miss Fitzpatrick, from mere force of habit, levelled at Mr.

Whitty, or were witnesses of a pebble-throwing encounter with the Messrs. Hemphill, would not have guessed that she desired anything better than these amusements.

"Such a Christmas Day!" she thought to herself, "without a soul to see or to talk to! I declare, I think I'll turn nurse in an hospital, the way Susie Brennan did. They say those nurses have grand fun, and 'twould be better than this awful old place anyhow!" She had walked almost to the squat Martello tower, and while she looked discontentedly up at Bray Head, the last ray of sun struck on its dark shoulder as if to challenge her with the magnificence of its outline and the untruthfulness of her indictment. "Oh, you may shine away!" she exclaimed, turning her back upon both sunlight and mountain and beginning to walk back to where Bobby and Dottie were searching for jelly-fish among the sea-weed cast up by the storm, "the day's done for now, it's as good for me to go up to the four o'clock service as be streeling about in the cold here."

Almost at the same moment the chimes from the church on the hill behind the town struck out upon the wind with beautiful severity, and obeying them listlessly, she left the children and turned up the

steep suburban road that was her shortest way to Christ Church.

It was a long and stiffish pull; the wind blew her hair about till it looked like a mist of golden threads, the colour glowed dazzlingly in her cheeks, and the few men whom she passed bestowed upon her a stare of whose purport she was well aware. This was a class of compliment which she neither resented nor was surprised at, and it is quite possible that some months before she might have allowed her sense of it to be expressed in her face. But she felt now as if the approval of the man in the street was not worth what it used to be. It was, of course, agreeable in its way, but on this Christmas afternoon, with all its inevitable reminders of the past and the future, it brought with it the thought of how soon her face had been forgotten by the men who had praised it most.

The gas was lighted in the church, and the service was just beginning as she passed the decorated font and went uncertainly up a side-aisle till she was beckoned into a pew by a benevolent old lady. She knelt down in a corner, beside a pillar that was wreathed with a thick serpent of evergreens, and the old lady looked up from her admission of sin to wonder that such a pretty girl was allowed to walk

through the streets by herself. The heat of the church had brought out the aromatic smell of all the green things, the yellow gas flared from its glittering standards, and the glimmering colours of the east window were dying into darkness with the dying daylight. When she stood up for the Psalms she looked round the church to see if there were anyone there whom she knew; there were several familiar faces, but no one with whom she had ever exchanged a word, and turning round again she devoted herself to the hopeless task of finding out the special psalms that the choir were singing. Having failed in this, she felt her religious duties to be for the time suspended, and her thoughts strayed afield over things in general, settling down finally on a subject that had become more pressing than was pleasant.

It is a truism of ancient standing that money brings no cure for heartache, but it is also true that if the money were not there the heartache would be harder to bear. Probably if Francie had returned from Lismoyle to a smart house in Merrion Square, with a carriage to drive in, and a rich relative ready to pay for new winter dresses, she would have been less miserable over Mr. Hawkins' desertion than she was at Albatross Villa; she certainly would not have felt

as unhappy as she did now, standing up with the shrill singing clamouring in her ears, while she tried in different ways to answer the question of how she was to pay for the dresses that she had bought to take to Lismoyle. Twenty-five pounds a year does not go far when more than half of it is expended upon board and lodging, and a whole quarter has been anticipated to pay for a summer visit, and Lambert's prophecy that she would find herself in the county court some day, seemed not unlikely to come true. In her pocket was a letter from a Dublin shop, containing more than a hint of legal proceedings; and even if she were able to pay them a temporising two pounds in a month, there still would remain five pounds due, and she would not have a farthing left to go on with. Everything was at its darkest for her. Her hardy, supple nature was dispirited beyond its power of reaction, and now and then the remembrance of the Sundays of last summer caught her, till the pain came in her throat, and the gaslight spread into shaking stars.

The service went on, and Francie rose and knelt mechanically with the rest of the congregation. She was not irreligious, and even the name of scepticism was scarcely understood by her, but she did not con-

sider that religion was applicable to love affairs and bills; her mind was too young and shapeless for anything but a healthy, negligent belief in what she had been taught, and it did not enter into her head to utilise religion as a last resource, when everything else had turned out a failure. She regarded it with respect, and believed that most people grew good when they grew old, and the service passed over her head with a vaguely pleasing effect of music and light. As she came out into the dark lofty porch, a man stepped forward to meet her. Francie started violently.

"Oh, goodness gracious!" she cried, "you frightened my life out!"

But for all that, she was glad to see Mr. Lambert.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THAT evening when Mrs. Fitzpatrick was putting on her best cap and her long cameo ear-rings she said to her husband :

"Well now, Robert, you mark my words, he's after her."

"Tchah!" replied Mr. Fitzpatrick, who was not in a humour to admit that any woman could be attractive, owing to the postponement of his tea by his wife so that cakes might be baked in Mr. Lambert's honour; "you can't see a man without thinking he's in love with someone or other."

"I suppose you think it's to see yourself he's come all the way from Lismoyle," rejoined Mrs. Fitzpatrick with becoming spirit, "and says he's going to stop at Breslin's Hotel for a week."

"Oh, very well, have it your own way," said Mr. Fitzpatrick acrimoniously, "I suppose you have it all settled, and he'll be married to her by special license before the week's out."

"Well, I don't care, Robert, you wouldn't think to look at him that he'd only buried his wife four months and a half ago—though I will say he's in deep mourning—but for all that no one'd blame him that he didn't think much of that poor creature, and 'twould be a fine match for Francie if she'd take him."

"Would she take him!" echoed Mr. Fitzpatrick scornfully; "would a duck swim? I never saw the woman yet that wouldn't half hang herself to get married!"

"Ah! have done being so cross, Robert, Christmas day and all; I wonder you married at all since you think so little of women."

Finding this argument not easy to answer, Mr. Fitzpatrick said nothing, and his wife, too much interested to linger over side issues, continued,

"The girls say they heard him asking her to drive to the Dargle with him to-morrow, and he's brought a grand box of sweets for the children as a Christmas box, and six lovely pair of gloves for Francie! 'Pon me word, I call her a very lucky girl!"

"Well, if I was a woman it isn't that fellow I'd fancy," said Mr. Fitzpatrick, unexpectedly changing his ground, "but as, thank God, I'm not, it's no affair of mine." Having delivered himself of this sentiment,

Mr. Fitzpatrick went downstairs. The smell of hot cakes rose deliciously upon the air, and, as his niece emerged from the kitchen with a plateful of them in her hand, and called to him to hurry before they got cold, he thought to himself that Lambert would have the best of the bargain if he married her.

Francie found the evening surprisingly pleasant. She was, as she had always been, entirely at her ease with Mr. Lambert, and did not endure, on his account, any vicarious suffering because the table-cloth was far from clean, and the fact that Bridget put on the coal with her fingers was recorded on the edges of the plates. If he chose to come and eat hot cakes in the bosom of the Fitzpatrick family instead of dining at his hotel, he was just as well able to do without a butter-knife as she was, and, at all events, he need not have stayed unless he liked, she thought, with a little flash of amusement and pride that her power over him, at least, was not lost. There had been times during the last month or two when she had believed that he, like everyone else, had forgotten her, and it was agreeable to find that she had been mistaken.

The next day proved to be one of the softest and sunniest of the winter, and, as they flew along the wet road towards the Dargle, on the smartest of the Bray

outside cars, a great revival took place in Francie's spirits. They left their car at the gate of the glen to which the Dargle river has given its name, and strolled together along the private road that runs from end to end of it. A few holiday-makers had been tempted down from Dublin by the fine day, but there was nothing that even suggested the noisy pleasure parties that vulgarise the winding beauty of the ravine on summer bank holidays.

"Doesn't it look fearful lonely to-day?" said Francie, who had made her last visit there as a member of one of these same pleasure parties, and had enjoyed herself highly. "You can't hear a thing but the running of the water."

They were sitting on the low parapet of the road, looking down the brown slope of the tree-tops to the river, that was running a foaming race among the rocks at the bottom of the cleft.

"I don't call it lonely," said Lambert, casting a discontented side-long glance at a couple walking past arm-in-arm, evidently in the silently blissful stage of courtship; "how many more would you like?"

"Oh, lots," replied Francie, "but I'm not going to tell you who they are!"

"I know one, anyhow," said Lambert, deliberately leading up to a topic that up to this had been only slightly touched on.

When he had walked home from the church with Francie the evening before, he had somehow not been able to talk to her consecutively; he had felt a nervous awkwardness that he had not believed himself capable of, and the fact that he was holding an umbrella over her head and that she had taken his arm had seemed the only thing that he could give his mind to.

"Who do you know?"

Francie had plucked a ribbon of hart's-tongue from the edge of the wall, and was drawing its cold satiny length across her lips.

"Wouldn't you like it now if you saw—" he paused and looked at Francie—"who shall we say—Charlotte Mullen coming up the road?"

"I wouldn't care."

"Wouldn't you though! You'd run for your life, the way you did before out of Lismoyle," said Lambert, looking hard at her and laughing not quite genuinely.

The strip of hart's-tongue could not conceal a rising glow in the face behind it, but Francie's voice was as undaunted as ever as she replied,

"Who told you I ran for my life?"

"You told me so yourself."

"I didn't. I only told you I'd had a row with her."

"Well, that's as good as saying you had to run. You don't suppose I thought you'd get the better of Charlotte?"

"I daresay you didn't, because you're afraid of her yourself!"

There was a degree of truth in this that made Mr. Lambert suddenly realise Francie's improper levity about serious things.

"I'll tell you one thing I'm afraid of," he said severely, "and that is that you made a mistake in fighting with Charlotte. If you'd chosen to—to do as she wished, she's easy enough to get on with."

Francie flung her fern over the parapet and made no answer.

"I suppose you know she's moved into Gurthnamuckla?" he went on.

"I know nothing about anything," interrupted Francie; "I don't know how long it isn't since you wrote to me, and when you do you never tell me anything. You might be all dead and buried down there for all I know or care!"

The smallest possible glance under her eyelids

tempered this statement and confused Mr. Lambert's grasp of his subject.

"Do you mean that, about not caring if I was dead or no? I daresay you do. No one cares now what happens to me."

He almost meant what he said, her exclusiveness was so exasperating, and his voice told his sincerity. Last summer she would have laughed pitilessly at his pathos, and made it up with him afterwards. But she was changed since last summer, and now as she looked at him she felt a forlorn kinship with him.

"Ah, what nonsense!" she said caressingly. "I'd be awfully sorry if anything happened you." As if he could not help himself he took her hand, but before he could speak she had drawn it away. "Indeed, you might have been dead," she went on hurriedly, "for all you told me in your letters. Begin now and tell me the Lismoyle news. I think you said the Dysarts were away from Bruff still, didn't you?"

Lambert felt as if a hot and a cold spray of water had been turned on him alternately. "The Dysarts? Oh, yes, they've been away for some time," he said, recovering himself; "they've been in London I believe, staying with her people, since you're so anxious to know about them."

"Why wouldn't I want to know about them?" said Francie, getting off the wall. "Come on and walk a bit, it's cold sitting here."

Lambert walked on by her side rather sulkily; he was angry with himself for having let his feelings run away with him, and he was angry with Francie for pulling him up so quickly.

"Christopher Dysart's off again," he said abruptly; "he's got another of these diplomatic billets. He believed that Francie would find the information unpleasant, and he was in some contradictory way disappointed that she seemed quite unaffected by it. "He's unpaid *attaché* to old Lord Castlemore at Copenhagen," he went on; "he started last week."

So Christopher was gone from her too, and never wrote her a line before he went. They're all the same, she thought, all they want is to spoon a girl for a bit, and if she lets them do it they get sick of her, and whatever she does they forget her the next minute. And there was Roddy Lambert trying to squeeze her hand just now, and poor Mrs. Lambert that was worth a dozen of him, not dead six months. She walked on, and forced herself to talk to him, and to make inquiries about the Bakers, Dr. Rattray, Mr. Corkran, and other lights of Lismoyle society. It was

absurd, but it was none the less true that the news that Mr. Corkran was engaged to Carrie Beattie gave her an additional pang. The enamoured glances of the curate were fresh in her memory, and the thought that they were being now bestowed upon Carrie Beattie's freckles and watering eyes, was, though ludicrous, not altogether pleasing. She burst out laughing suddenly.

"I'm thinking of what all the Beatties will look like dressed as bridesmaids," she explained, "four of them, and every one of them roaring crying, and their noses bright red!"

The day was clouding over a little, and a damp wind began to stir among the leaves that still hung red on the beech trees. Lambert insisted with paternal determination that Francie should put on the extra coat that he was carrying for her, and the couple who had recently passed them, and whom they had now overtaken, looked at them sympathetically, and were certain that they also were engaged. It took some time to reach the far gate of the Dargle, sauntering as they did from bend to bend of the road, and stopping occasionally to look down at the river, or up at the wooded height opposite, with conventional expressions of admiration; and by the time they had passed down

between the high evergreens at the lodge, to where the car was waiting for them, Francie had heard all that Lambert could tell her of Lismoyle news. She had also been told what a miserable life Mr. Lambert's was, and how lonely he was at Rosemount since poor Lucy's death, and she knew how many young horses he had at grass on Gurthnamuckla, but neither mentioned the name of Mr. Hawkins.

The day of the Dargle expedition was Tuesday, and during the remainder of the week Mr. Lambert became so familiar a visitor at Albatross Villa, that Bridget learned to know his knock, and did not trouble herself to pull down her sleeves, or finish the mouthful of bread and tea with which she had left the kitchen, before she opened the door. Aunt Tish did not attempt to disguise her satisfaction when he was present, and rallied Francie freely in his absence; the children were quite aware of the state of affairs, having indeed discussed the matter daily with Bridget; and Uncle Robert, going gloomily up to his office in Dublin, had to admit to himself that Lambert was certainly paying her great attention, and that after all, all things considered, it would be a good thing for the girl to get a rich husband for herself when she had the chance. It was rather soon after his wife's death for

a man to come courting, but of course the wedding wouldn't come off till the twelve months were up, and at the back of these reflections was the remembrance that he, Uncle Robert, was Francie's trustee, and that the security in which he had invested her five hundred pounds was becoming less sound than he could have wished.

As is proverbially the case, the principal persons concerned were not as aware as the lookers-on of the state of the game. Francie, to whom flirtation was as ordinary and indispensable as the breath of her nostrils, did not feel that anything much out of the common was going on, though she knew quite well that Mr. Lambert was very fond of her; and Mr. Lambert had so firmly resolved on allowing a proper interval to elapse between his wife's death and that election of her successor upon which he was determined, that he looked upon the present episode as of small importance, and merely a permissible relaxation to a man whose hunting had been stopped, and who had, in a general way, been having the devil of a dull time. He was to go back to Lismoyle on Monday, the first of the year; and it was settled that he was to take Francie on Sunday afternoon to walk on Kingstown pier. The social laws of Mrs. Fitz-

patrick's world were not rigorous, still less was her interpretation of them; an unchaperoned expedition to Kingstown pier would not, under any circumstances, have scandalised her, and considering that Lambert was an old friend and had been married, the proceeding became almost prudishly correct. As she stood at her window and saw them turn the corner of the road on their way to the station, she observed to Mabel that there wouldn't be a handsomer couple going the pier than what they were, Francie had that stylish way with her that she always gave a nice set to a skirt, and it was wonderful the way she could trim up an old hat the same as new.

It was a very bright clear afternoon, and a touch of frost in the air gave the snap and brilliancy that are often lacking in an Irish winter day. On such a Sunday Kingstown pier assumes a fair semblance of its spring and summer gaiety; the Kingstown people walk there because there is nothing else to be done at Kingstown, and the Dublin people come down to snatch what they can of sea air before the short afternoon darkens, and the hour arrives when they look out for members of the St. George's Yacht Club to take them in to tea. There was a fair sprinkling of people on the long arm of granite that curves for a mile into

Dublin Bay, and as Mr. Lambert paced along it he was as agreeably conscious as his companion of the glances that met and followed their progress. It satisfied his highest ambition that the girl of his choice should be thus openly admired by men whom, year after year, he had looked up at with envious respect as they stood in the bow-window of Kildare St. Club, with figures that time was slowly shaping to its circular form, on the principle of correspondence with environment. He was a man who had always valued his possessions according to other people's estimation of them, and this afternoon Francie gained a new distinction in his eyes.

Abstract admiration, however, was one thing, but the very concrete attentions of Mr. Thomas Whitty were quite another affair. Before they had been a quarter of an hour on the pier, Francie was hailed by her Christian name, and this friend of her youth, looking more unmistakably than ever a solicitor's clerk, joined them, flushed with the effort of overtaking them, and evidently determined not to leave them again.

"I spotted you by your hair, Francie," Mr. Whitty was pleased to observe, after the first greetings; "you must have been getting a new dye for it; I could see it a mile off!"

"Oh, yes," responded Francie, "I tried a new bottle the other day, the same you use for your moustache y'know! I thought I'd like people to be able to see it without a spy-glass."

As Mr. Whitty's moustache was represented by three sickly hairs and a pimple, the sarcasm was sufficiently biting to yield Lambert a short-lived gratification.

"Mr. Lambert dyes his black," continued Francie, without a change of countenance. She had the Irish love of a scrimmage in her, and she thought it would be great fun to make Mr. Lambert cross.

"D'ye find the colour comes off?" murmured Tommy Whitty, eager for revenge, but too much afraid of Lambert to speak out loud.

Even Francie, though she favoured the repartee with a giggle, was glad that Lambert had not heard.

"D'ye find you want your ears boxed?" she returned in the same tone of voice; "I won't walk with you if you don't behave." Inwardly, however, she decided that Tommy Whitty was turning into an awful cad, and felt that she would have given a good deal to have wiped out some lively passages in her previous acquaintance with him.

At the end of half an hour Mr. Whitty was still

with them, irrepressibly intimate and full of reminiscence. Lambert, after determined efforts to talk to Francie, as if unaware of the presence of a third person, had sunk into dangerous silence, and Francie had ceased to see the amusing side of the situation, and was beginning to be exhausted by much walking to and fro. The sun set in smoky crimson behind the town, the sun-set gun banged its official recognition of the fact, followed by the wild, clear notes of a bugle, and a frosty after-glow lit up the sky, and coloured the motionless water of the harbour. A big bell boomed a monotonous summons to afternoon service, and people began to leave the pier. Those who had secured the entrée of the St. George's Yacht Club proceeded comfortably thither for tea, and Lambert felt that he would have given untold sums for the right to take Francie in under the pillared portico, leaving Tommy Whitty and his seedy black coat in outer darkness. The party was gloomily tending towards the station, when the happy idea occurred to Mr. Lambert of having tea at the Marine Hotel; it might not have the distinction of the club, but it would at all events give him the power of shaking off that damned presuming counter-jumper, as in his own mind he furiously designated Mr. Whitty.

"I'm going to take you up to the hotel for tea, Francie," he said decisively, and turned at once towards the gate of the Marine gardens. "Good evening, Whitty."

The look that accompanied this valedictory remark was so conclusive that the discarded Tommy could do no more than accept the position. Francie would not come to his help, being indeed thankful to get rid of him, and he could only stand and look after the two figures, and detest Mr. Lambert with every fibre of his little heart. The coffee-room at the hotel was warm and quiet, and Francie sank thankfully into an armchair by the fire.

"I declare this is the nicest thing I've done to-day," she said, with a sigh of tired ease; "I was dead sick of walking up and down that old pier."

This piece of truckling was almost too flagrant, and Lambert would not even look at her as he answered,

"I thought you seemed to be enjoying yourself, or I'd have come away sooner."

Francie felt none of the amusement that she would once have derived from seeing Mr. Lambert in a bad temper; he had stepped into the foreground of her life and was becoming a large and serious object there,

too important and powerful to be teased with any degree of pertinacity.

"Enjoy myself!" she exclaimed, "I was thinking all the time that my boots would be cut to pieces with the horrid gravel; and," she continued, laying her head on the plush-covered back of her chair, and directing a laughing, propitiatory glance at her companion, "you know I had to talk twice as much to poor Tommy because you wouldn't say a word to him. Besides, I knew him long before I knew you."

"Oh, of course if you don't mind being seen with a fellow that looks like a tailor's apprentice, I have nothing to say against it," replied Lambert, looking down on her, as he stood fingering his moustache, with one elbow on the chimney-piece. His eyes could not remain implacable when they dwelt on the face that was upturned to him, especially now, when he felt both in face and manner something of pathos and gentleness that was as new as it was intoxicating.

If he had known what it was that had changed her he might have been differently affected by it; as it was, he put it down to the wretchedness of life at Albatross Villa, and was glad of the adversity that was making things so much easier for him. His sulkiness melted away in spite of him; it was hard to

be sulky, with Francie all to himself, pouring out his tea and talking to him with an intimateness that was just tipped with flirtation; in fact, as the moments slipped by, and the thought gripped him that the next day would find him alone at Rosemount, every instant of this last afternoon in her society became unspeakably precious. The *tête-à-tête* across the tea-table prolonged itself so engrossingly that Lambert forgot his wonted punctuality, and their attempt to catch the five o'clock train for Bray resulted in bringing them breathless to the station as their train steamed out of it.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE Irish mail-boat was well up to time on that frosty thirty-first of December. She had crossed from Holyhead on an even keel, and when the Bailey light on the end of Howth had been sighted, the passengers began to think that they might risk congratulations on the clemency of the weather, and some of the hardier had ordered tea in the saloon, and were drinking it with incredulous enjoyment.

"I shall go mad, Pamela, perfectly mad, if you cannot think of any word for that tenth light. C. and H.—can't you think of *any*thing with C. and H.? I found out all the others in the train, and the least you might do is to think of this one for me. That dreadful woman snoring on the sofa just outside my berth put everything else out of my head."

This plaint, uttered in a deep and lamentable contralto, naturally drew some attention towards Lady Dysart, as she swept down the saloon towards the end of the table, and Pamela, becoming aware

that the lady referred to was among the audience, trod upon her mother's dress and thus temporarily turned the conversation.

"C. and H.," she repeated, "I'm afraid I can't think of anything; the only word I can think of beginning with C is Christopher."

"Christopher!" cried Lady Dysart, "why, Christopher ends with an R."

As Lady Dysart for the second time pronounced her son's name the young man who had just come below, and was having a whisky and soda at the bar at the end of the saloon, turned quickly round and put down his glass. Lady Dysart and her daughter were sitting with their backs to him, but Mr. Hawkins did not require a second glance, and made his way to them at once.

"And so you've been seeing poor Christopher off to the North Pole," he said, after the first surprise and explanations had been got over. "I can't say I envy him. They make it quite cold enough in Yorkshire to suit me."

"Don't they ever make it hot for you there?" asked Lady Dysart, unable to resist the chance of poking fun at Mr. Hawkins, even though in so doing she violated her own cherished regulations on the subject.

of slang. All her old partiality for him had revived since Francie's departure from Lismoyle, and she found the idea of his engagement far more amusing than he did.

"No, Lady Dysart, they never do," said Hawkins, getting very red, and feebly trying to rise to the occasion; "they're always very nice and kind to me."

"Oh, I daresay they are!" replied Lady Dysart archly, with a glance at Pamela like that of a naughty child who glories in its naughtiness. "And is it fair to ask when the wedding is to come off? *We* heard something about the spring!"

"Who gave you that interesting piece of news?" said Hawkins, trying not to look foolish.

"A bridesmaid," said Lady Dysart, closing her lips tightly, and leaning back with an irrepressible gleam in her eye.

"Well, she knows more than I do. All I know about it is, that I believe the regiment goes to Aldershot in May, and I suppose it will be some time after that." Mr. Hawkins spoke with a singularly bad grace, and before further comment could be made he turned to Pamela. "I saw a good deal of Miss Hope-Drummond in the north," he said, with an effort so

obvious and so futile at turning the conversation that Lady Dysart began to laugh.

"Why, she was the bridesmaid—" she began incautiously, when the slackening of the engines set her thoughts flying from the subject in hand to settle in agony upon the certainty that Doyle would forget to put her scent-bottle into her dressing-bag, and the whole party went up on deck.

It was dark, and the revolving light on the end of the east pier swung its red eye upon the steamer as she passed within a few yards of it, churning a curving road towards the double line of lamps that marked the jetty. The lights of Kingstown mounted row upon row, like an embattled army of stars, the great sweep of Dublin Bay was pricked out in lessening yellow points, and a new moon that looked pale green by contrast, sent an immature shaft along the sea in meek assertion of her presence. The paddles dropped their blades more and more languidly into the water, then they ceased, and the vessel slid silently alongside the jetty, with the sentient ease of a living thing. The warps were flung ashore, the gangways thrust on board, and in an instant the sailors were running ashore with the mail bags on their backs, like a string of ants with their eggs. The usual crowd of loafers

and people who had come to meet their friends formed round the passengers' gangway, and the passengers filed down it in the brief and uncoveted distinction that the exit from a steamer affords.

Lady Dysart headed her party as they left the steamer, and her imposing figure in her fur-lined cloak so filled the gangway that Pamela could not, at first, see who it was that met her mother as she stepped on to the platform. The next moment she found herself shaking hands with Mr. Lambert, and then, to her unbounded astonishment, with Miss Fitzpatrick. The lamps were throwing strong light and shadow upon Francie's face, and Pamela's first thought was how much thinner she had become.

"Mr. Lambert and I missed our train back to Bray," Francie began at once in a hurried deprecating voice, "and we came down to see the boat come in just to pass the time—" Her voice stopped as if she had suddenly gasped for breath, and Pamela heard Hawkins' voice say behind her:

"How de do, Miss Fitzpatrick? Who'd have thought of meetin' you here?" in a tone of cheerfully casual acquaintanceship.

Even Pamela, with all her imaginative sympathy, did not guess what Francie felt in that sick and

flinching moment, when everything rung and tingled round her as if she had been struck; the red had deserted her cheek like a cowardly defender, and the ground felt uneven under her feet, but the instinct of self-control that is born of habit and convention in the feeblest of us came mechanically to her help.

"And I never thought I'd see you either," she answered, in the same tone; "I suppose you're all going to Lismoyle together, Miss Dysart?"

"No, we stay in Dublin to-night," said Pamela, with sufficient consciousness of the situation to wish to shorten it. "Oh, thank you, Mr. Hawkins, I should be very glad if you would put these rugs in the carriage."

Hawkins disappeared with the rugs in the wake of Lady Dysart, and Lambert and Pamela and Francie followed slowly together in the same direction. Pamela was in the difficult position of a person who is full of a sympathy that it is wholly out of the question to express.

"I am so glad that we chanced to meet you here," she said, "we have not heard anything of you for such a long time."

The kindness in her voice had the effect of conveying to Francie how much in need of kindness she

was, and the creeping smart of tears gathered under her eyelids.

"It's awfully kind of you to say so, Miss Dysart," she said, with something in her voice that made even the Dublin brogue pathetic; "I didn't think anyone at Lismoyle remembered me now."

"Oh, we don't forget people quite so quickly as that," said Pamela, thinking that Mr. Hawkins must have behaved worse than she had believed; "I see this is our carriage. Mamma, did you know that Miss Fitzpatrick was here?"

Lady Dysart was already sitting in the carriage, her face fully expressing the perturbation that she felt, as she counted the parcels that Mr. Hawkins was bestowing in the netting.

"Oh yes," she said, with a visible effort to be polite, "I saw her just now; do get in, my dear, the thing may start at any moment."

If her mind had room for anything beside the anxieties of travelling, it was disapprobation of Francie and of the fact that she was going about alone with Mr. Lambert, and the result was an absence of geniality that added to Francie's longing to get away as soon as possible. Lambert was now talking to Pamela, blocking up the doorway of the carriage as he

stood on the step, and over his shoulder she could see Hawkins, still with his back to her, and still apparently very busy with the disposal of the dressing-bags and rugs. He was not going to speak to her again, she thought, as she stood a little back from the open door with the frosty air nipping her through her thin jacket; she was no more to him than a stranger, she, who knew every turn of his head, and the feeling of his yellow hair that the carriage lamp was shining upon. The very look of the first-class carriage seemed to her, who had seldom, if ever, been in one, to emphasise the distance that there was between them. The romance that always clung to him even in her angriest thoughts, was slaughtered by this glimpse of him, like some helpless atom of animal life by the passing heel of a schoolboy. There was no scaffold, with its final stupendous moment, and incentive to heroism; there was nothing but an ignoble end in commonplace neglect.

The ticket-collector slammed the door of the next carriage, and Francie stepped back still further to make way for Lambert as he got off the step. She had turned her back on the train, and was looking vacantly at the dark outlines of the steamer when she became aware that Hawkins was beside her.

"Er—good-bye—" he said awkwardly, "the train's just off."

"Good-bye," replied Francie, in a voice that sounded strangely to her, it was so everyday and conventional.

"Look here," he said, looking very uncomfortable, and speaking quickly, "I know you're angry with me. I couldn't help it. I tried to get out of it, but it—it couldn't be done. I'm awfully sorry about it—"

If Francie had intended to reply to this address, it was placed beyond her power to do so. The engine, which had been hissing furiously for some minutes, now set up the continuous ear-piercing shriek that precedes the departure of the boat train, and the guard, hurrying along the platform, signified to Hawkins in dumb show that he was to take his seat. The whistle continued unrelentingly; Hawkins put out his hand, and Francie laid hers in it. She looked straight at him for a second, and then, as she felt his fingers close hard round her hand in dastardly assurance of friendship if not affection, she pulled it away, and turned to Lambert, laughing and putting her hands up to her ears to show that she could hear nothing in the din. Hawkins jumped into the carriage again, Pamela waved her hand at the window, and Francie was left with Lambert on the platform, looking at the red light on the back of the guard's van, as the train wound out of sight into the tunnel.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

It was a cold, east-windy morning near the middle of March, when the roads were white and dusty, and the clouds were grey, and Miss Mullen, seated in her new dining-room at Gurthnamuckla, was finishing her Saturday balancing of accounts. Now that she had become a landed proprietor, the process was more complicated than it used to be. A dairy, pigs, and poultry cannot be managed and made to pay without thought and trouble, and, as Charlotte had every intention of making Gurthnamuckla pay, she spared neither time nor account books, and was beginning to be well satisfied with the result. She had laid out a good deal of money on the house and farm, but she was going to get a good return for it, or know the reason why; and, as no tub of skim milk was given to the pigs, or barrow of turnips to the cows, without her knowledge, the chances of success seemed on her side.

She had just entered, on the page headed Receipts,

the sale of two pigs at the fair, and surveyed the growing amount, in its neat figures, with complacency; then, laying down her pen, she went to the window, and directed a sharp eye at the two men who were spreading gravel on the reclaimed avenue, and straightening the edges of the grass.

"'Pon my word, it's beginning to look like a gentleman's avenue," she said to herself, eyeing approvingly the arch of the elm tree branches, and the clumps of yellow daffodils, the only spots of light in the colourless landscape, while the cawing of the building rooks had a pleasant, manorial sound in her ears. A young horse came galloping across the lawn, with floating mane and tail, and an intention to jump the new wooden railings that only failed him at the last moment, and resulted in two soapy slides in the grass, that Charlotte viewed from her window with wonderful equanimity. "I'll give Roddy a fine blowing up when he comes over," she thought, as she watched the colt cutting capers among the daffodils; "I'll ask him if he'd like me to have his four precious colts in to tea. He's as bad about them as I am about the cats!" Miss Mullen's expression denoted that the reproof would not be of the character to which Louisa was accustomed, and Mrs. Bruff, who

had followed her mistress into the window, sprang on a chair, and, arching her back, leaned against the well-known black alpaca apron with a feeling that the occasion was exceptionally propitious. The movements of Charlotte's character, for it cannot be said to possess the power of development, were akin to those of some amphibious thing, whose strong, darting course under the water is only marked by a bubble or two, and it required almost an animal instinct to note them. Every bubble betrayed the creature below, as well as the limitations of its power of hiding itself, but people never thought of looking out for these indications in Charlotte, or even suspected that she had anything to conceal. There was an almost blatant simplicity about her, a humorous rough and readiness which, joined with her literary culture, proved business capacity, and dreaded temper, seemed to leave no room for any further aspect, least of all of a romantic kind.

Having opened the window for a minute to scream abusive directions to the men who were spreading gravel, she went back to the table, and, gathering her account-books together, she locked them up in her davenport. The room that, in Julia Duffy's time, had been devoted to the storage of potatoes, was now be-

ginning life again, dressed in the faded attire of the Tally Ho dining-room. Charlotte's books lined one of its newly-papered walls; the fox-hunting prints that dated from old Mr. Butler's reign at Tally Ho hung above the chimney-piece, and the maroon rep curtains were those at which Francie had stared during her last and most terrific encounter with their owner. The air of occupation was completed by a basket on the rug in front of the fire with four squeaking kittens in it, and by the Bible and the grey manual of devotion out of which Charlotte read daily prayers to Louisa the orphan and the cats. It was an ugly room, and nothing could ever make it anything else, but with the aid of the brass-mounted grate, a few bits of Mrs. Mullen's silver on the sideboard, and the deep-set windows, it had an air of respectability and even dignity that appealed very strongly to Charlotte. She enjoyed every detail of her new possessions, and, unlike Norry and the cats, felt no regret for the urban charms and old associations of Tally Ho. Indeed, since her aunt's death, she had never liked Tally Ho. There was a strain of superstition in her that, like her love of land, showed how strongly the blood of the Irish peasant ran in her veins; since she had turned Francie out of the house she had not liked to think of

the empty room facing her own, in which Mrs. Mullen's feeble voice had laid upon her the charge that she had not kept; her dealings with table-turning and spirit-writing had expanded for her the boundaries of the possible, and made her the more accessible to terror of the supernatural. Here, at Gurthnamuckla, there was nothing to harbour these suggestions; no brooding evergreens rustling outside her bedroom window, no rooms alive with the little incidents of a past life, no doors whose opening and shutting were like familiar voices reminding her of the footsteps that they had once heralded. This new house was peopled only by the pleasant phantoms of a future that she had fashioned for herself out of the slightest and vulgarest materials, and her wakeful nights were spent in schemings in which the romantic and the practical were logically blended.

Norry the Boat did not, as has been hinted, share her mistress's satisfaction in Gurthnamuckla. For four months she had reigned in its kitchen, and it found no more favour in her eyes than on the day when she, with her roasting-jack in one hand and the cockatoo's cage in the other, had made her official entry into it. It was not so much the new range, or the barren tidyness of the freshly-painted

cupboards, these things had doubtless been at first very distressing, but time had stored the cupboards with the miscellanies that Norry loved to hoard, and Bid Sal had imparted a home-like feeling to the range by wrenching the hinge of the oven-door so that it had to be kept closed with the poker. Even the unpleasantly dazzling whitewash was now turning a comfortable yellow brown, and the cobwebs were growing about the hooks in the ceiling. But none of these things thoroughly consoled Norry. Her complaints, it is true, did not seem adequate to account for her general aspect of discontent. Miss Mullen heard daily lamentations over the ravages committed by Mr. Lambert's young horses on the clothes bleaching on the furze-bushes, the loss of "the clever little shcullery that we had in Tally Ho," and the fact that "if a pairson was on his dying bed for the want of a grain o' tay itself, he should thravel three miles before he'd get it," but the true grievance remained locked in Norry's bosom. Not to save her life would she have admitted that what was really lacking in Gurthnamuckla was society. The messengers from the shops, the pedlar-women; above all, the beggars; of these she had been deprived at a blow, and life had become a lean ill-nurtured thing without the news with which

they had daily provided her. Billy Grainy and Nance the Fool were all that remained to her of this choice company, the former having been retained in his offices of milk-seller, messenger, and post-boy, and the latter, like Abdiel, faithful among the faithless, was undeterred by the distance that had discouraged the others of her craft, and limped once a week to Gurthnamuckla for the sake of old times and a mug of dripping.

By these inadequate channels a tardy rill of news made its way to Miss Mullen's country seat, but it came poisoned by the feeling that every one else in Lismoyle had known it for at least a week, and Norry felt herself as much aggrieved as if she had been charged "pence apiece" for stale eggs.

It was therefore the more agreeable that, on this same raw, grey Saturday morning, when Norry's temper had been unusually tried by a search for the nest of an out-lying hen, Mary Holloran, the Rosemount lodgewoman, should have walked into the kitchen.

"God save all here!" she said, sinking on to a chair, and wiping away with her apron the tears that the east wind had brought to her eyes; "I'm as tired as if I was afther walking from Galway with a bag o' male!"

"Musha, then, *cead failthe*, Mary," replied Norry with unusual geniality; "is it from Judy Lee's wake ye're comin'?"

"I am, in throth; Lord ha' mercy on her!" Mary Holloran raised her eyes to the ceiling and crossed herself, and Norry and Bid Sal followed her example. Norry was sitting by the fire singeing the yellow carcase of a hen, and the brand of burning paper in her hand heightened the effect of the gesture in an almost startling way. "Well now," resumed Mary Holloran, "she was as nice a woman as ever threw a tub of clothes on the hill, and an honest poor crayture through all. She battled it out well, as owld as she was."

"Faith thin, an' if she did die itself she was in the want of it," said Norry sardonically; "sure there isn't a winther since her daughther wint to America that she wasn't anointed a couple of times. I'm thinkin' the people th' other side o' death will be throuncin' her for keepin' them waitin' on her this way!"

Mary Holloran laughed a little and then wiped her face with the corner of her apron, and sighed so as to restore a fitting tone to the conversation.

"The neighbours was all gethered in it last night," she observed; "they had the two rooms full in it, an' a half gallon of whisky, and porther and all sorts.

Indeed, her sisther's two daughthers showed her every respect; there wasn't one comin' in it, big nor little, but they'd fill them out a glass o' punch before they'd sit down. God bless ye, Bid Sal," she went on, as if made thirsty by the recollection; "have ye a sup o' tay in that taypot that's on th' oven? I'd drink the lough this minute!"

"Is it the like o' that ye'd give the woman?" vociferated Norry in furious hospitality, as Bid Sal moved forward to obey this behest; "make down the fire and bile a dhrop o' wather the way she'll get what'll not give her a sick shtummuck. Sure, what's in that pot's the lavin's afther Miss Charlotte's breakfast for Billy Grainy when he comes with the post; and good enough for the likes of him."

"There was a good manny axing for ye last night," began Mary Holloran again, while Bid Sal broke up a box with the kitchen cleaver, and revived the fire with its fragments and a little paraffin oil. "And you a near cousin o' the corp'. Was it herself wouldn't let you in it?"

"Whether she'd let me in it or no I have plenty to do besides running to every corp'-house in the counthry," returned Norry with an acerbity that showed how accurate Mary Holloran's surmise had

been ; "if thim that was in the wake seen me last night goin' out to the cow that's afther calvin' with the quilt off me bed to put over her, maybe they'd have less chat about me."

Mary Holloran was of a pacific turn, and she tried another topic. "Did ye hear that John Kenealy was afther summonsing me mother before the binch?" she said, unfastening her heavy blue cloak and putting her feet up on the fender of the range.

"Ah, God help ye, how would I hear annything?" grumbled Norry; "it'd be as good for me to be in heaven as to be here, with ne'er a one but Nance the Fool comin' next or nigh me."

"Oh, indeed, that's the thruth," said Mary Holloran with polite but transient sympathy. "Well, whether or no, he summonsed her, and all the raison he had for putting that scandal on her, was thim few little hins and ducks she have, that he seen different times on his land, themselves and an owld goat thravellin' the fields, and not a bit nor a bite before them in it that they'd stoop their heads to, only what sign of grass was left afther the winther, and faith! that's little. 'Twas last Tuesday, Lady Day an' all, me mother was bringin' in a goaleen o' turf, an' he came thundherin' round the house, and every big rock of English he had he

called it to her, and every soort of liar and blagyard —oh, indeed, his conduck was not fit to tell to a jack-ass—an' he summonsed her secondly afther that. Ye'd think me mother'd lose her life when she seen the summons, an' away she legged it into Rosemount to meself, the way I'd spake to the masther to lane heavy on Kenealy the day he'd bring her into coort. 'An' indeed,' says I to the masther, 'is it to bring me mother into coort!' says I; 'sure she's hardly able to lave the bed,' says I, 'an owld little woman that's not four stone weight! She's not that size,' says I—" Mary Holloran measured accurately off the upper joints of her first two fingers—"'Sure ye'd blow her off yer hand! And Kenealy sayin' she pelted the pavement afther him, and left a backward sthroke on him with the shovel!' says I. But, in any case the masther gave no satisfaction to Kenealy, and he arbithrated him the way he wouldn't be let bring me mother into coort, an' two shillin' she paid for threspass, and thank God she's able to do that same, for as desolate as Kenealy thinks her."

"Lambert's a fine arbithrator," said Norry, dispassionately. "Here, Bid Sal, run away out to the lardher and lave this within in it," handing over the singed hen, "and afther that,

go on out and cut cabbages for the pigs. Divil's cure to ye! Can't ye make haste! I suppose ye think it's to be standin' lookin' at the people that ye get four pounds a year an' yer dite! Thim gerrls is able to put annyone that'd be with them into a decay," she ended, as Bid Sal reluctantly withdrew, "and there's not a word ye'll say but they'll gallop through the counthry tellin' it " Then, dropping into a conversational tone, "Nance was sayin' Lambert was gone to Dublin agin, but what signifies what the likes of her'd say, it couldn't be he'd be goin' in it agin and he not home a week from it."

Mary Holloran pursed up her mouth portentously.

"Faith he *could* go in it, and it's in it he's gone," she said, beginning upon a new cup of tea, as dark and sweet as treacle, that Norry had prepared for her. "Ah musha! Lord have mercy on thim that's gone; 'tis short till they're forgotten!"

Norry contented herself with an acquiescing sound, devoid of interrogation, but dreary enough to be encouraging. Mrs. Holloran's saucer had received half the contents of her cup, and was now delicately poised aloft on the outspread fingers of her right hand, while her right elbow rested on the table according to the etiquette of her class, and Norry knew that the string

of her friend's tongue would loosen of its own accord.

"Seven months last Monday," began Mary Holloran in the voice of a professional reciter; "seven months since he berrid her, an' if he gives three more in the widda ye may call me a liar."

"Tell the truth!" exclaimed Norry, startled out of her self-repression and stopping short in the act of poking the fire. "D'ye tell me it's to marry again he'd go, an' the first wife's clothes on his cook this minnit?"

Mary Holloran did not reveal by look or word the gratification that she felt. "God forbid I'd rise talk or dhraw scandal," she continued with the same pregnant calm, "but the thruth it is an' no slandher, for the last month there's not a week—arrah what week! No, but there's hardly the day, but a letther goes to the post for—for one you know well, an' little boxeens and re*jes*tered envelopes an' all sorts. An' letthers coming from that one to him to further ordhers! Sure I'd know the writin'. Hav'nt she her name written the size of I don't know what on her likeness that he have shtuck out on the table."

Mary Holloran broke off like a number of a serial story, with a carefully interrupted situation, and sipped

her tea assiduously. Norry advanced slowly from the fireplace with the poker still clutched in her hand, and her glowing eyes fixed upon her friend, as if she were stalking her.

"For the love o' God, woman!" she whispered, "is it Miss Francie?"

"Now ye have it," said Mary Holloran.

Norry clasped her hands, poker and all, and raised them in front of her face, while her eyes apparently communed with a familiar spirit at the other end of the kitchen. They puzzled Mary Holloran, who fancied she discerned in them a wild and quite irrelevant amusement, but before further opinions could be interchanged, a dragging step was heard at the back door, a fumbling hand lifted the latch, and Billy Grainy came in with the post-bag over his shoulder and an empty milk-can in his hand.

"Musha, more power to ye, Billy!" said Mary Holloran, concealing her disgust at the interruption with laudable good breeding, and making a grimace of lightning quickness at Norry, expressive of the secrecy that was to be observed; "'tis you're the grand post-boy!"

"Och thin I am," mumbled Billy sarcastically, as he let the post-bag slip from his shoulders to the table,

"divil a boot nor a leg is left on me with the thravelling!" He hobbled over to the fireplace, and, taking the teapot off the range, looked into it suspiciously. "This is a quare time o' day for a man to be atin' his breakfast! Divil dom the bit I'd ate in this house agin' if it wasn't for the nathure I have for the place—"

Norry banged open a cupboard, and took from it a mug with some milk in it, and a yellow pie-dish, in which were several stale ends of loaves.

"Take it or lave it afther ye!" she said, putting them down on the table. "If ye had nathure for risin' airly out o' yer bed the tay wouldn't be waitin' on ye this way, an' if ourselves can't plaze ye, ye can go look for thim that will. 'Thim that's onaisy let thim quit!'" Norry cared little whether Billy Grainy was too deaf to take in this retort or no. Mary Holloran and her own self-respect were alike gratified, and taking up the post-bag she proceeded with it to the dining-room.

"Well, Norry," said Charlotte jocularly, looking round from the bookshelf that she was tidying, "is it only now that old thief's brought the post? or have ye been flirting with him in the kitchen all this time?"

Norry retired from the room with a snarl of indescribable scorn, and Charlotte unlocked the bag and drew forth its contents. There were three letters for her, and she laid one of them aside at once while she read the other two. One was from a resident in Ferry Lane, an epistle that began startlingly, "Honored Madman," and slanted over two sides of the note-paper in lamentable entreaties for a reduction of the rent and a little more time to pay it in. The other was an invitation from Mrs. Corkran to meet a missionary, and tossing both down with an equal contempt, she addressed herself to the remaining one. She was in the act of opening it when she caught sight of the printed name of a hotel upon its flap, and she suddenly became motionless, her eyes staring at the name, and her face slowly reddening all over.

"Bray!" she said between her teeth, "what takes him to Bray, when he told me to write to him to the Shelbourne?"

She opened the letter, a long and very neatly written one, so neat, in fact, as to give o a person who knew Mr. Lambert's handwriting in all its phases the idea of very unusual care and a rough copy.

"My dear Charlotte," it began, "I know you will

be surprised at the news I have to tell you in this letter, and so will many others; indeed I am almost surprised at it myself." Charlotte's left hand groped backwards till it caught the back of a chair and held on to it, but her eyes still flew along the lines. "You are my oldest and best friend, and so you are the first I would like to tell about it, and I would value your good wishes far beyond any others that might be offered to me, especially as I hope you will soon be my relation as well as my friend. I am engaged to Francie Fitzpatrick, and we are to be married as soon as possible."

The reader sat heavily down upon the chair behind her, her colour fading from red to a dirty yellow as she read on. "I am aware that many will say that I am not showing proper respect towards poor dear Lucy in doing this, but you, or any one that knew her well, will support me in saying that I never was wanting in that to her when she was alive, and that she would be the last to wish I should live a lonely and miserable life now that she is gone. It is a great pleasure to me to think that she always had such a liking for Francie, for her own sake as well as because she was your cousin. It was my intention to have put off the marriage for a year, but I heard a couple

of days ago from Robert Fitzpatrick that the investment that Francie's little fortune had been put into was in a very shaky state, and that there is no present chance of dividends from it. He offered to let her live with them as usual, but they have not enough to support themselves. Francie was half starved there, and it is no place for her to be, and so we have arranged to be married very quietly down here at Bray, on the twentieth—just a week from to-day. I will take her to London, or perhaps a little farther for a week or so, and about the first or second week in April I hope to be back in Rosemount. I know my dear Charlotte, my dear old friend, that this must appear a sudden and hasty step, but I have considered it well and thoroughly. I know too that when Francie left your house there was some trifling little quarrel between you, but I trust that you will forget all about that, and that you will be the first to welcome her when she returns to her new home. She begs me to say that she is sorry for anything she said to annoy you, and would write to you if she thought you would like to hear from her. I hope you will be as good a friend to her as you have always been to me, and will be ready to help and advise her in her new position. I would be greatly obliged to you if you would let the

Lismoyle people know of my marriage, and of the reasons that I have told you for hurrying it on this way ; you know yourself how glad they always are to get hold of the wrong end of a story. I am going to write to Lady Dysart myself. Now, my dear Charlotte, I must close this letter. The above will be my address for a week, and I will be very anxious to hear from you. With much love from Francie and myself, I remain your attached friend,

"RODERICK LAMBERT."

A human soul when it has broken away from its diviner part, and is left to the anarchy of the lower passions, is a poor and humiliating spectacle, and it is unfortunate that in its animal want of self-control it is seldom without a ludicrous aspect. The weak side of Charlotte's nature was her ready abandonment of herself to fury that was, as often as not, wholly incompatible with its cause, and now that she had been dealt the hardest blow that life could give her, there were a few minutes in which rage, and hatred, and thwarted passion took her in their fierce hands, and made her, for the time, a wild beast. When she came to herself she was standing by the chimney-piece, panting and trembling ; the letter lay in pieces on the

rug, torn by her teeth, and stamped here and there with the semicircle of her heel ; a chair was lying on its side on the floor, and Mrs. Bruff was crouching aghast under the sideboard, looking out at her mistress with terrified inquiry.

Charlotte raised her hand and drew it across her mouth with the unsteadiness of a person in physical pain, then, grasping the edge of the chimney-piece, she laid her forehead upon it and drew a few long shuddering breaths. It is probable that if anyone had then come into the room, the human presence, with its mysterious electric quality, would have drawn the storm outwards in a burst of hysterics ; but solitude seems to be a non-conductor, and a parched sob, that was strangled in its birth by an imprecation, was the only sound that escaped from her. As she lifted her head again her eyes met those of a large cabinet photograph of Lambert that stared brilliantly at her with the handsome fatuity conferred by an over-touched negative. It was a recent one, taken during one of those recent visits to Dublin whose object had been always so plausibly explained to her, and, as she looked at it, the biting thought of how she had been hoodwinked and fooled, by a man to whom she had all her life laid down the law, drove her half mad

again. She plucked it out of its frame with her strong fingers, and thrust it hard down into the smouldering fire.

"If it was hell I'd do the same for you!" she said, with a moan like some furious feline creature, as she watched the picture writhe in the heat, "and for her too!" She took up the poker, and with it drove and battered the photograph into the heart of the fire, and then, flinging down the poker with a crash that made Louisa jump as she crossed the hall, she sat down at the dinner-table and made her first effort at self-control.

"His old friend!" she said, gasping and choking over the words; "the cur, the double-dyed cur! Lying and cringing to me, and borrowing my money, and—and—"—even to herself she could not now admit that he had gulled her into believing that he would eventually marry her—"and sneaking after her behind my back all the time! And now he sends me her love—her love! Oh, my God Almighty—" she tried to laugh, but instead of laughter came tears, as she saw herself helpless, and broken, and aimless for the rest of her life—"I won't break down—I won't break down—" she said, grinding her teeth together with the effort to repress her sobs. She staggered

blindly to the sideboard, and, unlocking it, took out a bottle of brandy. She put the bottle to her mouth and took a long gulp from it, while the tears ran down her face.

CHAPTER XL.

SOMETIMES there comes in Paris towards the beginning of April a week or two of such weather as is rarely seen in England before the end of May. The horse-chestnut buds break in vivid green against the sober blue of the sky, there is a warmth about the pavements that suggests the coming blaze of summer, the gutter-rivulets and the fountains sparkle with an equal gaiety, and people begin to have their coffee out of doors again. The spring, that on the day Francie was married at Bray, was still mainly indicated by east wind and fresh mackerel, was burgeoning in the woods at Versailles with a hundred delicate surprises of blossom and leaf and thick white storm of buds, and tourists were being forced, like asparagus, by the fine weather, and began to appear in occasional twos and threes on the wide square in front of the palace. A remnant of the winter quiet still hung over everything, and a score or two of human beings, dispersed through the endless rooms and gardens, only

made more emphatic the greatness of the extent, and of the solitude. They certainly did not bring much custom to the little woman who had been beguiled by the fine weather to set up her table of cakes and oranges in a sunny angle of the palace wall, and sat by it all day, picturesque and patient in her white cap, while her strip of embroidery lengthened apace in the almost unbroken leisure. Even the first Sunday of April, from which she had hoped great things, brought her, during many bland and dazzling hours, nothing except the purchase of a few sous worth of sweets, and the afternoon was well advanced before she effected a sale of any importance. A tall gentleman, evidently a Monsieur Anglais, was wandering about, and she called to him to tell him of the excellence of her *brioches* and the beauty of her oranges. Ordinarily she had not found that English gentlemen were attracted by her wares, but there was something helpless about this one that gave her confidence. He came up to her table and inspected its dainties with bewildered disfavour, while a comfortable clink of silver came from the pocket in which one hand was fumbling.

"Pain d'épices! Des gâteaux! Ver' goot, ver' sveet!" she said encouragingly, bringing forth her

entire English vocabulary with her most winning smile.

"I wish to goodness I knew what the beastly things are made of," the Englishman murmured to himself. 'I can't go wrong with oranges anyhow. Er—cela, et cela s'il vous plait," producing in his turn his whole stock of French, "*combieng*." He had only indicated two oranges, but the little woman had caught the anxious glance at her cakes, and without more ado chose out six of the most highly-glazed *brioches*, and by force of will and volubility made her customer not only take them but pay her two francs for them and the oranges.

The tall Englishman strode away round the corner of the palace with these provisions, and along the great terrace towards a solitary figure sitting forlornly at the top of one of the flights of steps that drop in noble succession down to the expanses of artificial water that seem to stretch away into the heart of France.

"I couldn't find anywhere to get tea," he said as soon as he was within speaking distance; "I couldn't find anything but an old woman selling oranges, and I got you some of those, and she made me get some cakes as well—I don't know if they're fit to eat."

Mr. Lambert spoke with a very unusual timorousness, as he placed his sticky purchases in Francie's lap, and sat down on the step beside her.

"Oh, thank you awfully, Roddy, I'm sure they're lovely," she answered, looking at her husband with a smile that was less spontaneous than it used to be, and looking away again immediately.

There was something ineffably wearying to her in the adoring, proprietary gaze that she found so unfailingly fixed upon her whenever she turned her eyes towards him; it seemed to isolate her from other people and set her upon a ridiculous pedestal, with one foolish worshipper declaiming his devotion with the fervour and fatuity of those who for two hours shouted the praises of Diana of the Ephesians. The supernatural mist that blurs the irksome and the ludicrous till it seems like a glory was not before her eyes; every outline was clear to her, with the painful distinctness of a caricature.

"I don't think you could eat the oranges here," he said, "they'd be down on us for throwing the skins about. Are you too tired to come on down into the gardens where they wouldn't spot us?" He laid his hand on hers, "You *are* tired. What fools we were to go walking round all those infernal

rooms! Why didn't you say you'd had enough of it?"

Francie was aching with fatigue from walking slowly over leagues of polished floor, with her head thrown back in perpetual perfunctory admiration of gilded ceilings and battle pictures, but she got up at once, as much to escape from the heavy warmth of his hand as from the mental languor that made discussion an effort. They went together down the steps, too much jaded by uncomprehended sight-seeing to take heed of the supreme expression of art in nature that stretched out before them in mirrors of Triton and dolphin-guarded water, and ordered masses of woodland, and walked slowly along a terrace till they came to another flight of steps that fell suddenly from the stately splendours of the terraces down to the simplicities of a path leading into a grove of trees.

The path wound temptingly on into the wood, with primroses and celandine growing cool and fresh in the young grass on either side of it; the shady greenness was like the music of stringed instruments after the brazen heroics of a military band. They loitered along, and Francie slipped her hand into Lambert's arm, feeling, unconsciously, a little more in sympathy

with him, and more at ease with life. She had never pretended either to him or to herself that she was in love with him; her engagement had been the inevitable result of poverty, and aimlessness, and bitterness of soul, but her instinctive leniency towards any man who liked her, joined with her old friendliness for Mr. Lambert, made it as easy a way out of her difficulties as any she could have chosen. There was something flattering in the knowledge of her power over a man whom she had been accustomed to look up to, and something, too, that appealed incessantly to her good nature; besides which there is to nearly every human being some comfort in being the first object of another creature's life. She was almost fond of him as she walked beside him, glad to rest her weight on his arm, and to feel how big and reliable he was. There was nothing in the least romantic about having married him, but it was eminently creditable. Her friends in the north side of Dublin had been immensely impressed by it, and she knew enough of Lismoyle society to be aware that there also she would be regarded with gratifying envy. She quite looked forward to meeting Hawkins again, that she might treat him with the cool and assured patronage proper to the heights of her new position; he had himself seared

the wound that he had given her, and now she felt that she was thankful to him.

"Hang this path! it has as many turns as a corkscrew," remarked Mr. Lambert, bending his head to avoid a downstretched branch of hawthorn, covered with baby leaves and giant thorns. "I thought we'd have come to a seat long before this; if it was Stephen's Green there'd have been twenty by this time."

"There would, and twenty old men sitting on each of them!" retorted Francie. "Mercy! who's that hiding behind the tree? Oh, I declare, it's only one of those everlasting old statues, and look at a lot more of them! I wonder if it was that they hadn't room enough for them up in the house that they put them out here in the woods?"

They had come to an enclosed green space in the wood, a daisy-starred oval of grass, holding the spring sunshine in serene remoteness from all the outer world of terraces and gardens, and made mysterious and poetical as a vale in Ida by the strange pale presences that peopled every nook of an ivy-grown crag at its further side. A clear pool reflected them, but waveringly, because of the ripples caused by a light drip from the overhanging rock; the trees towered on the encircling high ground and made a wall of silence

round the intenser silences of the statues as they leaned and postured in a trance of suspended activity; the only sound was the monotone of the falling water, dropping with a cloistered gravity in the melodious hollow of the cave.

"I'm not going to walk another foot," said Francie, sitting down on the grass by the water's edge; "here, give me the oranges, Roddy, no one'll catch us eating them here, and we can peg the skins at that old thing with its clothes dropping off and the harp in its hand."

It was thus that Mrs. Lambert described an Apollo with a lyre who was regarding them from the opposite rock with classic preoccupation. Lambert lighted a cigar, and leaning back on his elbow in the grass, watched Francie's progress through her inelegant meal with the pride of the provider. He looked at her half wonderingly, she was so lovely in his eyes, and she was so incredibly his own; he felt a sudden insanity of tenderness for her that made his heart throb and his cheek redden and would have ennobled him to the pitch of dying for her on the spot, had such an extravagance been demanded of him. He longed to put his arms round her, and tell her how dear, how adorable, how entirely delightful she was, but he knew that she would probably only laugh at him in that

maddening way of hers, or at all events, make him feel that she was far less interested in the declaration than he was. He gave a quick sigh, and stretching out his hand laid it on her shoulder as if to assure himself of his ownership of her.

"That dress fits you awfully well. I like you better in that than in anything."

"Then I'd better take care and not get the juice on it," Francie replied, with her mouth full of orange; "lend me a loan of your handkerchief."

Lambert removed a bundle of letters and a guide-book from his pocket, and finally produced the handkerchief.

"Why, you've a letter there from Charlotte, haven't you?" said Francie, with more interest than she had yet shown, "I didn't know you had heard again from her."

"Yes, I did," said Lambert, putting the letters back in his pocket, "I wish to goodness we hadn't left our address at the Charing Cross Hotel. People might let a man alone when he's on his honeymoon."

"What did she say?" inquired Francie lightly. "Is she cross? The other one she wrote was as sweet as syrup, and 'Love to dear Francie' and all."

"Oh, no, not a bit," said Mr. Lambert, who had

been secretly surprised and even slightly wounded by the fortitude with which Miss Mullen had borne the intelligence of his second marriage, "but she's complaining that my colts have eaten her best white petticoat."

"You may give her one of my new ones," suggested Francie.

"Oh yes, she'd like that, wouldn't she?" said Lambert with a chuckle; "she's so fond of you, y'know!"

"Oh, she's quite friendly with me now, though I know you're dying to make out that she'll not forgive me for marrying you," said Francie, flinging her last bit of orange-peel at the Apollo; "you're as proud as Punch about it. I believe you'd have married her, only she wouldn't take you!"

"Is that your opinion?" said Mr. Lambert with a smile that conveyed a magnanimous reticence as to the facts of the case; "you're beginning to be jealous, are you? I think I'd better leave you at home the day I go over to talk the old girl into good humour about her petticoat!"

In his heart Mr. Lambert was less comfortable than the tone of his voice might have implied; there had been in the letter, in spite of its friendliness and

singular absence of feminine pique, an allusion to that three hundred pounds that circumstances had forced him to accept from her. His honeymoon, and those new clothes that Francie had bought in London, had run away with no end of money, and it would be infernally inconvenient if Charlotte was going, just at this time of all others, to come down on him for money that he had never asked her for. He turned these things over uncomfortably in his mind as he lay back on the grass, looking up at Francie's profile, dark against the soft blue of the sky; and even while he took one of her hands and drew it down to his lips he was saying to himself that he had never yet failed to come round Charlotte when he tried, and it would not be for want of trying if he failed now.

The shadows of the trees began to stretch long fingers across the grass of the Bosquet d'Apollon, and Lambert looked at his watch and began to think of *table d'hôte* at the Louvre Hotel. Pleasant, paradisaically pleasant as it was here in the sun, with Francie's hand in his, and one of his best cigars in his mouth, he had come to the age at which not even Paradise would be enjoyable without a regular dinner hour.

Francie felt chilly and exhausted as they

walked back and climbed the innumerable flights of steps that lay between them and the Palace; she privately thought that Versailles would be a horrible place to live in, and not to be compared in any way to Bruff, but, at all events, it would be a great thing to say she had been there, and she could read up all the history part of it in the guide book when she got back to the hotel. They were to go up the Eiffel tower the next day; that would be some fun, anyhow, and to the Hippodrome in the evening, and, though that wouldn't be as good as Hengler's circus, the elephants and horses and things wouldn't be talking French and expecting her to answer them, like the housemaids and shopmen. It was a rest to lean back in the narrow carriage, with the pair of starveling ponies, that rattled along with as much whip-cracking and general pomp as if it were doing ten miles an hour instead of four, and to watch the poplars and villas pass by in placid succession, delightfully devoid of historical interest.

It was getting dark when they reached Paris, and the breeze had become rough and cold. The lamps were shining among the trees on the Boulevards, and the red and green eyes of the cabs and trams crossed and recrossed each other like a tangle of fire-flies.

The electric lights of the Place du Louvre were at length in sight, lofty and pale, like globes of imprisoned daylight above the mundane flare of the gas, and Francie's eyes turned towards them with a languid relief. Her old gift of living every moment of her day seemed gone, and here, in this wonderful Paris, that had so suddenly acquired a real instead of a merely geographical existence for her, the stream of foreign life was passing by her, and leaving her face as uninterested and wearied as it ever had been when she looked out of the window at Albatross Villa at the messenger boys and bakers' carts. The street was crowded, and the carriage made slower and slower way through it, till it became finally wedged in the centre of a block. Lambert stood up, and entered upon a one-sided argument with the driver as to how to get out, while Francie remained silent, and indifferent to the situation. A piano-organ at a little distance from them was playing the Boulanger March, with the brilliancy of its tribe, its unfaltering vigour dominating all other sounds. It was a piece of music in which Francie had herself a certain proficiency, and, shutting her eyes with a pang of remembrance, she was back in the Tally Ho drawing-room, strumming it on Charlotte's piano, while Mr. Hawkins,

holding the indignant Mrs. Bruff on his lap, forced her unwilling paws to thump a bass. Now the difficult part, in which she always broke down, was being played ; he had pretended there that he was her music teacher, and had counted out loud, and rapped her over the knuckles with a tea-spoon, and gone on with all kinds of nonsense. The carriage started forward again with a jerk, and Lambert dropped back into his place beside her.

"Of all the asses unhung these French fellows are the biggest," he said fervently, "and that infernal organ banging away the whole time till I couldn't hear my own voice, much less his jabber. Here we are at last, anyhow, and you've got to get out before me."

The tears had sprung overwhelmingly to her eyes, and she could not answer a word. She turned her back on her husband, and stepping out of the carriage she walked unsteadily across the courtyard in the white glare of the electric light, leaving the hotel servant, who had offered his arm at the carriage door, to draw what conclusions seemed good to him from the spectacle of her wet cheeks and trembling lips. She made for the broad flight of steps, and went blindly up them under the drooping fans of the

palms, into the reading-room on the first floor. The piano-organ was still audible outside, reiterating to madness the tune that had torn open her past, and she made a hard effort to forget its associations and recover herself, catching up an illustrated paper to hide her face from the people in the room. It was a minute or two before Lambert followed her.

"Here's a go!" he said, coming towards her with a green envelope in his hand, "here's a wire to say that Sir Benjamin's dead, and they want me back at once."

CHAPTER XLI.

THE morning after Lambert received the telegram announcing Sir Benjamin's death, he despatched one to Miss Charlotte Mullen at Gurthnamuckla in which he asked her to notify his immediate return to his household at Rosemount. He had always been in the habit of relying on her help in small as well as great occasions, and now that he had had that unexpectedly civil letter from her, he had turned to her at once without giving the matter much consideration. It was never safe to trust to a servant's interpretation of the cramped language of a telegram, and moreover, in his self-sufficient belief in his own knowledge of women, he thought that it would flatter her and keep her in good humour if he asked her to give directions to his household. He would have been less confident of his own sagacity had he seen the set of Miss Mullen's jaw as she read the message, and heard the laugh which she permitted to herself as soon as Louisa had left the room.

"It's a pity he didn't hire me to be his major-domo

as well as his steward and stud-groom!" she said to herself, "and his financier into the bargain! I declare I don't know what he'd do without me!"

The higher and more subtle side of Miss Mullen's nature had exacted of the quivering savage that had been awakened by Lambert's second marriage that the answer to his letter should be of a conventional and non-committing kind; and so, when her brain was still on fire with hatred and invective, her facile pen glided pleasantly over the paper in stale felicitations and stereotyped badinage. It is hard to ask pity for Charlotte, whose many evil qualities have without pity been set down, but the seal of ignoble tragedy had been set on her life; she had not asked for love, but it had come to her, twisted to burlesque by the malign hand of fate. There is pathos as well as humiliation in the thought that such a thing as a soul can be stunted by the trivialities of personal appearance, and it is a fact not beyond the reach of sympathy that each time Charlotte stood before her glass her ugliness spoke to her of failure, and goaded her to revenge.

It was a wet morning, but at half-past eleven o'clock the black horse was put into the phaeton, and Miss Mullen, attired in a shabby mackintosh, set out on

her mission to Rosemount. A cold north wind drove the rain in her face as she flogged the old horse along through the shelterless desolation of rock and scrub, and in spite of her mackintosh she felt wet and chilled by the time she reached the Rosemount yard. She went into the kitchen by the back door, and delivered her message to Eliza Hackett, whom she found sitting in elegant leisure, retrimming a bonnet that had belonged to the late Mrs. Lambert.

"And is it the day after to-morrow, miss, please?" demanded Eliza Hackett with cold resignation.

"It is, me poor woman, it is," replied Charlotte, in the tone of facetious intimacy that she reserved for other people's servants. "You'll have to stir your stumps to get the house ready for them."

"The house is cleaned down and ready for them as soon as they like to walk into it," replied Eliza Hackett with dignity, "and if the new lady faults the drawing-room chimbley for not being swep, the master will know it's not me that's to blame for it, but the sweep that's gone dhrilling with the Mileetia."

"Oh, she's not the one to find fault with a man for being a soldier any more than yourself, Eliza!" said Charlotte, who had pulled off her wet gloves and was warming her hands. "Ugh! How cold it is! Is

there any place upstairs where I could sit while you were drying my things for me?"

The thought had occurred to her that it would not be uninteresting to look round the house, and as it transpired that fires were burning in the dining-room and in Mr. Lambert's study she left her wet cloak and hat in the kitchen and ascended to the upper regions. She glanced into the drawing-room as she passed its open door, and saw the blue rep chairs ranged in a solemn circle, gazing with all their button eyes at a three-legged table in the centre of the room; the blinds were drawn down, and the piano was covered with a sheet; it was altogether as inexpressive of everything, except bad taste, as was possible. Charlotte passed on to the dining-room and stationed herself in front of an indifferent fire there, standing with her back to the chimney-piece and her eyes roving about in search of entertainment. Nothing was changed, except that the poor turkey-hen's medicine bottles and pill boxes no longer lurked behind the chimney-piece ornaments; the bare dinner-table suggested only how soon Francie would be seated at its head, and Charlotte presently prowled on to Mr. Lambert's study at the end of the passage, to look for a better fire, and a room less barren of incident.

The study grate did not fail of its reputation of being the best in the house, and Mr. Lambert's chair stood by the hearthrug in wide-armed invitation to the visitor. Charlotte sat down in it and slowly warmed one foot after the other, while the pain rose hot and unconquerable in her heart. The whole room was so gallingly familiar, so inseparably connected with the time when she had still a future, vague and improbable as it was, and could live in sufficient content on its slight sustenance. Another future had now to be constructed, she had already traced out some lines of it, and in the perfecting of these she would henceforward find the cure for what she was now suffering. She roused herself, and glancing towards the table saw that on it lay a heap of unopened newspapers and letters; she got up with alacrity, and addressed herself to the congenial task of examining each letter in succession.

"H'm! They're of a very bilious complexion," she said to herself. "There's one from Langford," turning it over and looking at the name on the back. "I wonder if he's ordering a Victoria for her ladyship. I wouldn't put it past him. Perhaps he'd like me to tell her whose money it was paid Langford's bill last year!"

She fingered the letter longingly, then, taking a hair-pin from the heavy coils of her hair, she inserted it under the flap of the envelope. Under her skilful manipulation it opened easily, and without tearing, and she took out its contents. They consisted of a short but severe letter from the head of the firm, asking for "a speedy settlement of this account, now so long overdue," and of the account in question. It was a bill of formidable amount, from which Charlotte soon gathered the fact that twenty pounds only of the money she had lent Lambert last May had found its way into the pockets of the coachbuilder. She replaced the bill and letter in the envelope, and, after a minute of consideration, took up for the second time two large and heavy letters that she had thrown aside when first looking through the heap. They had the stamp of the Lismoyle bank upon them, and obviously contained bank books. Charlotte saw at a glance that the hair-pin would be of no avail with these envelopes, and after another pause for deliberation she replaced all the letters in their original position, and went down the passage to the top of the kitchen stairs.

"Eliza," she called out, "have ye a kettle boiling down there? Ah, that's right—" as Eliza answered

in the affirmative. "I never knew a well kept kitchen yet without boiling water in it! I'm chilled to me bones, Eliza," she continued, "I wonder could you put your hand on a drop of spirits anywhere, and I'd ask ye for a drop of hot grog to keep the life in me, and"—as Eliza started with hospitable speed in search of the materials,—"let me mix it meself, like a good woman; I know very well I'd be in the lock-up before night if I drank what *you'd* brew for me!"

Retiring on this jest, Miss Mullen returned to the study, and was sitting over the fire with a newspaper when the refreshment she had asked for was brought in.

"I cut ye a sandwich to eat with it, miss," said Eliza Hackett, on whom Charlotte's generosity in the matter of Mrs. Lambert's clothing had not been thrown away; "I know meself that as much as the smell itself o' sperrits would curdle under me nose, takin' them on an empty stomach. Though, indeed, if ye walked Lismoyle ye'd get no better brandy than what's in that little bottle. 'Tis out o' the poor mistress's medicine chest I got it. Well, well, she's where she won't want brandy now!"

Eliza withdrew with a well-ordered sigh, that, as Charlotte knew, was expressive of future as well as

past regret, and Mr. Lambert's "oldest friend" was left in sole possession of his study. She first proceeded to mix herself a tumbler of brandy and water, and then she lifted the lid of the brass punch kettle, and taking one of the envelopes that contained the bank books she held it in the steam till the gum of the flap melted. The book in it was Lambert's private banking account, and Charlotte studied it for some time with greedy interest, comparing the amounts of the drafts and cash payments with the dates against each. Then she opened the other envelope, keeping a newspaper ready at hand to throw over the books in case of interruption, and found, as she had anticipated, that it was the bank book of the Dysart estate. After this she settled down to hard work for half an hour, comparing one book with another, making lists of figures, sipping her brandy and water meanwhile, and munching Eliza Hackett's sandwiches. Having learned what she could of the bank books, she fastened them up in their envelopes, and, again having recourse to the kettle that was simmering on the hob, she made, with slow, unslaked avidity, an examination of some of the other letters on the table. When everything was tidy again she leaned back in the chair, and remained in deep meditation over her paper of figures,

until the dining-room clock sent a muffled reminder through the wall that it was two o'clock.

Ferry Row had, since Charlotte's change of residence, breathed a freer air. Even her heavy washing was now done at home, and her visits to her tenantry might be looked forward to only when rents were known to be due. There was nothing that they expected less than that, on this wet afternoon, so soon, too, after a satisfactory quarter day, they should hear the well-known rattle of the old phaeton, and see Miss Mullen, in her equally well-known hat and waterproof, driving slowly past house after house, until she arrived at the disreputable abode of Dinny Lydon, the tailor. Having turned the cushions of the phaeton upside down to keep them dry, Miss Mullen knocked at the door, and was admitted by Mrs. Lydon, a very dirty woman, with a half-finished waistcoat over her arm.

"Oh, ye're welcome, Miss Mullen, ye're welcome! Come in out o' the rain, asthore," she said, with a manner as greasy as her face. "Himself have the coat waitin' on ye these three days to thry on."

"Then I'm afraid the change for death must be on Dinny if he's beginning to keep his promises," replied Charlotte, adventuring herself fearlessly into the dark

interior. "I'd be thrown out in all me calculations, Dinny, if ye give up telling me lies."

This was addressed through a reeking fog of tobacco smoke to a half-deformed figure seated on a table by the window.

"Oh, with the help o' God I'll tell yer honour a few lies yet before I die," replied Dinny Lydon, removing his pipe and the hat which, for reasons best known to himself, he wore while at work, and turning on Charlotte a face that, no less than his name, told of Spanish, if not Jewish blood.

"Well, that's the truth, anyway," said Charlotte, with a friendly laugh; "but I won't believe in the coat being ready till I see it. Didn't ye lose your apprentice since I saw ye?"

"Is it that young gobsther?" rejoined Mrs. Lydon acridly, as she tendered her unsavoury assistance to Charlotte in the removal of her waterproof; "if that one was in the house yer coat wouldn't be finished in a twelvemonth with all the time Dinny lost cursing him. Faith! it was last week he hysted his sails and away with him. Mind ye, 'twas he was the first-class puppy!"

"Was it the trade he didn't like?" asked Charlotte; "or was it the skelpings he got from Dinny?"

"Throth, it was not, but two plates in the sate of his breeches was what he faulted, and the divil mend him!"

"Two plates!" exclaimed Charlotte, in not unnatural bewilderment; "what in the name of fortune was he doing with them?"

"Well, indeed, Miss Mullen, with respex t'ye, when he came here he hadn't as much rags on him as'd wipe a candlestick," replied Mrs. Lydon, with fluent spitefulness; "yerself knows that ourselves has to be losing with puttin' clothes on thim apprentices, an' feedin' them as lavish and as natty as ye'd feed a young bonnuf, an' afther all they'd turn about an' say they never got so much as the wettin' of their mouths of male nor tay nor praties—" Mrs. Lydon replenished her lungs with a long breath,—"and this lad the biggest dandy of them all, that wouldn't be contint without Dinny'd cut the brea'th of two fingers out of a lovely throusers that was a little sign bulky on him and was gethered into nate plates—"

"Oh, it's well known beggars can't bear heat," said Charlotte, interrupting for purposes of her own a story that threatened to expand unprofitably, "and that was always the way with all the M'Donaghs. Didn't I meet that lad's cousin, Shamus Bawn, driving a new

side-car this morning, and his father only dead a week. I suppose now he's got the money he thinks he'll never get to the end of it, though indeed it isn't so long since I heard he was looking for money, and found it hard enough to get it."

Mrs. Lydon gave a laugh of polite acquiescence, and wondered inwardly whether Miss Mullen had as intimate a knowledge of everyone's affairs as she seemed to have of Shamus Bawn's.

"Oh, they say a manny a thing—" she observed with well-simulated inanity "Arrah! *dheen dheffeth*, Dinny! *thurrum cussoge um'na.*"

"Yes, hurry on and give me the coat, Dinny," said Charlotte, displaying that knowledge of Irish that always came as a shock to those who were uncertain as to its limitations.

The tailor untwisted his short legs and descended stiffly to the floor, and having helped Charlotte into the coat, pushed her into the light of the open door, and surveyed his handiwork with his large head on one side, and the bitten ends of thread still hanging on his lower lip.

"It turrned well," he said, passing his hand approvingly over Miss Mullen's thick shoulder; "afther all, the good stuff's the best; that's fine honest stuff that'll

wear forty of thim other thrash. That's the soort that'll shtand."

"To the death!" interjected Mrs. Lydon fervently.

"How many wrinkles are there in the back?" said Charlotte; "tell me the truth now, Dinny, remember 'twas only last week you were 'making your sowl' at the mission."

"Tchah!" said Dinny Lydon contemptuously, "it's little I regard the mission, but I wouldn't be bothered tellin' ye lies about the likes o' this," surreptitiously smoothing as he spoke a series of ridges above the hips; "that's a grand clane back as ever I see."

"How independent he is about his missions!" said Charlotte jibingly. "Ha! Dinny me man, if you were sick you'd be the first to be roaring for the priest!"

"Faith, divil a roar," returned the atheistical Dinny; "if I couldn't knock the stone out of the gap for meself, the priest couldn't do it for me."

"Oh, Gaad! Dinny, have conduct before Miss Mullen!" cried Mrs. Lydon.

"He may say what he likes, if he wouldn't drop candle grease on my jacket," said Charlotte, who had taken off the coat and was critically examining every seam; "or, indeed, Mrs. Lydon, I believe it was yourself did it!" she exclaimed, suddenly intercepting an in-

describable glance of admonition from Mrs. Dinny to her husband; "that's wax candle grease! I believe you wore it yourself at Michael M'Donagh's wake, and that's why it was finished four days ago."

Mrs. Lydon uttered a shriek of merriment at the absurdity of the suggestion, and then fell to disclaimers so voluble as at once to convince Miss Mullen of her guilt. The accusation was not pressed home, and Dinny's undertaking to remove the grease with a hot iron was accepted with surprising amiability. Charlotte sat down on a chair whose shattered frame bore testimony to the renowned violence of Mrs. Lydon when under the influence of liquor, and encouraging the singed and half-starved cat on to her lap, she addressed herself to conversation.

"Wasn't Michael M'Donagh husband to your mother's cousin?" she said to the tailor; "I'm told he had a very large funeral."

"He had that," answered Dinny, pushing the black hair back from his high forehead, and looking more than ever like a Jewish rabbi; "three priests, an' five an' twenty cars, an' fifteen pounds of althar money."

"Well, the three priests have a right to pray their big best for him, with five pounds apiece in their pockets," remarked Charlotte; "I suppose it was the

M'Donagh side gave the most of the altar. Those brothers of old Michael's are all stinking of money."

"Oh, they're middlin' snug," said Dinny, who had just enough family feeling for the M'Donaghs to make him chary of admitting their wealth; "annyway, they're able to slap down their five shillins or their ten shillin' bit upon the althar as well as another."

"Who got the land?" asked Charlotte, stroking the cat's filthy head, and thereby perfuming her fingers with salt fish.

"Oh, how do I know what turning and twisting of keys there was in it afther himself dyin'?" said the tailor, with the caution which his hearers understood to be a fatiguing but inevitable convention; "they say the daughter got the biggest half, an' Shamus Bawn got the other. There's where the battle'll be between them." He laughed sardonically, as he held up the hot iron and spat upon it to ascertain its heat.

"He'd better let his sister alone," said Charlotte. "Shamus Bawn has more land this minute than he has money enough to stock, with that farm he got from Mr. Lambert the other day, without trying to get more."

"Oh, Jim's not so poor altogether that he couldn't bring the law on her if he'd like," said Dinny, immediately resenting the slighting tone; "he got a good lump of a fortune with the wife."

"Ah, what's fifty pounds!" said Charlotte scornfully. "I daresay he wanted every penny of it to pay the fine on Knocklara."

"Arrah, fifty pounds! God help ye!" exclaimed Dinny Lydon with superior scorn. "No, but a hundhred an' eighty was what he put down on the table to Lambert for it, and it's little but he had to give the two hundhred itself."

Mrs. Lydon looked up from the hearth where she was squatted, fanning the fire with her red petticoat to heat another iron for her husband. "Sure I know Dinny's safe tellin' it to a lady," she said, rolling her dissolute cunning eye from her husband to Miss Mullen; "but ye'll not spake of it asthore. Jimmy had some dhrink taken when he shown Dinny the docket, because Lambert said he wouldn't give the farm so chape to e'er a one but Jimmy, an' indeed Jimmy'd break every bone in our body if he got the wind of a word that 'twas through us the neighbours had it to say he had that much money with him. Jimmy's very close in himself that way."

Charlotte laughed good-humouredly. "Oh, there's no fear of me, Mrs. Lydon. It's no affair of mine either way," she said reassuringly. "Here, hurry with me jacket, Dinny, I'll be glad enough to have it on me going home."

CHAPTER XLII.

SIR BENJAMIN DYSART'S funeral was an event of the past. It was a full three weeks since the family vault in Lismoyle Churchyard had closed its door upon that ornament of county society; Lady Dysart's friends were beginning to recover from the strain of writing letters of condolence to her on her bereavement, and Christopher, after sacrificing to his departed parent's memory a week of perfect sailing weather, had had his boat painted, and had relapsed into his normal habit of spending as much of his time as was convenient on the lake.

There was still the mingled collapse and stir in the air that comes between the end of an old regime and the beginning of a new. Christopher had resigned his appointment at Copenhagen, feeling that his life would, for the future, be vaguely filled with new duties and occupations, but he had not as yet discovered anything very novel to do beyond signing his name a good many times, and trying to become accustomed

to hearing himself called Sir Christopher; occupations that seemed rather elementary in the construction of a career. His want of initiative energy in every-day matters kept him motionless and apathetic, waiting for his new atmosphere to make itself palpable to him, and prepared to resign himself to its conditions. He even, in his unquenchable self-consciousness, knew that it would be wholesome for him if these were such as he least liked; but, in the meantime, he remained passively unsettled, and a letter from Lord Castlemore, in which his tact and conscientiousness as a secretary were fully set forth, roused no outside ambition in him. He re-read it on a shimmering May morning, with one arm hanging over the tiller of his boat, as she crept with scarcely breathing sails through the pale streaks of calm that lay like dreams upon the lake. He was close under the woods of Bruff, close enough to feel how still and busy they were in the industry of spring. It seemed to him that the sound of the insects was like the humming of her loom, and almost mechanically he turned over the envelope of Lord Castlemore's letter, and began in the old familiar way to scrawl a line or two on the back of it.

The well-known crest, however, disconcerted his fancy, and he fell again to ruminating upon the letter

itself. If this expressed the sum of his abilities, diplomatic life was certainly not worth living. Tact and conscientiousness were qualities that would grace the discharge of a doctor's butler, and might be expected from anyone of the most ordinary intelligence. He could not think that his services to his country, as concentrated in Lord Castlemore, were at all remarkable; they had given him far less trouble than the most worthless of those efforts in prose and verse, that, as he thought contemptuously, were like the skeletons that mark the desert course of a caravan; he did not feel the difficulty, and he, therefore, thought the achievement small. A toying breeze fluttered the letter in his hand, and the boat tilted languidly in recognition of it. The water began to murmur about the keel, and Christopher presently found himself gliding smoothly towards the middle of the lake.

He looked across at Lismoyle, spreading placidly along the margin of the water, and as he felt the heat of the sun and the half-forgotten largeness of summer in the air, he could have believed himself back in the August of last year, and he turned his eyes to the trees of Rosemount as if the sight of them would bring disillusionment. It was some time now since he had first been made ashamed of the discovery that disillu-

sionment also meant relief. For some months he had clung to his dream; at first helplessly, with a sore heart, afterwards with a more conscious taking hold, as of something gained, that made life darker, but for ever richer. It had been torture to drive away from Tally Ho with the knowledge that Hawkins was preferred to him, torture of the most simple, unbearable kind; but sentiment had deftly usurped the place of his blind suffering, and that stage came that is almost inevitable with poetic natures, when the artistic sense can analyse sorrow, and sees the beauty of defeat. Then he had heard that Francie was going to marry Lambert, and the news had done more in one moment to disillusion him than common sense could do in years. The thought stung him with a kind of horror for her that she could tolerate such a fate as marrying Roddy Lambert. He knew nothing of the tyrannies of circumstance. To prosperous young men like Christopher, poverty, except barefooted and in rags, is a name, and unpaid bills a joke. That Albatross Villa could have driven her to the tremendous surrender of marriage was a thing incredible. All that was left for him to believe was that he had been mistaken, and that the lucent quality that he thought he had found in her soul had existed only in his imagina-

tion. Now when he thought of her face it was with a curious half-regret that so beautiful a thing should no longer have any power to move him. Some sense of loss remained, but it was charged with self-pity for the loss of an ideal. Another man in Christopher's position would not probably have troubled himself about ideals, but Christopher, fortunately, or unfortunately for him, was not like other men.

The fact must even be faced that he had probably never been in love with her, according to the common acceptation of the term. His intellect exhausted his emotions and killed them with solicitude, as a child digs up a flower to see if it is growing, and his emotions themselves had a feminine refinement, but lacked the feminine quality of unreasoning pertinacity. From self-pity for the loss of an ideal to gratitude for an escape is not far to go, and all that now remained to him of bitterness was a gentle self-contempt for his own inadequacy in falling in love, as in everything else.

It may be imagined that in Lismoyle Francie was a valued and almost invariable topic of conversation. Each visitor to Rosemount went there in the character of a scout, and a detailed account of her interview was published on every possible occasion.

"Well, I took my time about calling on her," ob-

served Mrs. Baker; "I thought I'd let her see I was in no hurry."

Mrs. Corkran, with whom Mrs. Baker was having tea, felt guiltily conscious of having called on Mrs. Lambert two days after her arrival, and hastened to remind the company of the pastoral nature of the attention.

"Oh, of course we know clergymen's families can't pick their company," went on Mrs. Baker, dismissing the interruption not without a secret satisfaction that Carrie Beattie, who, in the absence of Miss Corkran, was pouring out tea for her future mother-in-law, should see that other people did not consider the Rev. Joseph such a catch as she did. "Only that Lambert's such a friend of Mr. Baker's, and always banked with him, I declare I don't know that I'd have gone at all. I assure you it gave me quite a turn to see her stuck up there in poor Lucy Lambert's chair, talking about the grand hotels that she was in, in London and Paris, as if she never swept out a room or cleaned a saucepan in her life."

"She had all the walls done round with those penny fans," struck in Miss Kathleen Baker, "and a box of French bongbongs out on the table; and oh,

mamma! did you notice the big photograph of him and her together on the chimney-piece?"

"I could notice nothing, Kathleen, and I didn't want to notice them," replied Mrs. Baker; "I could think of nothing but of what poor Lucy Lambert would say to see her husband dancing attendance on that young hussy without so much as a mourning ring on him, and her best tea-service thrashed about as if it was kitchen delft."

"Was he very devoted, Mrs. Baker?" asked Miss Beattie with a simper.

"Oh, I suppose he was," answered Mrs. Baker, as if in contempt for any sentiment inspired by Francie, "but I can't say I observed anything very particular."

"Oh, then, *I* did!" said Miss Baker with a nod of superior intelligence; "I was watching them all the time; every word she uttered he was listening to it, and when she asked for the tea-cosy he *flew* for it, and oh! the tender looks he cast at her!"

"Eliza Hackett told my Maria there was shocking waste going on in the house now; fires in the drawing-room from eight o'clock in the morning, and this the month of May!" said Mrs. Corkran with an approving eye at the cascade of cut paper that decked

her own grate, "and the cold meat given to the boy that cleans the boots!"

"Roddy Lambert'll be sorry for it some day when it's too late," said Mrs. Baker darkly, "but men are all alike; it's out of sight out of mind with them!"

"Oh, Mrs. Baker," wheezed Mrs. Corkran with asthmatic fervour, "I think you're altogether too cynical; I'm sure that's not your opinion of Mr. Baker."

"I don't know what he might do if I was dead," replied Mrs. Baker, "but I'll answer for it he'll not be carrying on with Number Two while *I'm* alive, like other people I know!"

"Oh, don't say such things before these young ladies," said Mrs. Corkran; "I wish them no greater blessing of Providence than a good husband, and I think I may say that dear Carry will find one in my Joseph." The almost death-bed solemnity of this address paralysed the conversation for a moment, and Miss Beattie concealed her blushes by going to the window to see whose was the vehicle that had just driven by.

"Oh, it's Mr. Hawkins!" she exclaimed, feeling the importance of the information.

Kathleen Baker sprang from her seat and ran to the window. "So it is!" she cried, "and I bet you sixpence he's going to Rosemount! My goodness, I wish it was to-day we had gone there!"

CHAPTER XLIII.

HAWKINS had, like Mrs. Baker, been in no hurry to call upon the bride. He had seen her twice in church, he had once met her out driving with her husband, and, lastly, he had come upon her face to face in the principal street of Lismoyle, and had received a greeting of aristocratic hauteur, as remarkable as the newly acquired English accent in which it was delivered. After these things a visit to her was unavoidable, and, in spite of a bad conscience, he felt, when he at last set out for Rosemount, an excitement that was agreeable after the calm of life at Lismoyle.

There was no one in the drawing-room when he was shown into it, and as the maid closed the door behind him he heard a quick step run through the hall and up the stairs. "Gone to put on her best bib and tucker," he said to himself with an increase of confidence; "I'll bet she saw me coming." The large photograph alluded to by Miss Baker was on the chimneypiece, and he walked over and examined it

with great interest. It obeyed the traditions of honeymoon portraits, and had the inevitable vulgarity of such; Lambert, sitting down, turned the leaves of a book, and Francie, standing behind him, rested one hand on his shoulder, while the other held a basket of flowers. In spite of its fatuity as a composition, both portraits were good, and they had moreover an air of prosperity and new clothes that Mr. Hawkins found to be almost repulsive. He studied the photograph with deepening distaste until he was aware of a footstep at the door, and braced himself for the encounter, with his heart beating uncomfortably and unexpectedly.

They shook hands with the politeness of slight acquaintance, and sat down, Hawkins thinking he had never seen her look so pretty or so smart, and wondering what he was going to talk to her about. It was evidently going to be war to the knife, he thought, as he embarked haltingly upon the weather, and found that he was far less at his ease than he had expected to be.

"Yes, it's warmer here than it was in England," said Francie, looking languidly at the rings on her left hand; "we were perished there after Paris."

She felt that the familiar mention of such names

must of necessity place her in a superior position, and she was so stimulated by their associations with her present grandeur that she raised her eyes, and looked at him. Their eyes met with as keen a sense of contact as if their hands had suddenly touched, and each, with a perceptible jerk, looked away.

"You say that Paris was hot, was it?" said Hawkins, with something of an effort. "I haven't been there since I went with some people the year before last, and it was as hot then as they make it. I thought it rather a hole."

"Oh, indeed?" said Francie, chillingly; "Mr. Lambert and I enjoyed it greatly. You've been here all the spring, I suppose?"

"Yes; I haven't been out of this place, except for Punchestown, since I came back from leave;" then with a reckless feeling that he would break up this frozen sea of platitudes, "since that time that I met you on the pier at Kingstown."

"Oh yes," said Francie, as if trying to recall some unimportant incident; "you were there with the Dysarts, weren't you?"

Hawkins became rather red. She was palpably overdoing it, but that did not diminish the fact that he was being snubbed, and though he might, in a

general and guarded way, have admitted that he deserved it, he realised that he bitterly resented being snubbed by Francie.

"Yes," he said, with an indifference as deliberately exaggerated as her own, "I travelled over with them. I remember how surprised we were to see you and Mr. Lambert there."

She felt the intention on his part to say something disagreeable, and it stung her more than the words.

"Why were you surprised?" she asked coolly.

"Well—er—I don't exactly know," stammered Mr. Hawkins, a good deal taken aback by the directness of the inquiry; "we didn't exactly know where you were—thought Lambert was at Lismoyle, you know." He began to wish he had brought Cursiter with him; no one could have guessed that she would have turned into such a cat and given herself such airs; her ultra-refinement, and her affected accent, and her exceeding prettiness, exasperated him in a way that he could not have explained, and though the visit did not fail of excitement, he could not flatter himself that he was taking quite the part in it that he had expected. Certainly Mrs. Lambert was not maintaining the role that he had allotted her; huffiness was one thing, but infernal swagger was quite another.

It is painful for a young man of Mr. Hawkins' type to realise that an affection that he has inspired can wane and even die, and Francie's self-possession was fast robbing him of his own.

"I hear that your regiment is after being ordered to India?" she said cheerfully, when it became apparent that Hawkins could find no more to say.

"Yes, so they say; next trooping season will about see us I expect, and they're safe to send us to Aldershot first, so we may be out of this at any minute." He glanced at her as he spoke, to see how she took it.

"Oh, that'll be very nice for you," answered Francie still more cheerfully. "I suppose," she went on with her most aristocratic drawl, "that you'll be married before you go out?"

She had arranged the delivery of this thrust before she came downstairs, and it glided from her tongue as easily as she could have wished.

"Yes, I daresay I shall," he answered defiantly, though the provokingly ready blush of a fair man leaped to his face. He looked at her, angry with himself for reddening, and angrier with her for blazoning her indifference, by means of a question that seemed to him the height of bad taste and spite-

fulness. As he looked, the colour that burned in his own face repeated itself in hers with slow relentlessness; at the sight of it a sudden revulsion of feeling brought him dangerously near to calling her by her name, with reproaches for her heartlessness, but before the word took form she had risen quickly, and, saying something incoherent about ordering tea, moved towards the bell, her head turned from him with the helpless action of a shy child.

Hawkins, hardly knowing what he was doing, started forward, and as he did so the door opened, and a well-known voice announced

"Miss Charlotte Mullen!"

The owner of the voice advanced into the room, and saw, as anyone must have seen, the flushed faces of its two occupants, and felt that nameless quality in the air that tells of interruption.

"I took the liberty of announcing myself," she said, with her most affable smile; "I knew you were at home, as I saw Mr. Hawkins' trap at the door, and I just walked in."

As she shook hands and sat down she expanded easily into a facetious description of the difficulties of getting her old horse along the road from Gurthnamuckla, and by the time she had finished her story

Hawkins' complexion had regained its ordinary tone, and Francie had resumed the air of elegant nonchalance appropriate to the importance of the married state. Nothing, in fact, could have been more admirable than Miss Mullen's manner. She praised Francie's new chair covers and Indian tea; she complimented Mr. Hawkins on his new pony; even going so far as to reproach him for not having been out to Gurthnamuckla to see her, till Francie felt some pricks of conscience about the sceptical way that she and Lambert had laughed together over Charlotte's amiability when she paid her first visit to them. She found inexpressible ease in the presence of a third person as capable as Charlotte of carrying on a conversation with the smallest possible assistance; sheltered by it she slowly recovered from her mental overthrow, and, furious as she was with Hawkins for his part in it, she was beginning to be able to patronise him again by the time that he got up to go away.

"Well, Francie, my dear child," began Charlotte, as soon as the door had closed behind him, "I've scarcely had a word with you since you came home. You had such a reception the last day I was here that I had to content myself with talking to Mrs. Beattie, and hearing all about the price of underclothes. In-

deed I had a good mind to tell her that only for your magnanimity she wouldn't be having so much to say about Carrie's trousseau!"

"Indeed she was welcome to him!" said Francie, putting her chin in the air, "that little wretch, indeed!"

It was one of the moments when she touched the extreme of satisfaction in being married, and in order to cover, for her own and Charlotte's sake, the remembrance of that idiotic blush, she assumed a little extra bravado.

"Talking of your late admirers—" went on Charlotte, "for I hope for poor Roddy's sake they're not present ones—I never saw a young fellow so improved in his manners as Mr. Hawkins. There was a time I didn't fancy him—as you may remember, though we've agreed to say nothing more about our old squabbles—but I think he's chastened by adversity. That engagement, you know—" she paused, and cast a side-long, unobtrusive glance at Francie. "He's not the first young man that's been whipped in before marriage as well as after it, and I think the more he looks at it the less he likes it."

"He's been looking at it a long time now," said Francie with a laugh that was intended to be careless, but into which a sneer made its way. "I wonder

Roddy isn't in," she continued, changing the subject to one in which no pit-falls lurked ; " I wouldn't be surprised if he'd gone to Gurthnamuckla to see you, Charlotte ; he's been saying ever since we came back he wanted to have a talk with you, but he's been so busy he hadn't a minute."

" If I'm not greatly mistaken," said Charlotte, standing up so as to be able to see out of the window, " here's the man of the house himself. What horse is that he's on ? " her eyes taking in with unwilling admiration the swaggering ease of seat and squareness of shoulder that had so often captivated her taste, as Lambert, not unaware of spectators at the window, overcame much callow remonstrance on the part of the young horse he was riding, at being asked to stand at the door till a boy came round to take him.

" Oh, that's the new four-year-old that Roddy had taken in off Gurthnamuckla while we were away," said Francie, leaning her elbow against the shutter and looking out too. " He's an awful wild young brat of a thing ! Look at the way he's hoisting now ! Roddy says he'll have me up on him before the summer's out, but I tell him that if he does I won't be on him long." Her eyes met her husband's, and she

laughed and tapped on the glass, beckoning imperiously to him to come in.

Charlotte turned away from the window, and when, a few minutes afterwards, Mr. Lambert came into the room, the visitor had put her gloves on, and was making her farewells to her hostess.

"No, Roddy," she said, "I must be off now. I'm like the beggars, 'tay and turn out' is my motto. But supposing now that you bring this young lady over to lunch with me to-morrow—no, not to-morrow, that's Sunday—come on Monday. How would that suit your book?"

Lambert assented with a good grace that struck Francie as being wonderfully well assumed, and followed Miss Mullen out to put her in her phaeton.

Francie closed the door behind them, and sat down. She was glad she had met Hawkins and got it over, and as she reviewed the incidents of his visit, she thought that on the whole she had come very near her own ideal of behaviour. Cool, sarcastic, and dignified, even though she had, for one moment, got a little red, he could not but feel that she had acted as became a married lady, and shown him his place once for all. As for him, he had been horrible, she thought bitterly; sitting up and talking to her as if he had

never seen her before, and going on as if he had never —she got up hastily as if to escape from the hateful memories of last year that thrust themselves suddenly into her thoughts. How thankful she was that she had shown him she was not inconsolable ; she wished that Roddy had come in while he was there, and had stood over him, and overshadowed him with his long legs and broad shoulders, and his air of master of the house. Why on earth had Charlotte praised him ? Gurthnamuckla must have had the most extraordinarily sweetening effect upon her, for she seemed to have a good word for everybody now, and Roddy's notion that she would want to be coaxed into a good temper was all nonsense, and conceited nonsense too, and so she would tell him. It was not in Francie's light, wholesome nature to bear malice ; the least flutter of the olive branch, the faintest glimmer of the flag of truce, was enough to make her forgive an injury and forget an insult.

When her husband came back she turned towards him with a sparkle in her eye.

" Well, Roddy, I hope you squeezed her hand when you were saying good-bye ! I daresay now you'll want me to believe that it's all in honour of you that she's asked us over to lunch to-morrow, and I suppose

that's what she was telling you out in the hall. Aren't you sorry you didn't marry her instead of me?"

Lambert did not answer, but came over to where she was standing, and putting his arm round her, drew her towards him and kissed her with a passion that seemed too serious an answer to her question. She could not know, as she laughed and hid her face from him, that he was saying to himself, "Of course he was bound to come and call, he'd have had to do that no matter who she was!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

SPRING, that year, came delicately in among the Galway hills; in primroses, in wild bursts of gorse, and in the later snow of hawthorn, unbeaten by the rain or the wet west wind of rougher seasons. A cuckoo had dropped out of space into the copse at the back of Gurthnamuckla, and kept calling there with a lusty sweetness; a mist of green was breathed upon the trees, and in the meadows by the lake a corncrake was adding a diffident guttural or two to the chirruping chorus of coots and moorhens. Mr. Lambert's three-year-olds grew and flourished on the young rich grass, and, in the turbulence of their *joie de vivre*, hunted the lambs, and bit the calves, and jumped every barrier that the ingenuity of Miss Mullen's herdsman could devise. "Those brutes must be put into the Stone Field," the lady of the house had said, regarding their gambols with a sour eye; "I don't care whether the grass is good or bad, they'll have to do with it;" and when she and her guests went forth after

their lunch to inspect the farm in general and the young horses in particular, it was to the Stone Field that they first bent their steps.

No one who has the idea of a green-embowered English lane can hope to realise the fortified alley that wound through the heart of the pastures of Gurthnamuckla, and was known as the Farm Lane. It was scarcely wide enough for two people to walk abreast; loose stone walls, of four or five feet in thickness, towered on either side of it as high as the head of a tall man ; to meet a cow in it involved either retreat or the perilous ascent of one of the walls. It embodied the simple expedient of by-gone farmers for clearing their fields of stones, and contained raw material enough to build a church. Charlotte, Mr. Lambert and Francie advanced in single file along its meaningless windings, until it finished its career at the gate of the Stone Field, a long tongue of pasture that had the lake for a boundary on three of its sides, and was cut off from the mainland by a wall not inferior in height and solidity to those of the lane.

"There, Roddy," said Miss Mullen, as she opened the gate, "there's where I had to banish them, and I don't think they're too badly off."

The young horses were feeding at the farthest point

of the field, fetlock deep in the flowery grass, with the sparkling blue of the lake making a background to their slender shapes.

"They look like money, Charlotte, I think. That brown filly ought to bring a hundred at least next Ballinasloe fair, when she knows how to jump," said Lambert, as he and Charlotte walked across the field, leaving Francie, who saw no reason for pretending an interest that was not expected of her, to amuse herself by picking cowslips near the gate.

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Roddy," replied Charlotte. "It's a comfort to think anything looks like money these bad times; I've never known prices so low."

"They're lower than I ever thought they'd go, by Jove," Lambert answered gloomily. "I'm going up to Mayo, collecting, next week, and if I don't do better there than I've done here, I daresay Dysart won't think so much of his father's shoes after all."

He was striding along, taking no trouble to suit his pace to Charlotte's, and perhaps the indifference to her companionship that it showed, as well as the effort involved in keeping beside him, had the effect of irritating her.

"Maybe he might think them good enough to kick

people out with," she said with a disagreeable laugh ; "I remember, in the good old times, when my father and Sir Benjamin ruled the roast, we heard very little about bad collections."

It struck Lambert that though this was the obvious moment for that business talk that he had come over for, it was not a propitious one. "I wonder if the macaroni cheese disagreed with her," he thought; "it was beastly enough to do it, anyhow. You may remember," he said aloud, "that in the good old times the property was worth just about double what it is now, and a matter of three or four hundred pounds either way made no difference to signify."

"D'ye think ye'll be that much short this time?"

She darted the question at him with such keenness that Lambert inwardly recoiled before it, though it was the point to which he had wished to bring her.

"Oh, of course one can't be sure," he said, retreating from his position ; "but I've just got a sort of general idea that I'll be a bit under the mark this time."

He was instinctively afraid of Charlotte, but in this moment he knew, perhaps for the first time, how much afraid. In theory he believed in his old power over her, and clung to the belief with the fatuity of a vain man, but he had always been uncomfortably

aware that she was intellectually his master, and though he thought he could still sway her heart with a caress, he knew he could never outwit her.

"Oh, no one knows better than I do what a thankless business it is, these times," said Charlotte with a reassuring carelessness; "it's a case of 'pull, devil, pull, baker,' though indeed I don't know under which head poor Christopher Dysart comes. And as we've got on to the sordid topic of money, Roddy—I'm not going to ask yer honour for a reduction of the rint, ye needn't be afraid—but I've been rather pinched by the expense I've been put to in doing up the house and stocking the farm, and it would be mighty convaynient to *me*, if it would be convaynient to *you*, to let me have a hundred or so of that money I lent you last year."

"Well—Charlotte—" began Lambert, clearing his throat, and striking with his stick at the heads of the buttercups, "that's the very thing I've been anxious to talk to you about. The fact is, I've had an awful lot of expense myself this last twelve months, and, as I told you, I can't lay a finger on anything except the interest of what poor Lucy left me—and—er—I'd give you any percentage you like, you know—?" He broke off for an instant, and then began again. "You

can see for yourself what a sin it would be to sell those things now," he pointed at the three young horses, "when they'll just bring three times the money this time next year."

"Oh yes," said Charlotte, "but my creditors might say it was more of a sin for me not to pay my debts."

Lambert stood still, and dug his stick into the ground, and Charlotte, watching him, knew that she had put in her sickle and reaped her first sheaf.

"All right," he said, biting his lip, "if your creditors can manage to hold out till after the fair next week, I daresay by selling every horse I've got I could let you have your money then." As he made the offer, he trusted that its quixotic heroism would make Charlotte ashamed of herself; no woman could possibly expect such a sacrifice as that from a man, and the event proved that he was right.

This was not the sacrifice that Miss Mullen wished for.

"Oh, pooh, pooh, Roddy! you needn't take me up in such earnest as that," she said in her most friendly voice, and Lambert congratulated himself upon his astuteness; "I only meant that if you could let me have a hundred or so in the course of the next month, it would be a help to my finances."

Lambert could not bring himself to admit that he was as little able to pay her one hundred as three; at all events, a month would give him time to look about him, and if he made a good collection he could easily borrow it from the estate account.

"Oh, if that's all," he answered, affecting more relief than he felt, "I can let you have it in a fortnight or so."

They were near the lake by this time, and the young horses feeding by its margin flung up their heads and stared in statuesque surprise at their visitors.

"They'll not let you near them," said Charlotte, as Lambert walked slowly towards them; "they're as wild as hawks. And, goodness me! that girl's gone out of the field and left the gate open! Wait a minute till I go back and shut it."

Lambert stood and looked after her as she hastened cumbrously back towards the gate, and wondered how he had ever liked her, or brought himself to have any dealings with her, and his eye left her quickly to follow the red parasol that, moving slowly along above the grey wall, marked Francie's progress along the lane. Charlotte hurried on towards the gate, well satisfied with the result of her conversation, and she was within some fifty yards of it when a loud and ex-

cited shout from Lambert, combined with the thud of galloping hoofs, made her start round. The young horses had been frightened by Lambert's approach, and after one or two circling swoops, had seen the open gate, and, headed by the brown filly, were careering towards it.

"The gate! Charlotte!" roared Lambert, rushing futilely after the horses, "shut the gate!"

Charlotte was off in an instant, realising as quickly as Lambert what might happen if Francie were charged in the narrow lane by this living avalanche; even in the first instant of comprehension another idea had presented itself. Should she stumble and so not reach the gate in time? It was fascinatingly simple, but it was too simple, and it was by no means certain.

Charlotte ran her hardest, and, at some slight personal risk, succeeded in slamming the gate in the face of the brown filly, as she and her attendant squires dashed up to it. There was a great deal of slipping about and snorting, before the trio recovered themselves, and retired to pass off their discomfiture in a series of dislocating bucks and squealing snaps at each other, and then Charlotte, purple from her exertions, advanced to meet Lambert with

the smile of the benefactor broad upon her face. His was blotched white and red with fright and running; without a breath left to thank her, he took her hand, and wrung it with a more genuine emotion than he had ever before felt for her.

Francie, meanwhile, strolled slowly up the lane towards the house, with her red parasol on her shoulder and her bunch of cowslips in her hand. She knew that the visit to the Stone Field was only the preliminary to a crawling inspection of every cow, sheep, and potato ridge on the farm, and she remembered that she had seen a novel of attractive aspect on the table in the drawing-room. She felt singularly uninterested in everything; Gurthnamuckla was nothing but Tally Ho over again on a larger and rather cleaner scale; the same servants, the same cats, the same cockatoo, the same leathery pastry and tough mutton. Last summer these things had mingled themselves easily into her everyday enjoyment of life, as amusing and not unpleasant elements; now she promised herself that, no matter what Roddy said, this was the last time she would come to lunch with Charlotte.

Roddy was very good to her and all that, but there was nothing new about him either, and marriage was an awful humdrum thing after all. She looked back

with something of regret to the crowded drudging household at Albatross Villa; she had at least had something to do there, and she had not been lonely; she often found herself very lonely at Rosemount. Before she reached the house she decided that she would ask Ida Fitzpatrick down to stay with her next month, and give her her return ticket, and a summer dress, and a new—her thoughts came to a startling full stop, as, round the corner of the house, she found herself face to face with Mr. Hawkins.

She had quite made up her mind that when she next saw him she would merely bow to him, but she had not reckoned on the necessities of such an encounter as this, and before she had time to collect herself she was shaking hands with him and listening to his explanation of what had brought him there.

"I met Miss Mullen after church yesterday," he said awkwardly, "and she asked me to come over this afternoon. I was just going out to look for her."

"Oh, really," said Francie, moving on towards the hall door; "she and Mr. Lambert are off in those fields there."

Hawkins stood looking irresolutely at her as she walked up to the open door that in Miss Duffy's time had been barricaded against all comers. She went in

as unswervingly as if she had already forgotten his existence, and then yielding, according to his custom, to impulse, he followed her.

She had already taken up a book, and was seated in a chair by the window when he came in, and she did not even lift her eyes at his entrance. He went over to the polished centre table, and, opening a photograph book, turned over a few of the leaves noisily. There was a pause, tense on both sides as silence and self-consciousness could make it, and broken only by the happy, persistent call of the cuckoo and the infant caws of the young rooks in the elms by the gate. The photograph book was shut with a bang, and Hawkins, taking his resolution in both hands, came across the room, and stood in front of Francie.

"Look here!" he said, with a strange mixture of anger and entreaty in his voice; "how much longer is this sort of thing to go on? Are you always going to treat me in this sort of way?"

"I don't know what you mean," answered Francie, looking up at him with eyes of icy blue, and then down at her book again. Her heart was beating in leaps, but of this Hawkins was naturally not aware.

"You can't pretend not to know what I mean—

this sort of rot of not speaking to me, and looking as if you had never seen me before. I told you I was sorry and all that. I don't know what more you want!"

"I don't want ever to speak to you again." She turned over a page of her book, and forced her eyes to follow its lines.

"You know that's impossible; you know you've got to speak to me again, unless you want to cut me and kick up a regular row. I don't know why you're going on like this. It's awfully unfair, and it's awfully hard lines." Since his visit to Rosemount, the conviction had been growing on him that in marrying another man she had treated him heartlessly, and he spoke with the fervour of righteous resentment.

"Oh, that comes well from you!" exclaimed Francie, dropping the book, and sitting up with all her pent-in wrath ablaze at last; "you that behaved in a way anyone else would be ashamed to think of! Telling me lies from first to last, and trying to make a fool of me—It was a good thing I didn't believe more than the half you said!"

"I told you no lie," said Hawkins, trying to stand his ground. "All I did was that I didn't answer your letters because I couldn't get out of that ac-

cursed engagement, and I didn't know what to say to you, and then the next thing I knew was that you were engaged, without a word of explanation to me or anything."

"And will you tell me what call there was for me to explain anything to you?" burst out Francie, looking, with the hot flash in her eyes, more lovely than he had ever seen her; "for all I knew of you, you were married already to your English heiress—Miss Coppers, or whatever her name is—I wonder at your impudence in daring to say things like that to me!" The lift of her head, and the splendid colour in her cheeks would have befitted an angry goddess, and it is not surprising that Hawkins did not take offence at the crudity of the expression, and thought less of the brogue in which it was uttered than of the quiver of the young voice that accused him.

"Look here," he said, for the second time, but with a new and very different inflection, "don't let us abuse each other any more. I couldn't answer your letters. I didn't know what to say, except to tell you that I was a cad and a beast, and I didn't see much good in doing that. Evidently," he added, with a bitterness that was at least half genuine, "it didn't make much difference to you whether I did or not."

She did not reply, except by a glance that was intended to express more than words could convey of her contempt for him, but somewhere in it, in spite of her, he felt a touch of reproach, and it was it that he answered as he said :

"Of course if you won't believe me you won't, and it don't make much odds now whether you do or no ; but I think if you knew how—" he stammered, and then went on with a rush—"how infernally I've suffered over the whole thing, you'd be rather sorry for me."

Francie shaped her lips to a thin and tremulous smile of disdain, but her hands clutched each other under the book in her lap with the effort necessary to answer him. "Oh, yes, I *am* sorry for you ; I'd be sorry for anyone that would behave the way you did," she said, with a laugh that would have been more effective had it been steadier ; "but I can't say you look as if you wanted my pity."

Hawkins turned abruptly away and walked towards the door, and then, as quickly, came back to her side.

"They're coming across the lawn now," he said ; "before they come, don't you think you could forgive me—or just say you do, anyhow. I did behave like a brute, but I never thought you'd have cared. You

may say the worst things about me you can think of, if you'll only tell me you forgive me." His voice broke on the last words in a way that gave them irresistible conviction.

Francie glanced out of the window, and saw her husband and Charlotte slowly approaching the house. "Oh, very well," she said proudly, without turning her head; "after all there's nothing to forgive."

CHAPTER XLV.

LAMBERT and Francie were both very silent as they drove away from Gurthnamuckla. He was the first to speak.

"I've asked Charlotte to come over and stay with you while I'm away next week. I find I can't get through the work in less than a fortnight, and I may be kept even longer than that, because I've got to go to Dublin."

"Asked Charlotte!" said Francie, in a tone of equal surprise and horror. "What on earth made you do that?"

"Because I didn't wish you should be left by yourself all that time."

"I think you might have spoken to me first," said Francie, with deepening resentment. "I'd twice sooner be left by myself than be bothered with that old cat."

Lambert looked quickly at her. He had come back to the house with his nerves still strained from

his fright about the open gate, and his temper shaken by his financial difficulties, and the unexpected discovery of Hawkins in the drawing-room with his wife had not been soothing.

"I don't choose that you should be left by yourself," he said, in the masterful voice that had always, since her childhood, roused Francie's opposition. "You're a deal too young to be left alone, and—' with an involuntary softening of his voice—"and a deal too pretty, confound you!" He cut viciously with his whip at a long-legged greyhound of a pig that was rooting by the side of the road.

"D'ye mean me or the pig?" said Francie, with a laugh that was still edged with defiance.

"I mean that I'm not going to have the whole country prating about you, and they would if I left you here by yourself."

"Very well, then, if you make me have Charlotte to stay with me I'll give tea-parties every day, and dinners and balls every night. I'll make the country prate, I can tell you, and the money fly too!"

Her eyes were brighter than usual, and there was a fitfulness about her that stirred and jarred him, though he could hardly tell why.

"I think I'll take you with me," he said, with the

impotent wrath of a lover who knows that the pain of farewell will be all on his side. "I won't trust you out of my sight."

"All right! I'll go with you," she said, becoming half serious. "I'd like to go."

They were going slowly up hill, and the country lay bare and desolate in the afternoon sun, without a human being in sight. Lambert took the reins in his right hand, and put his arm round her.

"I don't believe you. I know you wouldn't care a hang if I never came back—kiss me!" She lifted her face obediently, and as her eyes met his she wondered at the unhappiness in them. "I can't take you, my darling," he whispered; "I wish to God I could. I'm going to places you couldn't stay at, and—and it would cost too much."

"Very well; never say I didn't make you a good offer," she answered, her unconquerable eyes giving him a look that told she could still flirt with her husband.

"Put my cloak on me, Roddy; the evening's getting cold."

They drove on quickly, and Lambert felt the gloom settling down upon him again. He hated going away and leaving Francie; he hated his financial

difficulties, and their tortuous, uncertain issues ; and, above all, he hated Hawkins. He would have given the world to know how things had been between him and Francie last year ; anything would be less intolerable than suspicion.

The strip of grass by the roadside widened as they left the rocky country, and the deep dints of galloping hoofs became apparent on it. Lambert pointed to them with his whip, and laughed contemptuously.

"If I had a thick-winded pony like your friend Mr. Hawkins, I wouldn't bucket her up hill in that sort of way. She'd do well enough if he had the sense to take her easy ; but in all my knowledge of soldiers—and I've seen a good few of them here now—I've never seen a more self-sufficient jackass in the matter of horses than Hawkins. I wouldn't trust him with a donkey."

"You'd better tell him so," said Francie, indifferently. Lambert chose to suspect a sneer in the reply.

"Tell him so!" he said hotly. "I'd tell him so pretty smart, if I thought there was a chance of his getting outside a horse of mine. But I think it'll be a long day before that happens!"

"Maybe he wouldn't thank you for one of your horses."

"No, I'll bet he wouldn't say thank you," said Lambert, a thrill of anger darting to his brain. "He's a lad that'll take all he can get, and say nothing about it, and chuck it away to the devil when he's done with it."

"I'm sure I don't care what he does!" exclaimed Francie, with excusable impatience. "I wonder if he's able to get into a passion about nothing, the way you're doing now!"

"It didn't look this afternoon as if you cared so little about what he does!" said Lambert, his breath coming short. "May I ask if you knew he was coming, that you were in such a hurry back to the house to meet him? I suppose you settled it when he came to see you on Saturday."

"Since you know all about it, there's no need for me to contradict you!" Francie flashed back.

One part of Lambert knew that he was making a fool of himself, but the other part, which was unfortunately a hundred times the stronger, drove him on.

"Oh, I daresay you found it very pleasant, talking over old times," he retorted, releasing the thought at

last like a long caged beast; "or was he explaining how it was he got tired of you?"

Francie sat still and dumb; the light surface anger startled out of her in a moment, and its place taken by a suffocating sense of outrage and cruelty. She did not know enough of love to recognise it in this hideous disguise of jealousy; she only discerned the cowardly spitefulness, and it cut down to that deep place in her soul, where, since childhood, had lain her trust in him. She did not say a word, and Lambert went on:

"Oh, I see you are too grand to answer me; I suppose it's because I'm only your husband that you think I'm not worth talking to." He gave the horse a lash of the whip, and then chucked up its head as it sprang forward, making the trap rock and jerk. The hateful satisfaction of taunting her about Hawkins was beginning to die on him like drunkenness, and he dimly saw what it was going to cost him. "You make me say these sort of things to you," he broke out, seeing that she would not speak. "How can I help it, when you treat me like the dirt under your feet, and fight with me if I say a word to you that you don't like? I'd like to see the man that would stand it!"

He looked down at her, and saw her head drooping forward, and her hand up to her face. He could not say more, as at that moment Mary Holloran was holding the gate open for him to drive in ; and as he lifted his wife out of the trap at the hall door, and saw the tears that she could no longer hide from him, he knew that his punishment had begun, and the iron entered into his soul.

CHAPTER XLVI.

A FEW days afterwards Lambert started on his rent-collecting tour. Peace of a certain sort was restored, complete in outward seeming, but with a hidden flaw that both knew and pretended to ignore. When Lambert sat by himself in the smoking-carriage of the morning train from Lismoyle, with the cold comfort of a farewell kiss still present with him, he was as miserable and anxious a man as could easily have been found. Charlotte had arrived the night before, and with all her agreeability had contrived to remind him that she expected a couple of hundred pounds on his return. He could never have believed that she would have dunned him in this way, and the idea occurred to him for the first time that she was perhaps taking this method of paying him out for what, in her ridiculous vanity, she might have imagined to be his bad treatment of her. But none the less, it was a comfort to him to think that she was at his house.

He did not say so to himself, but he knew that he could not have found a better spy.

Dislike, as has been said, was a sentiment that Francie found great difficulty in cultivating. She conducted a feud in the most slipshod way, with intervals of illogical friendship, of which anyone with proper self-respect would have been ashamed, and she consequently accepted, without reservation, the fact that Charlotte was making herself pleasant with a pleasantness that a more suspicious person would have felt to be unwholesome.

Charlotte, upon whose birth so many bad fairies had shed their malign influence, had had at all events one attraction bestowed upon her, the gift of appreciation, and of being able to express her appreciation—a faculty that has been denied to many good and Christian people. The evil spirit may have torn her at sight of Francie enthroned at the head of Roddy Lambert's table, but it did not come out of her in any palpable form, nor did it prevent her from enjoying to the utmost the change from the grease and smoke of Norry's cooking, and the slothful stupidity of the Protestant orphan. Charlotte was one of the few women for whom a good cook will exert herself to make a savoury; and Eliza Hackett felt rewarded

when the parlour-maid returned to the kitchen with the intelligence that Miss Mullen had taken two helpings of cheese-soufflé, and had sent her special compliments to its constructor. Another of the undoubted advantages of Rosemount was the chance it afforded Charlotte of paying off with dignity and ease the long arrears of visits that the growing infirmities of the black horse were heaping up against her. It was supremely bitter to hear Francie ordering out the waggonette as if she had owned horses and carriages all her life, but she could gulp it down for the sake of the compensating comfort and economy. In the long *tête-à-têtes* that these drives involved, Charlotte made herself surprisingly pleasant to her hostess. She knew every scandal about every family in the neighbourhood, and imparted them with a humour and an easy acquaintance with the aristocracy that was both awe-inspiring and encouraging to poor Francie, whose heart beat fast with shyness and conscious inferiority, as, card-case in hand, she preceded Miss Mullen to Mrs. Ffolliott's or Mrs. Flood's drawing-room. It modified the terror of Mrs. Flood's hooked nose to remember that her mother had been a Hebrew barmaid, and it was some consolation to reflect that General Ffolliott's second son had had to leave his

regiment for cheating at cards, when she became aware that she alone, among a number of afternoon callers at Castle Ffolliott, had kept on her gloves during tea.

In every conversation with Charlotte it seemed to Francie that she discovered, as if by accident, some small but disagreeable fact about her husband. He had been refused by such and such a girl; he had stuck so and so with a spavined horse; he had taken a drop too much at the hunt ball; and, in a general way, he owed the agency and his present position in society solely to the efforts of Miss Mullen and her father.

Francie accepted these things, adding them to her previous store of disappointment in Roddy, with the philosophy that she had begun to learn in Albatross Villa, and that life was daily teaching her more of. They unconsciously made themselves into a background calculated to give the greatest effect to a figure that now occupied a great deal of her thoughts.

It was at Mrs. Waller's house that she first met Hawkins after her encounter with him at Gurthnamuckla. He came into the room when it was almost time for her to face the dreadful ordeal of leave-taking, and she presently found herself talking to him

with considerably less agitation than she had felt in talking about Paris to Miss Waller. The memory of their last meeting kept her eyes from his, but it made the ground firm under her feet, and in the five minutes before she went away she felt that she had effectually shown him the place she intended him to occupy, and that he thoroughly understood that conversation with her was a grace, and not a right. The touch of deference and anxiety in his self-assured manner were as sweet to her as the flowers strewed before a conqueror, and laid themselves like balm on the wound of her husband's taunt. Some day Roddy would see for himself the sort of way things were between her and Mr. Hawkins, she thought, as she drove down the avenue, and unconsciously held her head so high and looked so brilliant, that Charlotte, with that new-born amiability that Francie was becoming accustomed to, complimented her upon her colour, and declared that, after Major Waller's attentions, she would have to write to Roderick and decline further responsibility as a chaperone.

They drove to Bruff two or three days afterwards, to return the state visit paid by Pamela on her mother's behalf, and, during some preliminary marketing in Lismoyle, they came upon Hawkins

walking through the town in the Rosemount direction, with an air of smartness and purpose about him that bespoke an afternoon call.

"I was just going to see you," he said, looking rather blank.

"We're on our way to Bruff," replied Francie, too resolved on upholding her dignity to condescend to any conventional regrets.

Mr. Hawkins looked more cheerful, and observing that as he also owed a visit at Bruff this would be a good day to pay it, was turning back to the barracks for his trap when Miss Mullen intervened with almost childlike impulsiveness.

"I declare now, it vexes my righteous soul to think of your getting out a horse and trap, with two seats, going a-begging here. It's not my carriage, Mr. Hawkins, or I promise you you should have one of them."

Hawkins looked gratefully at her, and then uncertainly at Francie.

"He's welcome to come if he likes," said Francie frigidly, thinking with a mixture of alarm and satisfaction of what Roddy would say if he heard of it.

Hawkins waited for no further invitation, and got into the waggonette. A trait of character as old as

humanity was at this time asserting itself, with singular freshness and force, in the bosom of Mr. Gerald Hawkins. He had lightly taken Francie's heart in his hand, and as lightly thrown it away, without plot or premeditation ; but now that another man had picked it up and kept it for his own, he began to see it as a thing of surpassing value. He could have borne with a not uninteresting regret the idea of Francie languishing somewhere in the suburbs of Dublin, and would even, had the chance come in his way, have flirted with her in a kind and consolatory manner. But to see her here, prosperous, prettier than ever, and possessing the supreme attraction of having found favour in someone else's eyes, was a very different affair. The old glamour took him again, but with tenfold force, and, while he sat in the waggonette and talked to his ancient foe, Miss Mullen, with a novel friendliness, he gnawed the ends of his moustache in the bitterness of his soul because of the coldness of the eyes that were fascinating him.

It was a bright and blowy afternoon, with dazzling masses of white cloud moving fast across the blue, and there was a shifting glimmer of young leaves in the Bruff avenue, and a gusty warmth of fragrance from lilacs and laurel blossoms on either side. As this

strangely compounded party of visitors drove up to the hall door they caught sight of Christopher going down the lawn towards the boat-house, and in answer to a call from Mr. Hawkins, he turned and came back to meet them. He was only on his way to the boat-house to meet Cursiter, he explained, and he was the only person at home, but he hoped that they would, none the less, come in and see him. Hawkins helped Francie out of the carriage, giving her a hand no less formal than that which she gave him. She recognised the formality, and was not displeased to think that it was assumed in obedience to her wish.

They all strolled slowly on towards the boat-house, Hawkins walking behind with Miss Mullen, Francie in front with her host. It was not her first meeting with him since her return to Lismoyle, and she found it quite easy to talk with him of her travels, and of those small things that make up the sum of ordinary afternoon conversation. She had come to believe now that she must have been mistaken on that afternoon when he had stood over her in the Tally Ho drawing-room and said those unexpected things to her—things that, at the time, seemed neither ambiguous nor Platonic. He was now telling her, in the quietly hesitating voice that had always seemed to her the

very height of good breeding, that the weather was perfect, and that the lake was lower than he had ever known it at that time of year, with other like commonplaces, and though there was something wanting in his manner that she had been accustomed to, she discerned none of the awkwardness that her experience had made her find inseparable from the rejected state.

There was no sign of Captain Cursiter or his launch when they reached the pier, and, after a fruitless five minutes of waiting, they went on, at Christopher's suggestion, to see the bluebells in the wood that girdled the little bay of Bruff. Before they reached the gate of the wood, Miss Mullen had attached herself to Christopher, having remarked, with engaging frankness, that Mr. Hawkins could only talk to her about Lismoyle, and she wanted Sir Christopher to tell her of the doings of the great world ; and Francie found herself following them with Hawkins by her side. The park turned inwards and upwards from the lake, climbing, by means of a narrow flight of moss-grown stone steps, till it gained the height of about fifty feet above the water. Walking there, the glitter of the lake came up brokenly to the eye through the beech-tree branches, that lay like sprays of maiden-

hair beneath them; and over the hill and down to the water's edge and far away among the grey beech stems, the bluebells ran like a blue mist through all the wood. Their perfume rose like incense about Francie and her companion as they walked slowly, and ever more slowly, along the path. The spirit of the wood stole into their veins, and a pleasure that they could not have explained held them in silence that they were afraid to break.

Hawkins was the first to make a diffident comment.

"They're ripping, aren't they? They're a great deal better than they were last year."

"I didn't see them last year."

"No, I know you didn't," he said quickly; "you didn't come to Lismoyle till the second week in June."

"You seem to remember more about it than I do," said Francie, still maintaining her attitude of superiority.

"I don't think I'm likely to forget it," he said, turning and looking at her.

She looked down at the ground with a heightening colour and a curl of the lip that did not come easily. If she found it hard to nurse her anger against Charlotte, it was thrice more difficult to harden her-

self to the voice to which one vibrating string in her heart answered in spite of her.

"Oh, there's nothing people can't forget if they try!" she said, with a laugh. "I always find it much harder to remember!"

"But people sometimes succeed in doing things they don't like," said Hawkins pertinaciously.

"Not if they don't want to," replied Francie, holding her own, with something of her habitual readiness.

Hawkins' powers of repartee weakened a little before this retort. "No, I suppose not," he said, trying to make up by bitterness of tone for want of argument.

Francie was silent, triumphantly silent, it seemed to him, as he walked beside her and switched off the drooping heads of the bluebells with his stick. He had experiences that might have taught him that this appetite for combat, this determination to trample on him, was a more measurable thing than the contempt that will not draw a sword; but he was able to think of nothing except that she was unkind to him, and that she was prettier now than he had ever seen her. He was so thoroughly put out that he was not aware of any awkwardness in the silence that had progressed,

unbroken, for a minute or two. It was Francie to whom it was apparently most trying, as, at length, with an obvious effort at small talk, she said:

"I suppose that's Captain Cursiter coming up the lake," indicating, through an opening in the branches, a glimpse of a white funnel and its thong of thinly streaming vapour; "he seems as fond of boating as ever."

"Yes, I daresay he is," said Hawkins, without pretending any interest, real or polite, in the topic. He was in the frame of mind that lies near extravagance of some kind, whether of temper or sentiment, and, being of a disposition not versed in self-repression, he did not attempt diplomacy. He looked sulkily at the launch, and then, with a shock of association, he thought of the afternoon that he and Francie had spent on the lake, and the touch of unworthiness that there was in him made him long to remind her of her subjugation.

"Are *you* as fond of boating as — as you were when we ran aground last year?" he said, and looked at her daringly.

He was rewarded by seeing her start perceptibly and turn her head away, and he had the grace to feel a little ashamed of himself. Francie looked down the

bluebell slope till her eyes almost ached with the soft glow of colour, conscious that every moment of delay in answering told against her, but unable to find the answer. The freedom and impertinence of the question did not strike her at all; she only felt that he was heartlessly trying to humiliate her.

"I'd be obliged to you, Mr. Hawkins," she said, her panting breath making her speak with extreme difficulty, "if you'd leave me to walk by myself."

Before she spoke he knew that he had made a tremendous mistake, and, as she moved on at a quickened pace, he felt he must make peace with her at any price.

"Mrs. Lambert," he said, with a gravity and deference which he had never shown to her before, "is it any use to beg your pardon? I didn't know what I was saying—I hardly know now what I did say—but if it made you angry or—or offended you, I can only say I'm awfully sorry."

"Thank you, I don't want you to say anything," she answered, still walking stiffly on.

"If it would give you any pleasure, I swear I'll promise never to speak to you again!" Hawkins continued; "shall I go away now?" His instinct told him to risk the question.

"Please yourself. It's nothing to me what you do."

"Then I'll stay—"

Following on what he said, like an eldritch note of exclamation, there broke in the shrill whistle of the *Serpolette* as she turned into the bay of Bruff, and an answering hail from Christopher rose to them, apparently from the lower path by the shore of the lake.

"That's Cursiter," said Hawkins irritably; "I suppose we shall have to go back now."

She turned, as if mechanically accepting the suggestion, and, in the action, her eyes passed by him with a look that was intended to have as little reference to him as the gaze of a planet in its orbit, but which, even in that instant, was humanised by avoidance. In the space of that glance, he knew that his pardon was attainable, if not attained, but he had cleverness enough to retain his expression of gloomy compunction.

It was quite true that Francie's anger, always pitiably short-lived, had yielded to the flattery of his respect. Every inner, unformed impulse was urging her to accept his apology, when three impatient notes from the whistle of the steam-launch came up through the trees, and seemed to open a way for her to outside matters from the narrow stress of the moment.

"Captain Cursiter seems in a great hurry about something," she said, her voice and manner conveying sufficiently well that she intended to pass on with dignity from the late dispute. "I wonder what he wants."

"Perhaps we've got the route," said Hawkins, not sorry to be able to remind her of the impending calamity of his departure; "I shouldn't be a bit surprised."

They walked down the flight of stone steps, and reached the gate of the wood in silence. Hawkins paused with his hand on the latch.

"Look here, when am I going to see you again?" he said.

"I really don't know," said Francie, with recovered ease. She felt the wind blowing in on her across the silver scales of the lake, and saw the sunshine flashing on Captain Cursiter's oars as he paddled himself ashore from the launch, and her spirits leaped up in "the inescapable joy of spring." "I should think anyone that goes to church to-morrow will see me there."

Her glance veered towards his cloudy, downcast face, and an undignified desire to laugh came suddenly upon her. He had always looked so babyish

when he was cross, and it had always made her feel inclined to laugh. Now that she was palpably and entirely the conqueror, the wish for further severity had died out, and the spark of amusement in her eye was recklessly apparent when Hawkins looked at her.

His whole expression changed in a moment. "Then we're friends?" he said eagerly.

Before any answer could be given, Christopher and Charlotte came round a bend in the lower path, and even in this moment Francie wondered what it was that should cause Charlotte to drop her voice cautiously as she neared them.

CHAPTER XLVII.

It was very still inside the shelter of the old turf quay at Bruff. The stems of the lilies that curved up through its brown-golden depths were visible almost down to the black mud out of which their mystery of silver and gold was born; and, while the water outside moved piquantly to the breeze, nothing stirred it within except the water spiders, who were darting about, pushing a little ripple in front of them, and finding themselves seriously inconvenienced by the pieces of broken rush and the sodden fragments of turf that perpetually stopped their way. It had rained and blown very hard all the day before, and the innermost corners of the tiny harbour held a motionless curve of foam, yellowish brown, and flecked with the feathers of a desolated moorhen's nest.

Civilisation at Bruff had marched away from the turf quay. The ruts of the cart-track were green from long disuse, and the willows had been allowed

to grow across it, as a last sign of superannuation. In old days every fire at Bruff had been landed at the turf quay from the bogs at the other side of the lake; but now, since the railway had come to Lismoyle, coal had taken its place. It was in vain that Thady, the turf-cutter, had urged that turf was a far handsomer thing about a gentleman's place than coal. The last voyage of the turf boat had been made, and she now lay, grey from rottenness and want of paint, in the corner of the miniature dock that had once been roofed over and formed a boat-house. Tall, jointed reeds, with their spiky leaves and stiff stems, stood out in the shallow water, leaning aslant over their own reflections, and, further outside, green rushes grew thickly in long beds, the homes of dabchicks, coots, and such like water people. Standing on the brown rock that formed the end of the quay, the spacious sky was so utterly reproduced in the lake, cloud for cloud, deep for deep, that it only required a little imagination to believe oneself floating high between two atmospheres. The young herons, in the fir trees on Curragh Point, were giving utterance to their meditations on things in general in raucous monosyllables, and Charlotte Mullen, her feet planted firmly on

two of the least rickety stones of the quay, was continuing a conversation that had gone on one-sidedly for some time.

"Yes, Sir Christopher, my feeling for your estate is like the feeling of a child for the place where he was reared; it is the affection of a woman whose happiest days were passed with her father in your estate office!"

The accurate balance of the sentence and its nasal cadence showed that Charlotte was delivering herself of a well-studied peroration. Her voice clashed with the stillness as dissonantly as the clamour of the young herons. Her face was warm and shiny, and Christopher looked away from it, and said to himself that she was intolerable.

"Of course—yes—I understand—" he answered stammeringly, her pause compelling him to speak; "but these are very serious things to say—"

"Serious!" Charlotte dived her hand into her pocket to make sure that her handkerchief was within hail. "D'ye think, Sir Christopher, I don't know that well! I that have lain awake crying every night since I heard of it, not knowing how to decide between me affection for me friend and my duty to the son of my dear father's old employer!"

"I think anyone who makes charges of this kind," interrupted Christopher coldly, "is bound to bring forward something more definite than mere suspicion."

Charlotte took her hand out of her pocket without the handkerchief, and laid it for a moment on Christopher's arm.

"My dear Sir Christopher, I entirely agree with you," she said in her most temperate, gentlemanlike manner, "and I am prepared to place certain facts before you, on whose accuracy you may perfectly rely, although circumstances prevent my telling you how I learned them."

The whole situation was infinitely repugnant to Christopher. He would himself have said that he had not nerve enough to deal with Miss Mullen; and joined with this, and his innate and overstrained dislike of having his affairs discussed, was the unendurable position of conniving with her at a treachery. Little as he liked Lambert, he sided with him now with something more than a man's ordinary resentment against feminine espionage upon another man. He was quite aware of the subdued eagerness in Charlotte's manner, and it mystified while it disgusted him; but he was also aware that nothing

short of absolute flight would check her disclosures. He could do nothing now but permit himself the single pleasure of staring over her head with a countenance barren of response to her histrionic display of expression.

"You ask me for something more definite than mere suspicion," continued Charlotte, approaching one of the supremest gratifications of her life with full and luxurious recognition. "I can give you two facts, and if, on investigation, you find they are not correct, you may go to Roderick Lambert, and tell him to take an action for libel against me! I daresay you know that a tenant of yours, named James M'Donagh—commonly called Shamus Bawn—recently got the goodwill of Knocklara, and now holds it in addition to his father's farm, which he came in for last month." Christopher assented. "Jim M'Donagh paid one hundred and eighty pounds fine on getting Knocklara. I ask you to examine your estate account, and you will see that the sum credited to you on that transaction is no more than seventy."

"May I ask how you know this?" Christopher turned his face towards her for a moment as he asked the question, and encountered, with even more aversion than he had expected, her triumphing eyes.

"I'm not at liberty to tell you. All I say is, go to Jim M'Donagh, and ask him the amount of his fine, and see if he won't tell you just the same sum that I'm telling you now."

Captain Cursiter, at this moment steering the *Serpolette* daintily among the shadows of Bruff Bay, saw the two incongruous figures on the turf-quay, one short, black, and powerful, the other tall, white, and passive, and wondered, through the preoccupation of crawling to his anchorage, what it was that Miss Mullen was holding forth to Dysart about, in a voice that came to him across the water like the gruff barking of a dog. He thought, too, that there was an almost ship-wrecked welcome in the shout with which Christopher answered his whistle, and was therefore surprised to see him remain where he was, apparently enthralled by Miss Mullen's conversation, instead of walking round to meet him at the boat-house pier.

Charlotte had, in fact, by this time, compelled Christopher to give her his whole attention. As he turned towards her again, he admitted to himself that the thing looked rather serious, though he determined, with the assistance of a good deal of antagonistic irritability, to keep his opinion to himself. This

feeling was uppermost as he said: "I have never had the least reason to feel a want of confidence in Mr. Lambert, Miss Mullen, and I certainly could not discredit him by going privately to M'Donagh to ask him about the fine."

"It's a pity all unfaithful stewards haven't as confiding a master as you, Sir Christopher," said Charlotte, with a laugh. She felt Christopher's attitude towards her, as a man in armour may have felt the arrows strike him, and no more, and it came easily to her to laugh. "However," she went on, correcting her manner quickly, as she saw a very slight increase of colour in Christopher's face, "the burden of proof does not lie with James M'Donagh. Last November, as you may possibly remember, my name made its first appearance on your rent-roll, as the tenant of Gurthnamuckla, and in recognition of that honour,"—Charlotte felt that there was an academic polish about her sentences that must appeal to a University man—"I wrote your agent a cheque for one hundred pounds, which was duly cashed some days afterwards." She altered her position, so that she could see his face better, and said deliberately: "Not one penny of that has been credited to the estate! This I know for a fact."

"Yes," said Christopher, after an uncomfortable pause, "that's very—very curious, but, of course—until I know a little more, I can't give any opinion on the matter. I think, perhaps, we had better go round to meet Captain Cursiter—"

Charlotte interrupted him with more violence than she had as yet permitted to escape.

"If you want to know more, I can tell you more, and plenty more! For the last year and more, Roddy Lambert's been lashing out large sums of ready money beyond his income, and I know his income to the penny and the farthing! Where did he get that money from? I ask you. What paid for his young horses, and his new dog-cart, and his new carpets, yes! and his honeymoon trip to Paris? I ask you what paid for all that? It wasn't his first wife's money paid for it, I know that for a fact, and it certainly wasn't the second wife's!"

She was losing hold of herself; her gestures were of the sort that she usually reserved for her inferiors, and the corners of her mouth bubbled like a snail. Christopher looked at her, and began to walk away. Charlotte followed him, walking unsteadily on the loose stones, and inwardly cursing his insolence as well as her own forgetfulness of the method she had

laid down for the interview. He turned and waited for her when he reached the path, and had time to despise himself for not being able to conceal his feelings from a woman so abhorrent and so contemptible.

"I am—er—obliged for your information," he said stiffly. In spite of his scorn for his own prejudice, he would not gratify her by saying more.

"You will forgive me, Sir Christopher," replied Charlotte with an astonishing resumption of dignity, "if I say that that is a point that is quite immaterial to me. I require no thanks. I felt it to be my duty to tell you these painful facts, and what I suffer in doing it concerns only myself."

They walked on in silence between the lake and the wood, with the bluebells creeping outwards to their feet through the white beech stems, and as the last turn of the path brought them in sight of Francie and Hawkins, Charlotte spoke again:

"You'll remember that all this is in strict confidence, Sir Christopher."

"I shall remember," said Christopher curtly.

An hour later, Pamela, driving home with her mother, congratulated herself, as even the best people are prone to do, when she saw on the gravel-sweep the fresh double wheel tracks that indicated that

visitors had come and gone. She felt that she had talked enough for one afternoon during the visit to old Lady Eyrecourt, whose deaf sister had fallen to her share, and she did not echo her mother's regret at missing Miss Mullen and her cousin. She threw down the handful of cards on the hall table again, and went with a tired step to look for Christopher in the smoking-room, where she found him with Captain Cursiter, the latter in the act of taking his departure. The manner of her greeting showed that he was an accustomed sight there, and, as a matter of fact, since Christopher's return Captain Cursiter had found himself at Bruff very often. He had discovered that it was, as he expressed it, the only house in the country where the women let him alone. Lady Dysart had expressed the position from another point of view, when she had deplored to Mrs. Gascogne Pamela's "hopeless friendliness" towards men, and Mrs. Gascogne had admitted that there might be something discouraging to a man in being treated as if he were a younger sister.

This unsuitable friendliness was candidly apparent in Pamela's regret when she heard that Cursiter had come to Bruff with the news that his regiment was to leave Ireland for Aldershot in a fortnight.

"Here's Captain Cursiter trying to stick me with

the launch at an alarming reduction, as the property of an officer going abroad," said Christopher. "He wants to take advantage of my grief, and he won't stay and dine here and let me haggle the thing out comfortably."

"I'm afraid I haven't time to stay," said Cursiter rather cheerlessly. "I've got to go up to Dublin to-morrow, and I'm very busy. I'll come over again—if I may—when I get back." He felt all the awkwardness of a self-conscious man in the prominence of making a farewell that he is beginning to find more unpleasant than he had expected.

"Oh, yes! indeed, you must come over again," said Pamela, in the soft voice that was just Irish enough for Saxons of the more ignorant sort to fail to distinguish, save in degree, between it and Mrs. Lambert's Dublin brogue.

It remained on Captain Cursiter's ear as he stalked down through the shrubberies to the boat-house, and, as he steamed round Curragh Point, and caught the sweet, turfy whiff of the Irish air, he thought drearily of the arid glare of Aldershot, and, without any apparent connection of ideas, he wondered if the Dysarts were really coming to town next month.

Not long after his departure Lady Dysart rustled

into the smoking-room in her solemnly sumptuous widow's dress.

"Is he gone?" she breathed in a stage whisper, pausing on the threshold for a reply.

"No; he's hiding behind the door," answered Christopher; "he always does that when he hears you coming." When Christopher was irritated, his method of showing it was generally so subtle as only to satisfy himself; it slipped through the wide and generous mesh of his mother's understanding without the smallest friction.

"Nonsense, Christopher!" she said, not without a furtive glance behind the door. "What a visitation you have had from the whole set! Had they anything interesting to say for themselves? Charlotte Mullen generally is a great alleviation."

"Oh yes," replied her son, examining the end of his cigarette with a peculiar expression, "she—she alleviated about as much as usual; but it was Cursiter who brought the news."

"I can't imagine Captain Cursiter so far forgetting himself as to tell any news," said Lady Dysart; "but perhaps he makes an exception in your favour."

"They're to go to Aldershot in a fortnight," said Christopher.

"You don't say so!" exclaimed his mother, with an irrepressible look at Pamela, who was sitting on the floor in the window, taking a thorn out of Max's spatulate paw. "In a fortnight? I wonder how Mr. Hawkins will like that? Evelyn said that Miss Coppard told her the marriage was to come off when the regiment went back to England."

Christopher grunted unsympathetically, and Pamela continued her researches for the thorn.

"Well," resumed Lady Dysart, "I, for one, shall not regret them. Selfish and second-rate!"

"Which is which?" asked Christopher, eliminating any tinge of interest or encouragement from his voice. He was quite aware that his mother was in this fashion avenging the slaughter of the hope that she had secretly nourished about Captain Cursiter, and, being in a perturbed frame of mind, it annoyed him.

"I think *your* friend is the most self-centred, ungenial man I have ever known," replied Lady Dysart, in sonorous denunciation, "and if Mr. Hawkins is not second-rate, his friends are, which comes to the same thing! And, by the by, how was it that he went away before Captain Cursiter? Did not they come together?"

"Miss Mullen and Mrs. Lambert gave him a lift," said Christopher, uncommunicatively; "I believe they overtook him on his way here."

Lady Dysart meditated, with her dark eyebrows drawn into a frown.

"I think that girl will make a very great mistake if she begins a flirtation with Mr. Hawkins again," she said presently; "there has been quite enough talk about her already in connection with her marriage." Lady Dysart untied her bonnet strings as if with a need of more air, and flung them back over each shoulder. In the general contrariety of things, it was satisfactory to find an object so undeniably deserving of reprobation as the new Mrs. Lambert. "I call her a thorough adventuress!" she continued. "She came down here, determined to marry some one, and as Mr. Hawkins escaped from her, she just snatched at the next man she could find!"

Pamela came over and sat down on the arm of her mother's chair. "Now, mamma," she said, putting her arm round Lady Dysart's crape-clad shoulder, "you can't deny that she knew all about the Dublin clergy and went to Sunday-school regularly for ten years and she guessed two lights of an acrostic for you."

"Yes, two that happened to be slangy! No, my

dear child, I admit that she is very pretty, but, as I said before, she has proved herself to be nothing but an adventuress. Everyone in the country has said the same thing!"

"I can scarcely imagine anyone less like an adventuress," said Christopher, with the determined quietness by which he sometimes mastered his stammer.

His mother looked at him with the most unaffected surprise. "And I can scarcely imagine anyone who knows less about the matter than you!" she retorted. "Oh, my dear boy, don't smoke another of those horrid things," as Christopher got up abruptly and began to fumble rather aimlessly in a cigarette-box on the chimney-piece, "I'm sure you've smoked more than is good for you. You look quite white already."

He made no reply, and his mother's thoughts reverted to the subject under discussion. Suddenly a little cloud of memory began to appear on her mental horizon. Now that she came to think of it, had not Kate Gascogne once mentioned Christopher's name to her in preposterous connection with that of the present Mrs. Lambert?

"Let me tell you!" she exclaimed, her deep-set eyes glowing with the triumphant effort of memory

"that people said she did her very utmost to capture *you!* and I can very well believe it of her; a grievous waste of ammunition on her part, wasn't it, Pamela? Though it did not result in an *engagement!*" she added, highly pleased at being able to press a pun into her argument.

"Oh, I think she spared Christopher," struck in Pamela with a conciliatory laugh; "'Poor is the conquest of the timid hare,' you know!" She was aware of something portentously rigid in her brother's attitude, and would have given much to have changed the conversation, but the situation was beyond her control.

"I don't think she would have thought it such a poor conquest," said Lady Dysart indignantly; "a girl like that, accustomed to attorneys' clerks and commercial travellers—she'd have done anything short of suicide for such a chance!"

Christopher had stood silent during this discussion. He was losing his temper, but he was doing it after his fashion, slowly and almost imperceptibly. The pity for Mr. Lambert's wife, that had been a primary result of Charlotte's indictment, flamed up into quixotism, and every word his mother said was making him more hotly faithful to the time when his conquest had been complete.

"I daresay it will surprise you to hear that I gave her the chance, and she didn't take it," he said suddenly.

Lady Dysart grasped the arms of her chair, and then fell back into it.

"*You* did!"

"Yes, I did," replied Christopher, beginning to walk towards the door. He knew he had done a thing that was not only superfluous, but savoured repulsively of the pseudo-heroic, and the attitude in which he had placed himself was torture to his reserve. "This great honour was offered to her," he went on, taking refuge in lame satire, "last August, unstimulated by any attempts at suicide on her part, and she refused it. I—I think it would be kinder if you put her down as a harmless lunatic, than as an adventuress, as far as I am concerned." He shut the door behind him as he finished speaking, and Lady Dysart was left staring at her daughter, complexity of emotions making speech an idle thing.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE question, ten days afterwards, to anyone who had known all the features of the case, would have been whether Francie was worth Christopher's act of championing.

At the back of the Rosemount kitchen-garden the ground rose steeply into a knoll of respectable height, where grew a tangle of lilac bushes, rhododendrons, seringas, and yellow broom. A gravel path wound ingratiatingly up through these, in curves artfully devised by Mr. Lambert to make the most of the extent and the least of the hill, and near the top a garden-seat was sunk in the bank, with laurels shutting it in on each side, and a laburnum "showering golden tears" above it. Through the perfumed screen of the lilac bushes in front unromantic glimpses of the roof of the house were obtainable—eyesores to Mr. Lambert, who had concentrated all his energies on hiding everything nearer than the semi-circle of lake and distant mountain held in an opening cut through the

rhododendrons at the corner of the little plateau on which the seat stood. Without the disturbance of middle distance the eye lay at ease on the far-off struggle of the Connemara mountains, and on a serene vista of Loughmoyle ; a view that enticed forth, as to a playground, the wildest and most foolish imaginations, and gave them elbow-room ; a world so large and remote that it needed the sound of wheels on the road to recall the existence of the petty humanities of Lismoyle.

Francie and Hawkins were sitting there on the afternoon of the day on which Lambert was expected to come home, and as the sun, that had stared in at them through the opening in the rhododendrons when they first went there, slid farther round, their voices sank in unconscious accord with the fading splendours of the afternoon, and their silences seemed momently more difficult to break. They were nearing the end of the phase that had begun in the wood at Bruff, impelled to its verge by the unspoken knowledge that the last of the unthinking, dangerous days were dying with the sun, and that a final parting was looming up beyond. Neither knew for certain the mind of the other, or how they had dropped into this so-called friendship that in half a dozen afternoons

had robbed all other things of reality, and made the intervals between their meetings like a feverish dream. Francie did not dare to think much about it; she lived in a lime-light glow that surrounded her wherever she went, and all the world outside was dark. He was going in a fortnight, in ten days, in a week; that was the only fact that the future had held for her since Captain Cursiter had met them with the telegram in his hand on the lake shore at Bruff. She forgot her resolutions; she forgot her pride; and before she reached home that afternoon the spell of the new phase, that was the old, only intensified by forgiveness, was on her. She shut her eyes, and blindly gave house-room in her heart to the subtle passion that came in the garb of an old friend, with a cant about compassion on its lips, and perfidious promises that its life was only for a fortnight.

To connect this supreme crisis of a life with such a person as Mr. Gerald Hawkins may seem incongruous; but Francie was not aware of either crisis or incongruity. All she knew of was the enthralment that lay in each prosaic afternoon visit, all she felt, the tired effort of conscience against fascination. Her emotional Irish nature, with all its frivolity and recklessness, had also, far down in it, an Irish girl's moral

principle and purity; but each day she found it more difficult to hide the truth from him; each day the under-currents of feeling drew them helplessly nearer to each other. Everything was against her. Lambert's business had, as he expected, taken him to Dublin, and kept him there; Cursiter, like most men, was chary of active interference in another man's affairs, whatever his private opinion might be; and Charlotte, that guardian of youth, that trusty and vigilant spy, sat in her own room writing interminable letters, or went on long and complicated shopping expeditions whenever Hawkins came to the house.

On this golden, still afternoon, Francie strayed out soon after lunch into the garden, half dazed with unhappiness and excitement. To-night her husband would come home. In four days Hawkins would have gone, as eternally, so far as she was concerned, as if he were dead; he would soon forget her, she thought, as she walked to and fro among the blossoming apple trees in the kitchen-garden. Men forgot very easily, and, thanks to the way she had tried her best to make him think she didn't care, there was not a word of hers to bring him back to her. She hated herself for her discretion; her soul thirsted for even one word of understanding, that would be something to

live upon in future days of abnegation, when it would be nothing to her that she had gained his respect, and one tender memory would be worth a dozen self-congratulations.

She turned at the end of the walk and came back again under the apple trees; the ground under her feet was white with fallen blossoms; her fair hair gleamed among the thick embroidery of the branches, and her face was not shamed by their translucent pink and white. At a little distance Eliza Hackett, in a starched lilac calico, was gathering spinach, and meditating no doubt with comfortable assurance on the legitimacy of Father Heffernan's apostolic succession, but outwardly the embodiment of solid household routine and respectability. As Francie passed her she raised her decorous face from the spinach-bed with a question as to whether the trout would be for dinner or for breakfast; the master always fancied fish for his breakfast, she reminded Francie. Eliza Hackett's tone was distant, but admonitory, and it dispelled in a moment the visions of another now impossible future that were holding high carnival before Francie's vexed eyes. The fetter made itself coldly felt, and following came the quick pang of remorse at the thought of the man who was wasting on her the best

love he had to give. Her change of mood was headlong, but its only possible expression was trivial to absurdity, if indeed any incident in a soul's struggle can be called trivial. Some day, further on in eternity, human beings will know what their standards of proportion and comparison are worth, and may perhaps find the glory of some trifling actions almost insufferable.

She gave the necessary order, and hurrying into the house brought out from it the piece of corduroy that she was stitching in lines of red silk as a waistcoat for her husband, and with a childish excitement at the thought of this expiation, took the path that led to the shrubbery on the hill. As she reached its first turn she hesitated and stopped, an idea of further and fuller renunciation occurring to her. Turning, she called to the figure stooping among the glossy rows of spinach to desire that the parlour-maid should say that this afternoon she was not at home. Had Eliza Hackett then and there obeyed the order, it is possible that many things would have happened differently. But fate is seldom without a second string to her bow, and even if Francie's message had not been delayed by Eliza Hackett's determination to gather a pint of green gooseberries before she went

in, it is possible that Hawkins would, none the less, have found his way to the top of the shrubbery, where Francie was sewing with the assiduity of Penelope. It was about four o'clock when she heard his steps coming up the devious slants of the path, and she knew as she heard it that, in spite of all her precautions, she had expected him. His manner and even his look had nothing now in them of the confident lover of last year; his flippancy was gone, and when he began by reproaching her for having hidden from him, his face was angry and wretched, and he spoke like a person who has been seriously and unjustly hurt. He was more in love than he had ever been before, and he was taking it badly, like a fever that the chills of opposition were driving back into his system.

She made excuses as best she might, with her eyes bent upon her work.

"I might have been sitting in the drawing-room now," he said petulantly; "only that Miss Mullen had seen you going off here by yourself, and told me I'd better go and find you."

An unreasoning fear came over Francie, a fear as of something uncanny.

"Let us go back to the house," she said; "Char-

lotte will be expecting us." She said it to contradict the thought that had become definite for the first time. "Come; I'm going in."

Hawkins did not move. "I suppose you forget that this is Wednesday, and that I'm going on Saturday," he replied dully. "In any case you'll not be much good to Charlotte. She's gone up to pack her things. She told me herself she was going to be very busy, as she had to start at six o'clock."

Francie leaned back, and realised that now she had no one to look to but herself, and happiness and misery fought within her till her hands trembled as she worked.

Each knew that this was, to all intents and purposes, their last meeting, and their consciousness was charged to brimming with unexpressed farewell. She talked of indifferent subjects; of what Aldershot would be like, of what Lismoyle would think of the new regiment, of the trouble that he would have in packing his pictures, parrying, with a weakening hand, his efforts to make every subject personal; and all the time the laburnum drooped in beautiful despair above her, as if listening and grieving, and the cool-leaved lilac sent its fragrance to mingle with her pain, and to stir her to rebellion with the ecstasy of spring-time.

The minutes passed barrenly by, and, as has been said, the silences became longer and more clinging, and the thoughts that filled them made each successive subject more bare and artificial. At last Hawkins got up, and walking to the opening cut in the shrubs, stood, with his hands in his pockets, looking out at the lake and the mountains. Francie stitched on; it seemed to her that if she stopped she would lose her last hold upon herself; she felt as if her work were a talisman to remind her of all the things that she was in peril of forgetting. When, that night, she took up the waistcoat again to work at it, she thought that her heart's blood had gone into the red stitches.

It was several minutes before Hawkins spoke. "Francie," he said, turning round and speaking thickly, "are you going to let me leave you in this—in this kind of way? Have you realised that when I go on Saturday it's most likely—it's pretty certain, in fact—that we shall never see each other again?"

"Yes, I have," she said, after a pause of a second or two. She did not say that for a fortnight her soul had beaten itself against the thought, and that to hear it in words was as much as her self-command could bear.

"You seem to care a great deal!" he said violently;

"you're thinking of nothing but that infernal piece of work, that I loathe the very sight of. Don't you think you could do without it for five minutes, at all events?"

She let her hands drop into her lap, but made no other reply.

"You're not a bit like what you used to be. You seem to take a delight in snubbing me and shutting me up. I must say, I never thought you'd have turned into a prig!" He felt this reproach to be so biting that he paused upon it to give it its full effect. "Here I am going to England in four days, and to India in four months, and it's ten to one if I ever come home again. I mean to volunteer for the very first row that turns up. But it's just the same to you, you won't even take the trouble to say you're sorry."

"If you had taken the trouble to answer my letters last autumn, you wouldn't be saying these things to me now," she said, speaking low and hurriedly.

"I don't believe it! I believe if you had cared about me then you wouldn't treat me like this now."

"I *did* care for you," she said, while the hard-held tears forced their way to her eyes; "you made me do it, and then you threw me over, and now you're trying to put the blame on me!"

He saw the glisten on her eyelashes, and it almost took from him the understanding of what she said.

"Francie," he said, his voice shaking, and his usually confident eyes owning the infection of her tears, "you might forget that. I'm miserable. I can't bear to leave you!" He sat down again beside her, and, catching her hand, kissed it with a passion of repentance. He felt it shrink from his lips, but the touch of it had intoxicated him, and suddenly she was in his arms.

For a speechless instant they clung to each other; her head dropped to his shoulder, as if the sharp release from the tension of the last fortnight had killed her, and the familiar voice murmured in her ear:

"Say it to me—say you love me."

"Yes I do—my dearest—" she said, with a moan that was tragically at variance with the confession. "Ah, why do you make me so wicked!" She snatched herself away from him, and stood up, trembling all over. "I wish I had never seen you—I wish I was dead."

"I don't care what you say now," said Hawkins, springing to his feet, "you've said you loved me, and I know you meant it. Will you stand by it?" he

went on wildly. "If you'll only say the word I'll chuck everything overboard— I can't go away from you like this. Once I'm in England I can't get back here, and if I did, what good would it be to me? He'd never give us a chance of seeing each other, and we'd both be more miserable than we are, unless— unless there was a chance of meeting you in Dublin or somewhere—?" He stopped for an instant. Francie mutely shook her head. "Well, then, I shall never see you."

There was silence, and the words settled down into both their hearts. He cursed himself for being afraid of her, she, whom he had always felt to be his inferior, yet when he spoke it was with an effort.

"Come away with me out of this—come away with me for good and all! What's the odds? We can't be more than happy!"

Francie made an instinctive gesture with her hand while he spoke, as if to stop him, but she said nothing, and almost immediately the distant rush and rattle of a train came quietly into the stillness.

"That's his train!" she exclaimed, looking as startled as if the sound had been a sign from heaven, "Oh, go away! He mustn't meet you coming away from here."

"I'll go if you give me a kiss," he answered drunkenly. His arms were round her again when they dropped to his side as if he had been shot.

There was a footstep on the path immediately below the lilac bushes, and Charlotte's voice called to Francie that she was just starting for home and had come to make her adieux.

CHAPTER XLIX.

CHRISTOPHER DYSART drove to Rosemount next morning to see Mr. Lambert on business. He noticed Mrs. Lambert standing at the drawing-room window as he drove up, but she left the window before he reached the hall door, and he went straight to Mr. Lambert's study without seeing her again.

Francie returned listlessly to the seat that she had sprung from with a terrified throb of the heart at the thought that the wheels might be those of Hawkins' trap, and, putting her elbow on the arm of the chair, rested her forehead on her hand; her other hand drooped over the side of the chair, holding still in it the sprig of pink hawthorn that her husband had given her in the garden an hour before. Her attitude was full of languor, but her brain was working at its highest pressure, and at this moment she was asking herself what Sir Christopher would say when he heard that she had gone away with Gerald. She had seen him vaguely as one of the crowd of contemptuous or

horror-stricken faces that had thronged about her pillow in the early morning, but his opinion had carried no more restraining power than that of Aunt Tish, or Uncle Robert, or Charlotte. Nothing had weighed with her then; the two principal figures in her life contrasted as simply and convincingly as night and day, and like night and day, too, were the alternative futures that were in her hand to choose from. Her eyes were open to her wrong-doing, but scarcely to her cruelty; it could not be as bad for Roddy, she thought, to live without her as for her to stay with him and think of Gerald in India, gone away from her for ever. Her reasoning power was easily mastered, her conscience was a thing of habit, and not fitted to grapple with this turbulent passion. She swept towards her ruin like a little boat staggering under more sail than she can carry. But the sight of Christopher, momentary as it was, had startled for an instant the wildness of her thoughts; the saner breath of the outside world had come with him, and a touch of the self-respect that she had always gained from him made her press her hot forehead against her hand, and realise that the way of transgressors would be hard.

She remained sitting there, almost motionless, for

a long time. She had no wish to occupy herself with anything; all the things about her had already the air of belonging to a past existence; her short sovereignty was over, and even the furniture that she had, a few weeks ago, pulled about and rearranged in the first ardour of possession seemed to look at her in a decorous, clannish way, as if she were already an alien. At last she heard the study door open, and immediately afterwards, Christopher's dog-cart went down the drive. It occurred to her that now, if ever, was the time to go to her husband and see whether, by diplomacy, she could evade the ride that he had asked her to take with him that afternoon. Hawkins had sent her a note saying that he would come to pay a farewell visit, a cautiously formal note that anyone might have seen, but that she was just as glad had not been seen by her husband, and at all hazards she must stay in to meet him. She got up and went to the study with a nervous colour in her cheeks, glancing out of the hall window as she passed it, with the idea that the threatening grey of the sky would be a good argument for staying at home. But if it rained, Roddy might stay at home, too, she thought, and that would be worse than anything. That was her last thought as she went into the study.

Lambert was standing with his hands in his pockets, looking down at the pile of papers and books on the table, and Francie was instantly struck by something unwonted in his attitude, something rigid and yet spent, that was very different from his usual bearing. He looked at her with heavy eyes, and going to his chair let himself drop into it; then, still silently, he held out his hand to her. She thought he looked older, and that his face was puffy and unattractive, and in the highly-strung state of her nerves she felt a repugnance to him that almost horrified her. It is an unfortunate trait of human nature that a call for sympathy from a person with whom sympathy has been lost has a repellent instead of an attractive power, and if a strong emotion does not appear pathetic, it is terribly near the ludicrous. In justice to Francie it must be said that her dominant feeling as she gave Lambert her hand and was drawn down on to his knee was less repulsion than a sense of her own hypocrisy.

"What's the matter, Roddy?" she asked, after a second or two of silence, during which she felt the labouring of his breath.

"I'm done for," he said, "that's what's the matter."

"Why! what do you mean?" she exclaimed, turn-

ing her startled face half towards him, and trying not to shrink as his hot breath struck on her cheek.

"I've lost the agency."

"Lost the agency!" repeated Francie, feeling as though the world with all the things she believed to be most solid were rocking under her feet. "Do you mean he's after dismissing you?"

Lambert moved involuntarily, from the twitch of pain that the word gave him. It was this very term that Lismoyle would soon apply to him, as if he were a thieving butler or a drunken coachman.

"That's about what it will come to," he said bitterly. "He was too damned considerate to tell me so to-day, but he's going to do it. He's always hated me just as I've hated him, and this is his chance, though God knows what's given it to him!"

"You're raving!" cried Francie incredulously; "what on earth would make him turn you away?" She felt that her voice was sharp and unnatural, but she could not make it otherwise. The position was becoming momently more horrible from the weight of unknown catastrophe, the sight of her husband's suffering and the struggle to sympathise with it, and the hollow disconnection between herself and everything about her.

"I can't tell you—all in a minute," he said with difficulty. "Wouldn't you put your arm round my neck, Francie, as if you were sorry for me? You might be sorry for me, and for yourself too. We're ruined. Oh my God!" he groaned, "we're ruined!"

She put her arm round his neck, and pity, and a sense that it was expected of her, made her kiss his forehead. At the touch of her lips his sobs came suddenly and dreadfully, and his arms drew her convulsively to him. She lay there helpless and dry-eyed, enduring a wretchedness that in some ways was comparable to his own, but never becoming merged in the situation, never quite losing her sense of repulsion at his abasement.

"I never meant to touch a farthing of his—in the long run—" he went on, recovering himself a little; "I'd have paid him back every half-penny in the end—but, of course, he doesn't believe that. What does he care what I say!"

"Did you borrow money from him, or what was it?" asked Francie gently.

"Yes, I did," replied Lambert, setting his teeth; "but I didn't tell him. I was eaten up with debts, and I had to—to borrow some of the estate money." It was anguish to lower himself from the pedestal of

riches and omnipotence on which he had always posed to her, and he spoke stumblingly. "It's very hard to explain these things to you—it's—it's not so unusual as you'd think—and then, before I'd time to get things square again, some infernal mischief-maker has set him on to ask to see the books, and put him up to matters that he'd never have found out for himself."

"Was he angry?" she asked, with the quietness that was so unlike her.

"Oh, I don't know—I don't care—" moving again restlessly in his chair; "he's such a rotten, cold-blooded devil, you can't tell what he's at." Even at this juncture it gave him pleasure to make little of Christopher to Francie. "He asked me the most beastly questions he could think of, in that d—d stammering way of his. He's to write to me in two or three days, and I know well what he'll say," he went on with a stabbing sigh; "I suppose he'll have it all over the country in a week's time. He's been to the bank and seen the estate account, and that's what's done me. I asked him plump and plain if he hadn't been put up to it, and he didn't deny it, but there's no one could have known what was paid into that account but Baker or one of the clerks, and they

knew nothing about the fines—I mean—they couldn't understand enough to tell him anything. But what does it matter who told him. The thing's done now, and I may as well give up."

"What will you do?" said Francie faintly.

"If it wasn't for you I think I'd put a bullet through my head," he answered, his innately vulgar soul prompting him to express the best thought that was in him in conventional heroics, "but I couldn't leave you, Francie—I couldn't leave you—" he broke down again—"it was for our honeymoon I took the most of the money—" He could not go on, and her whole frame was shaken by his sobs.

"Don't, Roddy, don't cry," she murmured, feeling cold and sick.

"He knows I took the money," Lambert went on incoherently; "I'll have to leave the country—I'll sell everything—" he got up and began to walk about the room— "I'll pay him—damn him—I'll pay him every farthing. He sha'n't have it to say he was kept waiting for his money! He shall have it this week!"

"But how will you pay him if you haven't the money?" said Francie, with the same lifelessness of voice that had characterised her throughout.

"I'll borrow the money—I'll raise it on the furni-

ture; I'll send the horses up to Sewell's, though God knows what price I'll get for them this time of year, but I'll manage it somehow. I'll go out to Gurthnamuckla this very afternoon about it. Charlotte's got a head on her shoulders—" He stood still, and the idea of borrowing from Charlotte herself took hold of him. He felt that such trouble as this must command her instant sympathy, and awaken all the warmth of their old friendship, and his mind turned towards her stronger intelligence with a reliance that was creditable to his ideas of the duties of a friend. "I could give her a bill of sale on the horses and furniture," he said to himself.

His eyes rested for the first time on Francie, who had sunk into the chair from which he had risen, and was looking at him as if she did not see him. Her hair was ruffled from lying on his shoulder, and her eyes were wild and fixed, like those of a person who is looking at a far-off spectacle of disaster and grief.

CHAPTER L.

THE expected rain had not come, though the air was heavy and damp with the promise of it. It hung unshed, above the thirsty country, looking down gloomily upon the dusty roads, and the soft and straight young grass in the meadows; waiting for the night, when the wind would moan and cry for it, and the newborn leaves would shudder in the dark at its coming.

At three o'clock Francie was sure that the afternoon would be fine, and soon afterwards she came downstairs in her habit, and went into the drawing-room to wait for the black mare to be brought to the door. She was going to ride towards Gurthnamuckla to meet Lambert, who had gone there some time before; he had made Francie promise to meet him on his way home, and she was going to keep her word. He had become quite a different person to her since the morning, a person who no longer appealed to her admiration or her confidence, but solely and distressingly to her pity. She had always thought of

him as invincible, self-sufficing, and possessed of innumerable interests besides herself; she knew him now as dishonest and disgraced, and miserable, stripped of all his pretensions and vanities, but she cared for him to-day more than yesterday. It was against her will that his weakness appealed to her; she would have given worlds for a heart that did not smite her at its claim, but her pride helped out her compassion. She told herself that she could not let people have it to say that she ran away from Roddy because he was in trouble.

She felt chilly, and she shivered as she stood by the fire, whose unseasonable extravagance daily vexed the righteous soul of Eliza Hackett. Hawkins' note was in her hand, and she read it through twice while she waited; then, as she heard the sound of wheels on the gravel, she tore it in two and threw it into the fire, and, for the second time that morning, ran to the window.

It was Christopher Dysart again. He saw her at the window and took off his cap, and before he had time to ring the bell, she had opened the hall door. She had, he saw at once, been crying, and her paleness, and the tell-tale heaviness of her eyes, contrasted pathetically with the smartness of her figure

in her riding habit, and the boyish jauntiness of her hard felt hat.

"Mr. Lambert isn't in, Sir Christopher," she began at once, as if she had made up her mind whom he had come to see; "but won't you come in?"

"Oh—thank you—I—I haven't much time—I merely wanted to speak to your husband," stammered Christopher.

"Oh, please come in," she repeated, "I want to speak to you." Her eyes suddenly filled with tears, and she turned quickly from him and walked towards the drawing-room.

Christopher followed her with the mien of a criminal. He felt that he would rather have been robbed twenty times over than see the eyes that, in his memory, had always been brilliant and undefeated, avoiding his as if they were afraid of him, and know that he was the autocrat before whom she trembled. She remained standing near the middle of the room, with one hand on the corner of the piano, whose gaudy draperies had, even at this juncture, a painful sub-effect upon Christopher; her other hand fidgeted restlessly with a fold of the habit that she was holding up, and it was evident that whatever her motive had been in bringing him in, her

courage was not equal to it. Christopher waited for her to speak, until the silence became unendurable.

"I intended to have been here earlier," he said, saying anything rather than nothing, "but there was a great deal to be got through at the Bench to-day, and I've only just got away. You know I'm a magistrate now, and indifferently minister justice—"

"I'm glad I hadn't gone out when you came," she interrupted, as though, having found a beginning, she could not lose a moment in using it. "I wanted to say that if you—if you'll only give Roddy a week's time he'll pay you. He only meant to borrow the money, like, and he thought he could pay you before; but, indeed, he says he'll pay you in a week." Her voice was low and full of the bitterest humiliation, and Christopher wished that before he had arraigned his victim, and offered him up as an oblation to his half-hearted sense of duty, he had known that his infirmity of purpose would have brought him back three hours afterwards to offer the culprit a way out of his difficulties. It would have saved him from his present hateful position, and what it would have saved her was so evident, that he turned his head away as he spoke, rather than look at her.

"I came back to tell your husband that—that he

could arrange things in—in some such way," he said, as guiltily and awkwardly as a boy. "I'm sorry—more sorry than I can say—that he should have spoken to you about it. Of course, that was my fault. I should have told him then what I came to tell him now."

"He's gone out now to see about selling his horses and the furniture," went on Francie, scarcely realising all of Christopher's leniency in her desire to prove Lambert's severe purity of action. Her mind was not capable of more than one idea—one, that is, in addition to the question that had monopolised it since yesterday afternoon, and Christopher's method of expressing himself had never been easily understood by her.

"Oh, he mustn't think of doing that!" exclaimed Christopher, horrified that she should think him a Shylock, demanding so extreme a measure of restitution; "it wasn't the actual money question that—that we disagreed about; he can take as long as he likes about repaying me. In fact—in fact you can tell him from me that—he said something this morning about giving up the agency. Well, I—I should be glad if he would keep it."

He had stultified himself now effectually; he knew

that he had acted like a fool, and he felt quite sure that Mr. Lambert's sense of gratitude would not prevent his holding the same opinion. He even foresaw Lambert's complacent assumption that Francie had talked him over, but he could not help himself. The abstract justice of allowing the innocent to suffer with the guilty was beyond him; he forgot to theorise, and acted on instinct as simply as a savage. She also had acted on instinct. When she called him in she had nerved herself to ask for reprieve, but she never hoped for forgivenness, and as his intention penetrated the egotism of suffering, the thought leaped with it that, if Roddy were to be let off, everything would be on the same footing that it had been yesterday evening. A blush that was incomprehensible to Christopher swept over her face; the grasp of circumstances relaxed somewhat, and a jangle of unexplainable feelings confused what self-control she had left.

"You're awfully good," she began half hysterically. "I always knew you were good; I wish Roddy was like you! Oh, I wish I was like you! I can't help it—I can't help crying; you were always too good to me, and I never was worth it!" She sat down on one of the high stiff chairs, for which her predecessor

had worked beaded seats, and hid her eyes in her handkerchief. "Please don't talk to me; please don't say anything to me—" She stopped suddenly. "What's that? Is that anyone riding up?"

"No. It's your horse coming round from the yard," said Christopher, taking a step towards the window, and trying to keep up the farce of talking as if nothing had happened.

"My horse!" she exclaimed, starting up. "Oh, yes, I must go and meet Roddy. I mustn't wait any longer." She began, as if unconscious of Christopher's presence, to look for the whip and gloves that she had laid down. He saw them before she did and handed them to her.

"Good-bye," he said, taking her cold, trembling hand, "I must go too. You will tell your husband that it's—it's all right."

"Yes. I'll tell him. I'm going to meet him. I must start now," she answered, scarcely seeming to notice what he said, and withdrawing her hand from his, she began hurriedly to button on her gloves.

Christopher did not wait for further dismissal, but when his hand was on the door, her old self suddenly woke.

"Look at me letting you go away without telling

you a bit how grateful I am to you!" she said, with a lift of her tear-disfigured eyes that was like a changeling of the look he used to know; "but don't you remember what Mrs. Baker said about me, that 'you couldn't expect any manners from a Dublin Jackeen.'"

She laughed weakly, and Christopher stammering more than ever in an attempt to say that there was nothing to be grateful for, got himself out of the room.

After he had gone, Francie gave herself no time to think. Everything was reeling round her as she went out on to the steps, and even Michael, the groom, thought to himself that if he hadn't the trap to wash, he'd put the saddle on the chestnut and folly the misthress, she had that thrimulous way with her when he put the reins into her hands, and only for it was the mare she was riding he wouldn't see her go out by herself. It was the first of June, and the gaiety of the spring was nearly gone. The flowers had fallen from the hawthorn, the bluebells and primroses were vanishing as quietly as they came, the meadows were already swarthy, and the breaths of air that sent pale shimmers across them, were full of the unspeakable fragrance of the ripening grass. Un-

der the trees, near Rosemount, the shadowing greenness had saturated the daylight with its gloom, but out among the open pastures and meadows the large grey sky seemed almost bright, and, in the rich sobriety of tone, the red cattle were brilliant spots of colour.

The black mare and her rider were now on thoroughly confidential terms, and, so humiliatingly interwoven are soul and body, as the exercise quickened the blood in her veins, Francie's incorrigible youth rose up, and while it brightened her eyes and drove colour to her cheeks, it whispered that somehow or other happiness might come to her. She rode fast till she reached the turn to Gurthnamuckla, and there, mindful of her husband's injunctions that she was not to ride up to the house, but to wait for him on the road, she relapsed into a walk.

As she slackened her pace, all the thoughts that she had been riding away from came up with her again. What claim had Roddy on her now? She had got him out of his trouble, and that was the most he could expect her to do for him. He hadn't thought much about the trouble he was bringing on her; he never as much as said he was sorry for the disgrace it would be to her. Why should she break her heart

for him, and Gerald's heart too?—as she said Hawkins' name to herself, her hands fell into her lap, and she moaned aloud. Every step the mare was taking was carrying her farther from him, but yet she could not turn back. She was changed since yesterday; she had seen her husband's soul laid bare, and it had shown her how tremendous were sin and duty; it had touched her slumbering moral sense as well as her kindness, and though she rebelled she did not dare to turn back.

It was not till she heard a pony's quick gallop behind her, and, looking back, saw Hawkins riding after her at full speed, that she knew how soon she was to be tested. She had scarcely time to collect herself before he was pulling up the pony beside her, and had turned a flushed and angry face towards her.

"Didn't you get my note? Didn't you know I was coming?" he began in hot remonstrance. Then, seeing in a moment how ill and strange she looked, "What's the matter? Has anything happened?"

"Roddy came home yesterday evening," she said, with her eyes fixed on the mare's mane.

"Well, I know that," interrupted Hawkins. "Do you mean that he was angry? Did he find out

anything about me? If he did see the note I wrote you, there was nothing in that." Francie shook her head. "Then it's nothing? It's only that you've been frightened by that brute," he said, kicking his pony up beside the mare, and trying to look into Francie's downcast eyes. "Don't mind him. It won't be for long."

"You mustn't say that," she said hurriedly. "I was very wrong yesterday, and I'm sorry for it now."

"I know you're not!" he burst out, with all the conviction that he felt. "You can't unsay what you said to me yesterday. I sat up the whole night thinking the thing over and thinking of you, and at last I thought of a fellow I know out in New Zealand, who told me last year I ought to chuck the army and go out there." He dropped his reins on the pony's neck, and took Francie's hand. "Why shouldn't we go there together, Francie? I'll give up everything for you, my darling!"

She feebly tried to take her hand away, but did not reply.

"I've got three hundred a year of my own, and we can do ourselves awfully well on that out there. We'll always have lots of horses, and it's a ripping climate—and—and I love you, and I'll always love you!"

He was carried away by his own words, and, stooping his head, he kissed her hand again and again.

Every pulse in her body answered to his touch, and when she drew her hand away, it was with an effort that was more than physical.

"Ah! stop, stop," she cried. "I've changed—I didn't mean it."

"Didn't mean what?" demanded Hawkins, with his light eyes on fire.

"Oh, leave me alone," she said, turning her distracted face towards him. "I'm nearly out of my mind as it is. What made you follow me out here? I came out so as I wouldn't see you, and I'm going to meet Roddy now."

Hawkins' colour died slowly down to a patchy white. "What do you think it was that made me follow you? Do you want to make me tell you over again what you know already?" She did not answer, and he went on, trying to fight against his own fears by speaking very quietly and rationally. "I don't know what you're at, Francie. I don't believe you know what you're saying. Something must have happened, and it would be fairer to tell me what it is, than to drive me distracted in this sort of way."

There was a pause of several seconds, and he was framing a fresh remonstrance when she spoke.

"Roddy's in great trouble. I wouldn't leave him," she said, taking refuge in a prevarication of the exact truth.

Something about her told Hawkins that things were likely to go hard with him, and there was something, too, that melted his anger as it rose; but her pale face drew him to a height of passion that he had not known before.

"And don't you think anything about *me?*" he said with a breaking voice. "Are you ready to throw me overboard just because he's in trouble, when you know he doesn't care for you a tenth part as much as I do? Do you mean to tell me that you want me to go away, and say good-bye to you for ever? If you do, I'll go, and if you hear I've gone to the devil, you'll know who sent me."

The naïve selfishness of this argument was not perceived by either. Hawkins felt his position to be almost noble, and did not in the least realise what he was asking Francie to sacrifice for him. He had even forgotten the idea that had occurred to him last night, that to go to New Zealand would be a pleasanter way of escaping from his creditors than marrying Miss

Coppard. Certainly Francie had no thought of his selfishness or of her own sacrifice. She was giddy with struggle; right and wrong had lost their meaning and changed places elusively; the only things that she saw clearly were the beautiful future that had been offered to her, and the look in Roddy's face when she had told him that wherever he had to go she would go with him.

The horses had moved staidly on, while these two lives stood still and wrestled with their fate, and the summit was slowly reached of the long hill on which Lambert had once pointed out to her the hoof-prints of Hawkins' pony. The white road and the grey rock country stretched out before them, colourless and discouraging under the colourless sky, and Hawkins still waited for his answer. Coming towards them up the tedious slope was a string of half-a-dozen carts, with a few people walking on either side; an unremarkable procession, that might have meant a wedding, or merely a neighbourly return from market, but for a long, yellow coffin that lay, hemmed in between old women, in the midmost cart. Francie felt a superstitious thrill as she saw it; a country funeral, with its barbarous and yet fitting crudity, always seemed to bring death nearer to her than the plumed conven-

tionalities of the hearses and mourning coaches that she was accustomed to. She had once been to the funeral of a fellow Sunday-school child in Dublin, and the first verse of the hymn that they had sung then, came back, and began to weave itself in with the beat of the mare's hoofs.

> " Brief life is here our portion,
> Brief sorrow, short-lived care,
> The life that knows no ending,
> The tearless life is there."

" Francie, are you ever going to answer me? Come away with me this very day. We could catch the six o'clock train before any one knew—dearest, if you love me—" His roughened, unsteady voice seemed to come to her from a distance, and yet was like a whisper in her own heart.

" Wait till we are past the funeral," she said, catching, in her agony, at the chance of a minute's respite.

At the same moment an old man, who had been standing by the side of the road, leaning on his stick, turned towards the riders, and Francie recognised in him Charlotte's retainer, Billy Grainy. His always bloodshot eyes were redder than ever, his mouth dribbled like a baby's, and the smell of whisky poisoned the air all round him.

"I'm waitin' on thim here this half-hour," he began, in a loud drunken mumble, hobbling to Francie's side, and moving along beside the mare, "as long as they were taking her back the road to cry her at her own gate. Owld bones is wake, asthore, owld bones is wake!" He caught at the hem of Francie's habit to steady himself; "be cripes! Miss Duffy was a fine woman, Lord ha' maircy on her. And a great woman! And divil blasht thim that threw her out of her farm to die in the Union—the dom ruffins."

As on the day, now very long ago, when she had first ridden to Gurthnamuckla, Francie tried to shake his hand off her habit; he released it stupidly, and staggering to the side of the road, went on grumbling and cursing. The first cart, creaking and rattling under its load of mourners, was beside them by this time, and Billy, for the benefit of its occupants, broke into a howl of lamentation.

"Thanks be to God Almighty, and thanks be to His Mother, the crayture had thim belonging to her that would bury her like a Christian." He shook his fist at Francie. "Ah—ha! go home to himself and owld Charlotte, though it's little thim regards you—" He burst into drunken laughter, bending and tottering over his stick.

Francie, heedless of the etiquette that required that she and Hawkins should stop their horses till the funeral passed, struck the mare, and passed by him at a quickened pace. The faces in the carts were all turned upon her, and she felt as if she were enduring, in a dream, the eyes of an implacable tribunal ; even the mare seemed to share in her agitation, and sidled and fidgeted on the narrow strip of road, that was all the space left to her by the carts. The coffin was almost abreast of Francie now, and her eyes rested with a kind of fascination on its bare, yellow surface. She became dimly aware that Norry the Boat was squatted beside it on the straw, when one of the other women began suddenly to groan and thump on the coffin-lid with her fists, in preparation for a burst of the Irish Cry, and at the signal Norry fell upon her knees, and flung out her arms inside her cloak, with a gesture that made her look like a great vulture opening its wings for flight. The cloak flapped right across the mare's face, and she swerved from the cart with a buck that loosened her rider in the saddle, and shook her hat off. There was a screech of alarm from all the women, the frightened mare gave a second and a third buck, and at the third Francie was shot into the air, and fell, head first, on the road.

CHAPTER LI.

THE floor of the potato loft at Gurthnamuckla had for a long time needed repairs, a circumstance not in itself distressing to Miss Mullen, who held that effort after mere theoretical symmetry was unjustifiable waste of time in either housekeeping or farming. On this first of June, however, an intimation from Norry that "there's ne'er a pratie ye have that isn't ate with the rats," given with the thinly-veiled triumph of servants in such announcements, caused a truculent visit of inspection to the potato loft; and in her first spare moment of the afternoon, Miss Mullen set forth with her tool-basket, and some boards from a packing-case, to make good the breaches with her own hands. Doing it herself saved the necessity of taking the men from their work, and moreover ensured its being properly done.

So she thought, as, having climbed the ladder that led from the cowhouse to the loft, she put her tools on the ground, and surveyed with a workman's eye

the job she had set herself. The loft was hot and airless, redolent of the cowhouse below, as well as of the clayey mustiness of the potatoes that were sprouting in the dirt on the floor, and even sending pallid, worm-like roots down into space through the cracks in the boards. Miss Mullen propped the window-shutter open with the largest potato, and, pinning up her skirt, fell to work.

She had been hammering and sawing for a quarter of an hour when she heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs on the cobble-stones of the yard, and, getting up from her knees, advanced to the window with caution and looked out. It was Mr. Lambert, in the act of pulling up his awkward young horse, and she stood looking down at him in silence while he dismounted, with a remarkable expression on her face, one in which some acute mental process was mixed with the half-unconscious and yet all-observant recognition of an intensely familiar object.

"Hullo, Roddy!" she called out at last, "is that you? What brings you over so early?"

Mr. Lambert started with more violence than the occasion seemed to demand.

"Hullo!" he replied, in a voice not like his own, "is that where you are?"

"Yes, and it's where I'm going to stay. This is the kind of fancy work I'm at," brandishing her saw; "so if you want to talk to me you must come up here."

"All right," said Lambert, gloomily, "I'll come up as soon as I put the colt in the stable."

It is a fact so improbable as to be worth noting, that before Lambert found his way up the ladder, Miss Mullen had unpinned her skirt and fastened up the end of a plait that had escaped from the massive coils at the back of her head.

"Well, and where's the woman that owns you?" she asked, beginning to work again, while her visitor stood in obvious discomfort, with his head touching the rafters, and the light from the low window striking sharply up against his red and heavy eyes.

"At home," he replied, almost vacantly. "I'd have been here half an hour ago or more," he went on after a moment or two, "but the colt cast a shoe, and I had to go on to the forge beyond the cross to get it put on."

Charlotte, with a flat pencil in her mouth, grunted responsively, while she measured off a piece of board, and, holding it with her knee on the body of a legless wheelbarrow, began to saw it across. Lambert looked

on, provoked and disconcerted by this engrossing industry. With his brimming sense of collapse and crisis, he felt that even this temporary delay of sympathy was an unkindness.

"That colt must be sold this week, so I couldn't afford to knock his hoof to bits on the hard road." His manner was so portentous that Charlotte looked up again, and permitted herself to remark on what had been apparent to her the moment she saw him.

"Why, what's the matter with you, Roddy? Now I come to see you, you look as if you'd been at your own funeral."

"I wish to God I had! It would be the best thing could happen me."

He found pleasure in saying something to startle her, and in seeing that her face became a shade hotter than the stifling air and the stooping over her work had made it.

"What makes you talk like that?" she said, a little strangely, as it seemed to him.

He thought she was moved, and he immediately felt his position to be more pathetic than he had believed. It would be much easier to explain the matter to Charlotte than to Francie, he felt at once; Charlotte understood business matters, a formula which con-

veyed to his mind much comfortable flexibility in money affairs.

"Charlotte," he said, looking down at her with eyes that self-pity and shaken self-control were moistening again, "I'm in most terrible trouble. Will you help me?"

"Wait till I hear what it is and I'll tell you that," replied Charlotte, with the same peculiar, flushed look on her face, and suggestion in her voice of strong and latent feeling. He could not tell how it was, but he felt as if she knew what he was going to say.

"I'm four hundred pounds in debt to the estate, and Dysart has found it out," he said, lowering his voice as if afraid that the spiders and wood-lice might repeat his secret.

"Four hundred," thought Charlotte, "that's more than I reckoned;" but she said aloud, "My God! Roddy, how did that happen?"

"I declare to you I don't know how it happened. One thing and another came against me, and I had to borrow this money, and before I could pay it he found out."

Lambert was a pitiable figure as he made his confession, his head, his shoulders, and even his moustache

drooping limply, and his hands nervously twisting his ash plant.

"That's a bad business," said Charlotte reflectively, and was silent for a moment, while Lambert realised the satisfaction of dealing with an intelligence that could take in such a situation instantaneously, without alarm or even surprise.

"Is he going to give you the sack?" she asked.

"I don't know yet. He didn't say anything definite."

Lambert found the question hard to bear, but he endured it for the sake of the chance it gave him to lead up to the main point of the interview. "If I could have that four hundred placed to his credit before I see him next, I believe there'd be an end of it. Not that I'd stay with him," he went on, trying to bluster, "or with any man that treated me this kind of way, going behind my back to look at the accounts."

"Is that the way he found you out?" asked Charlotte, taking up the lid of the packing case and twisting a nail out of it with her hammer, "he must be smarter than you took him for."

"Someone must have put him up to it," said Lambert, "someone who'd got at the books. It beats me to make it out. But what's the good of thinking of

that. The thing that's setting me mad is to know how to pay him." He waited to see if Charlotte would speak, but she was occupied in straightening the nail against the wall with her hammer, and he went on with a dry throat. "I'm going to sell all my horses, Charlotte, and I daresay I can raise some money on the furniture; but it's no easy job to raise money in such a hurry as this, and if I'm to be saved from being disgraced, I ought to have it at once to stop his mouth. I believe if I could pay him at once he wouldn't have spunk enough to go any further with the thing." He waited again, but the friend of his youth continued silent. "Charlotte, no man ever had a better friend, through thick and thin, than I've had in you. There's no other person living that I'd put myself under an obligation to but yourself. Charlotte, for the sake of all that's ever been between us, would you lend me the money?"

Her face was hidden from him as she knelt, and he stooped and placed a clinging, affectionate hand upon her shoulder. Miss Mullen got up abruptly, and Lambert's hand fell.

"All that's ever been between us is certainly a very weighty argument, Roddy," she said with a smile that deepened the ugly lines about her mouth, and gave

Lambert a chilly qualm. "There's a matter of three hundred pounds between us, if that's what you mean."

"I know, Charlotte," he said hastily. "No one remembers that better than I do. But this is a different kind of thing altogether. I'd give you a bill of sale on everything at Rosemount—and there are the horses out here too. Of course, I suppose I might be able to raise the money at the bank or somewhere, but it's a very different thing to deal with a friend, and a friend who can hold her tongue too. You never failed me yet, Charlotte, old girl, and I don't believe you'll do it now!"

His handsome, dark eyes were bent upon her face with all the pathos he was master of, and he was glad to feel tears rising in them.

"Well, I'm afraid that's just what I'll have to do," she said, flinging away the nail that she had tried to straighten, and fumbling in her pocket for another, "I may be able to hold my tongue, but I don't hold with throwing good money after bad."

Lambert stood quite still, staring at her, trying to believe that this was the Charlotte who had trembled when he kissed her, whose love for him had made her his useful and faithful thrall.

"Do you mean to say that you'll see me ruined and disgraced sooner than put out your hand to help me?" he said passionately.

"I thought you said you could get the money somewhere else," she replied, with undisturbed coolness, "and you might know that coming to me for money is like going to the goat's house for wool. I've got nothing more to lend, and no one ought to know that better than yourself!"

Charlotte was standing, yellow-faced and insolent, opposite to Lambert, with her hands in the pockets of her apron; in every way a contrast to him, with his flushed forehead and suffused eyes. The dull, white light that struck up into the roof from the whitewashed kitchen wall, showed Lambert the furrowed paths of implacability in his adversary's face, as plainly as it showed her his defeat and desperation.

"*You've* got no more money to lend, d'ye say?" he repeated, with a laugh that showed he had courage enough left to lose his temper; "I suppose you've got all the money you got eighteen months ago from the old lady lent out! 'Pon my word, considering you got Francie's share of it for yourself, I think it would have been civiller to have given her husband the first refusal of a loan! I daresay I'd have given

you as good interest as your friends in Ferry Lane!"

Charlotte's eyes suddenly lost their exaggerated indifference.

"And if she ever had the smallest claim to what ye call a share!" she vociferated, "haven't you had it twenty times over? Was there ever a time that ye came cringing and crawling to me for money that I refused it to ye? And how do you thank me? By embezzling the money I paid for the land, and then coming to try and get it out of me over again, because Sir Christopher Dysart is taught sense to look into his own affairs, and see how his agent is cheating him!"

Some quality of triumph in her tone, some light of previous knowledge in her eye, struck Lambert.

"Was it you told him?" he said hoarsely, "was it you spoke to Dysart?"

Every now and then in the conduct of her affairs, Miss Mullen permitted the gratification of her temper to take the place of the slower pleasure of secrecy.

"Yes, I told him," she answered, without hesitation.

"You went to Dysart, and set him on to ruin me!"

said Lambert, in a voice that had nearly as much horror as rage in it.

"And may I ask you what you've ever done for me?" she said, gripping her hammer with a strong, trembling hand, "that I was to keep your tricks from being found out for you? What reason was there in God's earth that I wasn't to do my plain duty by those that are older friends than you?"

"What reason!" Lambert almost choked from the intolerable audacity and heartlessness of the question. "Are you in your right mind to ask me that? You, that's been like a—a near relation to me all these years, or pretending to be! There was a time you wouldn't have done this to me, you know it damned well, and so do I. You were glad enough to do anything for me then, so long as I'd be as much as civil to you, and now, I suppose, this is your dirty devilish spite, because you were cut out by someone else!"

She did not flinch as the words went through and through her.

"Take care of yourself!" she said, grinning at him, "perhaps you're not the one to talk about being cut out! Oh, I don't think ye need look as if ye didn't understand me. At all events, all ye have

to do is to go home and ask your servants—or, for the matter of that, anyone in the streets of Lismoyle—who it is that's cut ye out, and made ye the laughing-stock of the country?"

She put her hand on the dusty beam beside her, giddy with her gratified impulse, as she saw him take the blow and wither under it.

She scarcely heard at first the strange and sudden sound of commotion that had sprung up like a wind in the house opposite. The windows were all open, and through them came the sound of banging doors and running footsteps, and then Norry's voice screaming something as she rushed from room to room. She was in the kitchen now, and the words came gasping and sobbing through the open door.

"Where's Miss Charlotte? Where is she? O God! O God! Where is she? Miss Francie's killed, her neck's broke below on the road! O God of Heaven help us!"

Neither Charlotte nor Lambert heard clearly what she said, but the shapeless terror of calamity came about them like a vapour and blanched the hatred in their faces. In a moment they were together at the window, and at the same instant Norry burst out into the yard, with outflung arms and grey hair streaming.

As she saw Lambert, her strength seemed to go from her. She staggered back, and, catching at the door-post for support, turned from him and hid her face in her cloak.

FINIS.

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